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"*Use Me, When Needed Again*": Performing Heritage at Monuments of the Yugoslav Era

Introduction

When German political scientist Claus Leggewie introduced the image of "Battlefield Europe" in 2009, he reflected about the necessity of a pan-European awareness, which had to integrate the multitude of conflicts, expulsions, and ethnic cleansings within and beyond Europe in the twentieth century as an explicitly shared memory. However, Leggewie's article focuses primarily on the obstacles to a transnational remembrance as he observes an "existing asymmetry of European memory" (Leggewie 2009, 4). By this, Leggewie simply stresses the fact that neither the Holocaust nor the Gulag mean the same things for people and nations throughout Europe and that the wars in Europe were followed by a battle over memory. Consequently, historians, art historians, cultural scientists, and representatives from other disciplines have produced innumerable accounts of what it means to narrate the past as conflicted or shared European history.

One of the reasons for the ongoing asymmetry of memory lies in the various degrees of its visibility, of the sheer quantity of medialized and iconized content, and its prosumers. In this respect, monuments of the former Yugoslavia are an interesting case materializing the battle over memory, which is in their case simultaneously highly visible and alarmingly unseen. *Spomeniks*, the most used Serbo-Croatian-based term for this specific group of monuments, are undergoing a visible entry into art and popular culture today. Images by renowned or amateur photographers are flashing social media platforms or hitting the front page of art exhibitions. At the same time, contemporary discourses around these monuments (especially those from an "outsider" gaze position) are unaware of their historical inscription, which is the idea of Yugoslavia, its history, its ambitions, and its end. Furthermore, *Spomeniks* carry the narratives of Yugoslavia's aftermath. They embody the told and untold narratives of the Balkan Wars of the 1990s that finally erased any sense of shared experience for people living in the new post-Yugoslav states. They testify to a war in Europe that made their existence redundant, and today they often emblematize a threat to various contemporary nationalistic currents in the former Yugoslavia's successor states, still intending to forget the narratives of their past(s). As Claus Leggewie puts it:

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> the biggest obstacle to addressing the Yugoslavian catastrophe from 1991 onwards could be that it was not the authoritarian Tito regime that was responsible for causing the antagonism between the incompatible Serbs and Croats, Bosniaks and Kosovo-Albanians, so much as the illiberal democracies, whose nationalist majorities could not – and cannot – care less for the protection of ethnic and religious minorities (2009, 5).

In focusing on monuments of the former Yugoslavia, we address a highly contested case of heritage narratives, the often-uncomfortable multilayered histories engraved in stone – the tale of a socialist country not belonging to the Soviet Union, but not aligning with the West either, and the tale of the bloody civil war of the 1990s. The contemporary uses and misuses of *Spomeniks* were the subject of excursions and field work undertaken in recent years in order to explore performativity as a tool of a critical and first and foremost bodily encounter with heritage today. The methodological approach presented in this paper is by no means accidental, as the monuments themselves are aesthetic objects, which need to be perceived as (figurative) bodies among (human) bodies. We argue that both the existence of bodies and the inexistence of bodies are crucial in the context of conflicted narratives of the past. The case of monuments of former Yugoslavia is a spectacular one in this sense, as the bodies that once narrated the story of a certain context are gone, but the bodies of the monuments (mostly) still exist.

Monuments as Museums and Stage

When the Second World War was won, the new Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was formed and the process of identity building based on the ideals of antifascism and unity began, with an emphasis on the success of the social revolution. For this purpose, the state developed and employed a temporal identity-building strategy, based on formulating visions of the past, the present, and the future. Various practices – from building monuments and memorials, developing exhibitions and collections, to designing firm history curricula for elementary and secondary schools – were aimed to join the past, present, and future within the same site and in the same moment in time. The joining of the three was usually achieved by instigating encounters between veterans, the working people of Yugoslavia who were building the new society, and student youth, within the same practices of memory. For example, the performance scores of commemorations by rule entailed an homage to the fallen comrades led by the veterans, which was followed by narrational introduction of references to the contemporary relevant political occurrences or infrastructural achievements. Each perfor-

mance of this type concluded with a cultural program that actively involved youth and pupils as creators and performers.

