



The Partisan Symbolic Politics



The common argument that today the symbolic production of Yugoslav Partisans can finally be perceived as culture and as art because it has finally escaped from ideological confinement is itself a captive of the modern ideology of aesthetics according to which, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin, artefacts can be monuments of culture only if we pretend that they are not also monuments of barbarism. Such a framing of the discussion of the Partisan symbolic production would divert us from those characteristics of this production that are essential to it and that make it attractive to us in the first place. The Partisan art was produced in a radical and liminal situation and is hence itself radical and liminal. So, if we want to think about it at its own level, we must think radically and assume a liminal perspective.

SLOVENIAN PARTISAN ART, YUGOSLAV SOCIALISM, ANTI-FASCISM, MODERN AESTHETICS, CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Популярный аргумент, что символическую продукцию югославских партизан сегодня можно воспринимать как принадлежащую к культуре и искусству, так как она наконец освободилась от идеологической нагрузки, сам находится в плену современной идеологии эстетики, согласно которой, перефразируя Вальтера Беньямина, артефакты могут стать памятниками культуры, только если мы притворяемся, что они в одно и то же время не являются памятниками варваризма. Такому подходу к партизанской символической продукции недоступны те её признаки, которые существенны для неё и благодаря которым она и вызывает наш интерес. Партизанское искусство возникло в радикальной и лиминальной ситуации, поэтому и оно само — явление радикальное и лиминальное. Итак, если мы хотим мыслить его на его собственном уровне, мы должны мыслить радикально и занять лиминальную точку зрения.

СЛОВЕНСКОЕ ПАРТИЗАНСКОЕ ИСКУССТВО, ЮГОСЛАВСКИЙ СОЦИАЛИЗМ, АНТИФАШИЗМ, ЭСТЕТИКА ЭПОХИ МОДЕРНА, КУЛЬТУРНОЕ ПРОИЗВОДСТВО

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The historical rise and fall of the ideology of authenticity was brilliantly demonstrated by Lionel Trilling (1972). A classic portrayal of this historical position is given in Denis Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew* (written in 1762 and revised several times by 1775), and a classical philosophical presentation is given as early as 1807 in the chapter on the 'disintegrated consciousness' ('zer-rissenes Bewusstsein') in Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (296–328).

The further in time the Partisan symbolic production is slipping, the closer it is to us in a dimension that, although not merely of an 'aesthetic' nature, is nevertheless closely related to the effects that contemporary artistic practices exercise upon the functioning of our senses and the procedures of our thought.¹

But let us begin at the beginning and ask the following question: Why, at least in retrospect, did the Partisan symbolic production seem remote to us at a certain point? Why was it difficult, at that point, to establish direct, authentic and sincere contact with it? The very unsuitability of these categories—'sincerity', 'authenticity'²—which belong to the anachronistic Romantic aesthetics, warns us that it may be more difficult to formulate this question than to answer it. For neither is our present, and presumably more intimate, attitude towards the Partisan symbolic production constituted within the framework of 'sincerity and authenticity'—and is precisely for this reason more open, more *productive*, than it used to be.

A somewhat precipitate, and hence banal, answer could be that the Partisan symbolic production is now more accessible to us because it is no longer involved in the dominant ideology. According to this view, the art, and the symbolic production in general, of the struggle against fascism are beginning to speak to us, are becoming visible or, more precisely, viewable only today, when they are free from the parasite that was a specific form of social domination, that is, when they are free from ideological servitude.

In this view, the anti-fascist symbolic production has once again become relevant because it has finally found its way to where it actually belongs, to the sphere of culture, and to the field of art, after having initially served the propaganda purposes of the People's Liberation Struggle and after having later, in socialism, been kept prisoner by

the official ideology of domination. Indeed, it seems that in modernity, the aesthetic dimension is constitutively linked to the abstraction of artefacts from the concrete social and historical context in which they not only emerged but also had a very specific function. Against the backdrop of the aesthetic power of Giotto's frescoes, the information that the chapel was built for the purpose of expiation and symbolic redemption for the sins of a family of professional usurers seems to have but anecdotal value. But the relation should perhaps be inverted: in order to establish the aesthetic perspective from which we view Giotto today, it is crucial that concrete historical circumstances, practical presuppositions, social causes for the production of artefacts and the contemporary effects of this production be degraded to the level of base anecdotal curiosity.³

The argument that today we can finally perceive the Partisan symbolic production as culture and art because it has finally escaped from ideological confinement is itself a captive of this modern ideology of aesthetics, according to which artefacts can be monuments of culture only if we pretend that they are not also monuments of barbarism. Such a framing of our discussion of the Partisan symbolic production would divert us from those characteristics of this production that are essential to it and that make it challenging and attractive to us in the first place. The Partisan culture and art were produced in a radical situation, or, in existentialist parlance, in a liminal position. As a result, they are themselves radical and liminal. If we want to think about them at their own level, we must think radically and assume a liminal perspective.

I will try to sketch such a necessary radicalisation along three lines of argument. I will begin with the most general historical consideration and then move towards increasingly particular issues of culture and finally art.

3 In her study of the historical emergence of the modern autonomous sphere of culture and art in the Renaissance, Maja Breznik demonstrates that this sphere emerges both as the result of class struggles and as a decisive factor in the march to power of the new proto-capitalist classes. Hence, Benjamin's dictum that '[t] here is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism' (Benjamin 392) cannot be understood in the sense of the two sides of the coin: barbarism is not the flip side of culture; on the contrary, culture is precisely barbarism, if barbarism is taken to mean the violence of the ruling classes. Modernity, that is, capitalism, replaces the awkward physical violence of the Middle Ages with a much more effective symbolic violence that we call 'culture'. (See Breznik.)

1. The first step towards the radicalisation of our approach would be to estrange our own perspective: can we even start to think of the Partisan symbolic production if we still use the notions of culture and art as they are automatically understood and used today? As we have already seen, a measure of caution is necessary with regard to both notions: today, aesthetics implies for us distance and disinterest, and culture entails oblivion, perhaps even a hypocritical ignorance of its own conditions of possibility and effects. Such notions will not bring us closer to the symbolic production that was born out of the struggle for life and was perceived by its producers as a weapon in their fight for freedom and emancipation.
2. If we rely on our intuition that the Partisan symbolic production is now somewhat closer to us, we must not act as if we did not know that the present historical period, at least in its own dominant self-understanding, claims that it has done away with socialism and undertaken the task of restoring capitalism. In other words, according to its own dominant self-understanding, the present historical period liquidated the historical form that emerged from the Partisan symbolic production and similar processes. This forces us to face an unusual question: Why has the Partisan symbolic production become more readable and viewable as soon as its historical effects have been eliminated? The question is perverted, but the answer is simple if only we pose an intermediate question as well: *'More readable' from which standpoint, 'more viewable' from which point of view?* In which *ideological perspective* does the Partisan symbolic production now appear as art and culture *precisely because* its social and historical effects have been eliminated? Certainly, this is the perspective from which 'culture and art' are understood and experienced through the traditional lenses of modernity, that is, capitalism—as something that has separated

itself from its own social dimension, refusing to acknowledge its own historicity and constituting itself through a hypocritical ignorance of its own social and historical embeddedness and effectivity. Only within the horizon of this cognitive and affective pattern is it possible to claim that the Partisan symbolic production has become ‘culture and art’ once it has freed itself from the ideological servitude that had marked its emergence and its subsequent role in the relations of one-party domination, that is, once historical events have released it from its social and historical contexts. Yet the Partisan symbolic production *wanted* to produce ideological effects: through the historically given artistic devices and aesthetic procedures, it sought to produce effects at the level of the social bond. This is why the dominant modern (that is, bourgeois)⁴ view, which understands ideology as the opposite and the denial of art, perceiving the relationship between art and ideology through the notions of instrument and means, misses the historical, more precisely, the epochal transformation and innovation introduced by the Partisan symbolic production.