Official formulations of the past, including the founding myth of the new state, were framed within narratives of the Second World War and the undeniably won freedom and victory over fascism, as the recent and most triggering story, as a still living memory. Due to the dominance of war-connected narratives (either the glorification of combats or paying respects to the victims) the state framed its didactic cultural production logically within the scope of memorial art. "The monuments were used in an effort to master the past in order to control the future. Even though monuments mostly commemorated fallen soldiers, they were also used to articulate a spirit of optimism and collective will, directed towards a utopian classless society" (Musabegović 2012, 20). Across the state, this strategy could be seen in the erecting of monuments dedicated to the Peoples' Liberation Struggle (NOB). With the funding support, from public institutions and private initiatives, SUBNOR (the Association of Fighters of the Peoples' Liberation War) conducted a highly elaborated building endeavor. The Association supervised the building and placement of close to 14,402 diverse memory markers until 1961, "almost three monuments per day for each day of sixteen-year period" (Bergholz 2007, 65).

From a contemporary standpoint these grand-scale monuments can be interpreted in terms of a heritage network, or even heritage route (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006), as they were connected both on the level of narrative and on the level of visitors' commute by intentionally placing them along the routes of major road- and railways. Additionally, due to their dominant artistic style, they can be counted as a form of open-air museum that even today operate in a similar manner but now focused primarily on their aesthetic qualities, often disregarding the narratives they were built to mark. The process of musealization of immovable tangible heritage was present from their conception. During the state's existence, they were presented together in publications dedicated to the cultural heritage of Yugoslavia and by specialized tourist guides. They entered the international art scene with Yugoslavia's Pavilion at 39th Venice Biennale in 1980 (Bogdanović 2017) marking the beginning of their transformation to artworks, that the contemporary moment has taken even further by almost completely disregarding their function and placing them into the frames of architectural brutalism. However, the musealization of the sites and narratives they were dedicated to accompanied the construction of the memorials. This is especially visible within the planned structure of the sites that carried an all-Yugoslav significance, i.e., that either carried a memory of a great victory or of mass civilian casualties. On those occasions the architectural solution for the elaborate memorial parks incorporated the museum (or museum-like) spaces. These institutions did indeed function on the principles we encounter in history museums today. They collected, preserved, and exhibited artifacts related to the history of the spe-

cific sites and were therefore responsible for both documenting the past and for making it comprehensible to broad audiences. Although the interpretation of these sites has drastically changed in the past thirty years both in the local and international context, they still function as an over-dimensionalized open-air museum or maybe even a sculpture garden, within which the historical or contemporary societal context becomes secondary and the visual and formal aspects are consumed as their most important trait.

The truly vast and diverse research volume, ranging from art history and anthropology of heritage to memory and cultural studies (Dadić Dinulović 2017; Denegri 2017; Horvatinčić 2012; Karge 2010; Kirn & Burghardt 2011; Kulić 2018; Manojlović-Pintar 2008; Musabegović 2012; Niebyl at al. 2018; Pejić 2012; Putnik-Prica 2017; Šuvaković 2017), considers these monuments an archetype of the time of hyper-expansion of artistic form in the new Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia after 1948, when the state distanced itself intentionally from the Soviet Union. The plethora of formats used is extensive: it reaches from memory plaques and inscriptions on birth houses, schools, or other objects of importance in the life of local communities to large-scale monuments and elaborated memorials (Karge 2010). Assembled, they form a collection that greatly vary in size and aesthetic solutions – from a rather conservative socialist realism of poor quality to the large compositions that can be seen as masterpieces of Yugo-specific modernism. The latter are for example the works of Bogdan Bogdanović,[1] who among others created the Memorial Park Popina in Serbia (see Figure 1). It uses a design that oscillates between figurative and abstract forms and is equipped with an engraving, which would translate into English as "Use me, when needed again." Given the highly metaphorical semantics that Bogdanović utilized in his works, it remains ambiguous if this engraving refers to the continuous need for fighting fascism, as in the combat between German troops and Partisans in Popina in October 1941, or to the overcoming of any such antagonism in the name of the Yugoslavian *third way*.

However, with the abolishment of the human body from the new visual vocabulary, a new set of forms such as deconstructed and alienated stars, fists, wings, flowers, and rocks were adopted, and some truly modernist forms were produced. Today, scholars consider it a

> genuinely specific memorial typology that linked the memory of WWII to the promise of the future brought forward by the socialist revolution. Instead of formally addressing suffering, modernist memorial sites were intended to catalyze universal gestures of reconciliation, resistance, and modern progress (Kirn & Burghardt 2011, 6).

1 https://www.arhivamodernizma.com/autori/bogdan-bogdanovic/ (August 9, 2022).

Figure 1: Memorial Park Popina, Serbia. Photo by Vladimir Kulić, 2014.

Alongside the new aesthetic principles of their design, selecting an appropriate site had a significant role in their construction. When planned outside urbanized areas, they were placed so that more than one type of visitor activity could be combined. These sites were at the same time sites of leisure, education, and paying respect and therefore almost mandatorily incorporated an amphitheater into their design, transforming the monument into a stage – a scenography for the scripted performance.

The memorial network of NOB was built and maintained in continuity until the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia with a varying frequency of conservational care. Nevertheless, the erected memory sites played their role in the community with a firmly defined rhythm of annual commemorative events and state holidays. However, the final decade of the twentieth century altered life as it was known in the region for almost a half a century, the community was destroyed to the level of unrecognition and Yugoslavia and its memory and heritage were left to the mercy of time and the (ideological) needs of new societies. Historical revisionism entered the stage, and to this day, a consensus on the meaning and use of Yugoslavia's heritage is not achieved among its successor states. Nevertheless, the future use of the outlandish memorial sites and monuments seems to be a provocative question.

Spomeniks: Happily Colonized

After almost two decades of silence surrounding the faith of this monument network, both local and international interest slowly penetrated the public domain in the early 2000s. It is important to note that these sites often were and still are registered as cultural properties by heritage institutions and are frequently used to demonstrate new ideological and societal needs. However, the locally specific value and the historical context of these sites did not cause the renewed regional and international interest. The novel curiosity was and is based on their interpretation through an aesthetic lens; they are understood primarily as artistic expression and peculiar extraterrestrial objects placed "in the middle of nowhere."

In the past fifteen years, there have been several research, exhibition, and art projects focused on the memorial network of NOB – from documenting their number and current physical condition, such is the *Inappropriate Monuments* project[2] and *Spomenik Monument Database* (Niebyl et al. 2018) to numerous artistic productions centered around their stylistic and historical significance that can be seen in the works of David Maljković,[3] Igor Bošnjak,[4] Elena Čemerska,[5] or Ana Vujanović and Marta Popivoda.[6] A potential culmination of international recognition of their artistic value certainly is the exhibition *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980* by Philip Johnson and Vladimir Kulić staged at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2018.[7]

However, the first appearance of this monument network in the broader public forum can be attributed to the work of Jan Kempenaers. The work of the Belgian photographer gained significant recognition, with the work *Spomenik #6 (Kozara)* even finding its way to the digital collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum in London.[8] In 2010, he published a book under the title *Spomenik* (Kempenaers 2010) and veneration of the monument network of NOB became a practice for brutalism lovers, as a new format of the Grand Tour. Coining of the word "Spomeniks" followed (Horvatinčić 2012) and instigated a sort of aesthetic colonization. Memory sites were cleared of memorial and social practices and their nar-

2 https://inappropriatemonuments.org/en/ (August 18, 2022).
3 https://www.metropictures.com/exhibitions/david-maljkovic/selected-works?view=slider#6 (August 18, 2022).
4 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TvFwUBIIzhY (August 18, 2022).
5 https://spomeniknaslobodata.mk/gligor-serafimov/ (August 18, 2022).
6 http://www.anavujanovic.net/2018/06/landscapes-of-revolution/ (August 18, 2022).
7 https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3931 (August 18, 2022).
8 https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1313804/spomenik-6-kozara-photograph-jan-kempenaers/ (August 18, 2022).