3. Hence, we should not view the present time as a new cooking pot into which one is to place an old ingredient, the Partisan symbolic production, which now whets new appetite. The present time is not homogeneous, and the Partisan symbolic production is not a passive object, since it still affects us through its symbolic efficiency. Only when the present time began to produce new artistic devices, new cultural practices, could our eyes be opened to the historical innovation introduced by the Partisan artistic and cultural practices. In the present time, new political processes had to emerge for an old ally to resurface in these new struggles.

⁴ ‘And now we come to the question of propaganda. All painters have been propagandists or else they have not been painters. Giotto was a propagandist of the spirit of Christian charity, the weapon of the Franciscan monks of his time against feudal oppression. Breughel was a propagandist of the struggle of the Dutch artisan petty bourgeoisie against feudal oppression. Every artist who has been worth anything in art has been such a propagandist. The familiar accusation that propaganda ruins art finds its source in bourgeois prejudice. Naturally enough the bourgeoisie does not want art employed for the sake of revolution.’ (Rivera 57)

Each of these three *problématiques* can be further developed in relation to one of the three historical periods in which the Partisan symbolic production has operated.

The problem of *how to theoretically revolutionise the concept* of ‘culture and art’ in order to make our analysis capable of addressing the actual revolution performed by the anti-fascist production in the fields of culture and art, in their social roles and historical positions, will be presented in the context of the first period of the Partisan symbolic production—the time of *the anti-fascist People’s Liberation Struggle*.

The relationship between *ideology and art* will be presented in reference to the second historical period—*the socialist era*.

And the *present efficiency* of the anti-fascist cultural and artistic production will of course be demonstrated in the context of *the present time*.

1. WHAT CULTURE, WHAT ART?

If we want to analyse the anti-fascist culture, we first need to modify our spontaneous notion of culture. However, we will not be able to discard this spontaneous notion and formulate a new theoretical concept unless we bring ourselves to face, radically and without prejudice, the anti-fascist cultural and artistic practices. We are caught in this double-bind primarily because the Partisan symbolic production was born out of the struggle against the very historical processes one of whose products and sediments is our spontaneous, unreflexive, raw and automatic notion of culture. The Partisan cultural practices endeavoured to escape from the ivory tower of the so-called relatively autonomous spheres of culture and art. In retrospect, we could say that the available traces of these cultural practices *are in themselves this historical and structural break*. On the one hand, a break with the

refuge of ‘culture and art’ was a necessity at the ideological level of the direct struggle for freedom. On the other hand, the anti-fascist symbolic production was through this break itself constituting a new culture, a new position for symbolic practices, and with it a new structuring of the social space. Thus, by mobilising the masses in the anti-fascist struggle, the Partisan culture was already producing the new social and historical circumstances that would eliminate the social constellation that had enabled the emergence of fascism in the first place. The Partisan cultural practices were therefore more than just ‘a means’ in the struggle against fascism: on the one hand, they were securing material conditions for this struggle (such as the activation and mobilisation of the masses, or the consolidation on the frontline); and on the other hand, by doing this they were already establishing a new social structure and within it a new position for culture, a new web of human relations, which was precisely a historical negation of fascism. The conditions that enabled the anti-fascist struggle in the first place could be secured only through a cultural action that as such produced the basic elements of a social structure in which *fascism would no longer be possible*. On the one hand, the cultural action was but a forerunner of the armed struggle, and on the other, it already anticipated its results. More precisely, in the given historical circumstances the cultural action had to *ensure* the elements of the social structure that could be secured *only after* the victory in the armed struggle.