ratives were adjusted so they could fit the perception of the totalitarian East. The European Council defined and declared the heritage tourism route,[9] pursuing its strategy to introduce a European collection of pan-European networks (Kaiser et al. 2014), and dubious internet platforms such as *Atlas Obscura* offered a new high-priced product.[10]

This process can be seen as cultural appropriation in a classic form. Vladimir Kulić claims that despite the world-wide exposure that was granted to Yugoslavia's monuments, appropriating them as a matter of taste is nonetheless Orientalism, and the proclaimed benefits of globalized exposure are still not seen. "Rather than becoming identifiable in their own right, socialist buildings have only become further integrated into the economy of digital images, with the same anonymous detachment that ignores both their original meaning and their artistic merit" (Kulić 2018, 3).

Imported tastes became the main principle of locally produced interpretation and regardless of the urgent voice of the local professional community, these sites were swiftly transformed into a commodity than can be used as a backdrop for any activity, including light-art performances, music videos, sci-fi movies,[11] commercials, and fashion editorials. The "indigenous" product is made without consulting the local communities as to if and how they use these sites in their daily and extraordinary activities, and these monuments are transformed into an image of global taste and spectacularity.[12]

With a steady influx of contemporary pilgrims, *#spomeniks* can be found in many corners of the internet, giving the gloomy atmosphere of the bipolar world in front of and behind the Iron Curtain, conveniently forgetting that the sites in question stood on the curtain itself, that they were and are more than stone, and that they mark the good, bad, and ugly of the humanity and ideology of the former state. Today, critical commentators mark *Spomeniks* as social media clickbaits. Owen Hatherley cites the Croatian activist and curator Tihana Pupovac: "If we want to revive whatever we think can be found of politics in the aesthetic of these monuments, we need to go past nostalgia and past the sheer fascination.

9 https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/atrium-architecture-of-totalitarian-regimes-of-the-20th-century; https://www.rcc.int/news/606/rcc-presents-balkan-monumental-trail-a-new-regional-tourism-route (August 18, 2022).

10 https://www.atlasobscura.com/users/abiinman/lists/balkans-trip-april-2018 (August 18, 2022).

11 https://www.vecernji.hr/kultura/na-petrovoj-gori-njemci-za-netflix-snimili-postapokalipticnu-seriju-o-razorenoj-europi-1375616 (August 18, 2022).

12 A rare example of bottom-up heritage-based practices involving the local community is *Heritage from Below | Drežnica: Traces and Memories 1941–1945*. https://www.ipu.hr/article/en/761/heritage-from-below-dreznica-traces-and-memories-1941–1945 (August 18, 2022).

Because, again, these monuments in themselves are not that unique, what was unique was the lived historical experience of socialism" (2016).

The complex and above all uncomfortable history of the former Yugoslav region since the start of its violent dissolution imposed significant limitations on dealing with its heritage, especially with regard to Second World War monuments. For decades the professional heritage interpretation, management, and protection community within the region circled around the issue, trying not to address it at all. The once built open-air museum collection was divided and often deaccessioned from the new national heritage 'depot'. The route of heritage was broken, and for a long time a replacing bodily action that would link them together was not found. Veneration of socialist antiques brought the first instance of renewed, but thoroughly decontextualized encounters, as indicated above. The question is if and how can future interactions with sites be framed? In addition, and even more importantly: should the appeal these sites hold beyond their very local context be so easily dismissed?

The truth is they are spectacular. Both by their sheer magnitude and their specific figuration, they create a sense of awe (see Figure 2). They cannot *not* be perceived as artworks in themselves and as a museum collection overall; they are Land Art years before Western curators popularized this term. Hence, it is counterproductive to contextualize the monuments of the Yugoslav era without regard to their aesthetic narrative. Rather, one should take up this narrative as a quest for a different way to deal with the monuments today. Consequently, Sanja Horvatinčić makes a strong call for "the development of new research and mediation methodologies and practice" (2020, 113). Following this notion, we propose the use of *performing heritage* as a methodological tool in the heritage sector, as one possible investigative direction coming from the specific potentials these sites offer when approached as an aesthetic practice and not as aesthetic objects.

Performing Heritage

In heritage studies, the lack of analyzing practice itself – and not solely the narrative conveyed – is encountered even when the examples of performances at heritage sites are being emphasized or criticized. Most often, studies place the focus on the appropriateness of the act and not on the bodily interaction occurring within the site. The apparent lack of acknowledging the necessity of bodily presence, movement, and expression of the intended message is what creates room for introducing performativity into the heritage arena (Jackson & Kidd 2011). As much as the call for appropriate behavior is valid and needed in the case of me-

Figure 2: Monument Battle of Sutjeska, Memorial Park Valley of Heroes, Tjentište. Photo by Luka Skansi, 2018.

morial sites, one may ask: how does a visitor know what is appropriate and what is not, if bodily conduct is not explained or investigated?

In his "Manifesto for Performative Research," the Australian practice-researcher Brad Haseman suggests to "*lead* research through practice" (2006, 100). Referring to John Austin's concept of performativity, Haseman strengthens the idea of knowledge production that becomes self-referential: "[a dance, a novel, a contemporary performance] not only express the research, but in that expression become the research itself" (2006, 102). Even though we do not necessarily agree with the emphasis that practice, and more specifically artistic practice, "is the principal research activity" (Haseman 2006, 103), we take his advice to explore the presentational forms of our knowledge production in alternative ways. "When research findings are made as

presentational forms," Haseman argues, "they deploy symbolic data in the material forms of practice [. . .]" (2006, 102). In this case, we would argue that the material forms of practice are based on the body(s) of the performer. Bodies perform a dance, an act of remembrance, or research. Hence, any research findings on (in our case) the monuments of the Yugoslav era, which show themselves as presentational forms, reflect their status as findings of the body. As they oscillate between research and performance, they force the researcher/performer to deal with their own body, which simultaneously signifies *something* and brings this something physically into existence. Judith Butler states that any claim is "not only spoken or written, but it is made precisely when bodies appear together or, rather, when, through their action, they bring the space of appearance into being" (Butler 2015, 89). In this sense, we can apply the terms "space" by Butler or "social reality of a performance" by Erika Fischer-Lichte (2012). They are the product of the "pre-discursive" status of a body in action, i.e., space is subjected to discursive adjustment only after it appears as an aerial field of narrative, as ideological and discursive vacuum. To go a bit further into Butler's argument, for an action and space to gain meaning, they firstly need to be observed as practices of the body – and that is where the potential of practice-based research can have its rightful place in the heritage sector.

Although practice-based research has become a visible and influential methodology within the arts and performative studies in the last two decades, in the field of museum and heritage studies, performativity is hardly used as a means of alternative knowledge production in dealing with the past. Mechtild Widrich (2014) was possibly the first scholar to directly link theories of performativity with monuments and the sector of heritage production. She defines performative monuments as both an aesthetic and political practice that is based on the presumption of its social consequences and therefore binds together bodily presence, history, and politics. By applying principles of performance, she advocates for the necessity of two orders of participants in making a performative monument – the performer and the observer. However, she conceptualizes the performative monument according to one of the dominant criteria of performativity – the blurring of boundaries between producing art and receiving art, between the stage and the audience (Goldberg 1998). In the context of heritage, this means that performativity can be used as a tool to reflect on the gap between the result of the monument and the process of perceiving the monument as a continuous challenge of active sense-making between the body(s) of the audience and the body(s) of the monument. The specific postmodern problem of who disposes of history (Deines et al. 2003) performs itself rather than being solved. In this way, a monument keeps its form of a living object – an object with a continuous purpose that helps create and reflect the contemporary (emancipatory) struggle. Furthermore, the exchange of qualities, both physical and symbolic, creates a sense of understand-

ing between the audience/practitioners and consequently a performative monument becomes a matter of perceivable reality.

Whereas Widrich looks out for monuments that in her understanding are inherently performative, as in the often-cited works of Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz, our approach aims at using performativity as a methodological tool which, hypothetically, can be applied to any monument. We argue that transforming the process of perception of the monument into a presentational form will re-insert the body into the main narrative of heritage production. Presentational forms come in many shapes and sizes from photography, performing arts, poems – as suggested by Gal Kirn (2016) and his score of a partisan poem used anew – to semantic wordplays and the creation of *#spomeniks*.

The practice of producing a presentational form as a bodily tool for working with heritage allows researchers, as well as practitioners, to approach its specific historical context and to simultaneously create awareness of the contemporaneity and contingency of such an act. Furthermore, application of a presentational form transforms an aesthetic *object* of heritage into an aesthetic *practice* of heritage, making it possible to act and be seen. For memorial sites of former Yugoslavia this would allow them to be used to address the needs of the communities surrounding them, as Horvatinčić highlights "their potential as contemporary and political tools for bridging ethnic divisions and conflicts" (2020, 113).

The proposed notion of applying diverse presentational forms in order to interact and interpret heritage came as a result of research through observation. Namely, through three consecutive student seminars held in the region of former Yugoslavia and where open-ended deliverables were produced, it became clear that the conditioning of the body and the movements of visitors achieves the highest impact of heritage sites, as such sites carry a significant level of self-referentiality due to their physical configurations (Đorđević 2021). This can be seen, for example, when a group of students applied the presentational form of Follow-Me-Around-Videos in the process of investigating, and therefore encountering, the Partisan Fighter Monument in Podgorica (Montenegro). In the video *ASMR – Monument Edition*, they used contemporary aesthetic techniques to reflect the physical presence of their bodies through close-ups of them interacting with the site or through their own breathing being fortified at certain moments. They never show more than a detail of the monument as if to reject a coherent grasping of the past. Instead, it becomes *visible* that their bodies frame the perception of the monument physically: "This is what it looks like" is a repetitive phrase as the smartphone camera strolls across stones, weeds, and leftovers, retracing the movements of the body/bodies. In this specific case, the student/performer imagines a medialized audience and engages in the act of self-spectating

through the means of anatomically deconstructing her own body and the site by focusing on dissecting the physical and material qualities of heritage production.

Alongside the presentational form produced, the process of documenting the act taking place marks a significant aspect of what is to be performing heritage. By creating references that can be observed, an aesthetic object is produced and can be reflected regardless of location and context. The act of documenting the practice is one of the vital elements of performing heritage as a tool in heritage management and interpretation, especially in terms of determining the appropriate and inappropriate manners of performing within a memorial site. The document of practices transforming a site into heritage can be one starting point for the necessary deconstruction of the colonizing appropriation of Yugoslavia's heritage. If the practices are known in all their iterations, exercises such as Parkour art and climbing (Kulić 2018) would not be possible as performance acts. This means that a site would not only be a stage for the "outsider" gaze but an active participant in the interaction as the life of the monument within its community can be precisely traced. Furthermore, if practices as presentational forms are known, monuments of NOB can have a contemporary use and presenting them as alien exotic objects is no longer sufficient. In terms of contemporary museum narrative creation, the understanding of an object as more than a material relic, as a presentational form, as an active participant in sense-making that does impact the ways in which the body of the audience behaves in its presence, can significantly alter the principles of participatory practice. There is a possibility to relocate the investigative focus away from the relations between audience/practitioner groups. Thus, it is possible to establish the interaction with the "artifacts" as the primary interest, and therefore explore the bodily techniques of communication coming from other fields of investigation, such as trauma coping mechanisms.

The practice-based method that we are proposing rests on the main principle of bodily interaction that is always occurring here and now. It offers, as a core task of the heritage sector, the possibility of exploring presentational forms that can prolong and reflect the life of a monument within the local and broader community. As observed through numerous study visits, when (human) bodies perform with (figurative) bodies they deconstruct the othering of the gaze; and to deconstruct is to decolonize "when needed again."[13]

13 Inscription Memorial Park Popina (Serbia), Bogdan Bogdanović, constructed 1978–1980.

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