This is why the symbolic activity—or ‘cultural creativity’, as it was called at the time—was already in its producers’ self-understanding an essential component of the People’s Liberation Struggle. This struggle for national liberation was a struggle against fascism, that is, against a historical outcome of the modern, capitalist social structuring. In the Slovenian People’s Liberation Struggle, as in all other struggles

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The protagonists of the time were aware of this. In *Temeljne točke Osvobodilne fronte slovenskega naroda* (Fundamental Points Issued by the Liberation Front of the Slovenian Nation), Point 4, proposed by the poet and essayist Edvard Kocbek, is significant here:

Through the liberating action and activation of Slovenian masses, the Liberation Front transforms the Slovenian national character. Fighting for their national and human rights, Slovenian masses are creating a new pattern of active Slovenianness.

for national liberation of the twentieth century, the nation could be liberated only by undoing the entire structure of human non-freedom, of the oppression of nations, that is, by undoing the capitalist society. This is why the People's Liberation Struggle was possible only as an anti-fascist struggle, since fascism and Nazism were at that time the most advanced forms of capitalist barbarism. Simply put, the People's Liberation Struggle cannot be separated from the socialist revolution. This means that the 'nation' that is liberating itself through an anti-fascist struggle is actually revolutionising the modern, capitalist social order characteristic of the modern articulation of society into relatively autonomous social spheres (that is, economy, politics and culture)—since this order is a structure of exploitation, oppression, the non-freedom of humans and hence of nations.

However, a nation that was historically formed within this structure of non-freedom, a nation that was marked by this structure of oppression and was hence itself a *structure of non-freedom*, had to revolutionise, in the socialist revolution that was the anti-fascist struggle, *itself, too*.⁵ National culture is one of the basic elements of all nations; it is even the crucial element for those nations which at the time of their formation did not possess their own states (which is the case of, say, the German nation and the Slovenian nation). Hence, the People's Liberation Struggle was also a cultural revolution—and in the twentieth century, the cultural revolution was radical because it transformed not only the inner structure of culture but also the very position of the cultural sphere within the social structure. It abolished culture as a sphere whose very existence realises the barbarity of the ruling classes, and transformed it into a space of emancipation.

Any reading of the Partisan symbolic production that attempts to retroactively link it to bourgeois and basically Romantic aestheticism

is therefore but an escape from the historical and *cultural* significance of this production, an act of escapism running away from the effects of this production's intervention in history. Adorno (36) describes the crisis of the contemporary novel as a 'capitulation ... to the superior power of reality—a reality that cannot be transfigured in an image but only altered concretely, in reality'. The Partisan cultural production is an example of such a transforming intervention in an aggressive and overly powerful reality. Granted, this was an intervention using representations, but representations that were produced from the perspective of another reality, one that first had to be won in a struggle—an armed struggle, but also a struggle with representations.

2. WHAT IDEOLOGICAL MECHANISMS, WHAT EFFECTS?

During post-war one-party socialism, Partisanship and its cultural and artistic production were undoubtedly important components of the ideology of domination⁶—but in a very ambivalent manner that deserves to be analysed. The integration of the People's Liberation Struggle into the ruling ideology implied that, generally, this struggle was considered as something 'good' (as I write these lines, this is no longer the case), and that this positive evaluation was shared by the masses. The anti-fascist project was an emancipatory and solidarity-based undertaking, while the ideology of domination was counter-emancipatory and based on subjection. If the one-party domination wanted to obtain legitimacy, mass approval, it had to incorporate the anti-fascist project. But by incorporating the revolutionary emancipatory project of anti-fascism into its ideology, it also introduced a fundamental contradiction at the crucial point of this ideology—the point of unification of all the practices of domination. It had to present

6 Lev Centrih, using Gramsci's conceptual apparatus, accurately and concisely defines the historical situation after the victory in the anti-fascist armed struggle:

The hegemony of the new historical block of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was securing social consent by various means, including the monopoly over the (ideological) interpretation of the People's Liberation Struggle and related merits of the Communist Party. (Centrih)

the new practices of oppression and exploitation that it had introduced as a continuation of the historical practices of liberation and emancipation, that is, as a realisation of the project of eliminating exploitation. For those whose task was to implement the practices of domination this meant that they also had to take on the commitment to solidarity and to the emancipatory project (as I write this text, this is no longer the case). At any moment they could be called to account for the promise which they made by accepting the Partisan project. This means that the anti-fascist symbolic production was indeed a component of the ruling ideology—but also a fundamental element of *resistance* against the one-party rule during socialism. Yet this was not a case of the classical problem of historical interpretation; it was not just another fight over who would appropriate history by enforcing a specific historical interpretation. The interpretation was identical on both sides: they both understood the anti-fascist liberation struggle as a revolutionary and emancipatory struggle. So, the clash over the so-called Partisan heritage was transposed from the level of *ideology* and *interpretation* to the *practical* level. In socialism, the issue was not whose interpretation would win the Partisan tradition for itself, or who would use it to better ideological advantage; on the contrary, the clash revolved around the question of who actually was *practicing* the anti-fascist heritage.

The implications of the historical horizon created by the anti-fascist armed struggle and particularly the Liberation Front as a mass *political* force of the emancipatory anti-fascist struggle are too complex and far reaching to be presented in the confines of this essay. Yet even at this stage it is possible to discern the outlines of the world-historic significance of Slovenian and Yugoslav socialism. It should be pointed out that as early as the mid-1980s, Slovenian socialism was able to

secure freedom of expression, abolish capital punishment and permit a reasonable exercise of other human rights. This refutes the current (domestic and ‘European’) attempts to retroactively confine Yugoslav socialism and revolutionary politics to the sphere of the ‘really existing socialism’ of the Soviet type. The clash over the practicing of the anti-fascist tradition also explains why in socialist Yugoslavia all the historically relevant critiques of the domination in the conditions of socialism, as well as all historically productive practices of resistance against this domination, were ideologically ‘leftist’.⁷

This resistance and these clashes were not just about the clash of ideologies, nor about the clash of different types of politics. The central object of political clashes in Yugoslav socialism was the determination of the general social *structural framework* within which different types of politics would be confronted and exercised, and within which the ideological struggles would be fought. The objects of these clashes were the transformation or, on the contrary, the reproduction of the existing social structure; in other words, the fundamental issue was whether to continue or to stall revolutionary processes. In the sphere of culture, which concerns us here, the resistance against one-party domination endeavoured to push forward the withering-away of culture as a relatively autonomous social sphere. This was a continuation of the process that the Partisan symbolic production initiated by dismantling the cultural ghetto and starting to change ‘culture’, transforming it from a means of class violence of the ruling classes into a space of human emancipation. In contrast to those who carried on the Partisan politics,⁸ the bearers of domination in the specific conditions of socialism endeavoured to re-traditionalise the society in certain strategic aspects and to eliminate the achievements already won in the anti-fascist struggle.

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At the moment, this is a forbidden topic. Let me mention as a curiosity that some years ago the Slovenian Ministry of Science and Technology (under the liberal government and headed by a minister of the conservative Slovenian People’s Party) refused the application for (very limited) funding for the project titled ‘Criticism of Communism Under Communism’ and proposed by the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana and the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM) in Vienna. The Austrian Ministry of Science (headed by a minister of the conservative Austrian People’s Party) supported the project. When I requested a re-application of the project at the Slovenian ministry, I received the answer that the original application and its evaluation cannot be retrieved, presumably because the person in charge left the ministry.

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For the introduction of the concept of the Partisan politics, and for the constitution of its *problématique*, see Stojanović.

One of the successful features of the establishment of domination in the conditions of socialism was the re-constitution of the modern cultural sphere in its relative autonomy. Even though the autonomisation of culture in Yugoslav socialism was part of the strategy of domination in the conditions of socialism, it had a number of positive results, notably the exceptionally rich cultural, intellectual and artistic production of Yugoslav socialism. And most of all, it contributed to the establishment of modernism as a prevalent and dominant artistic formation, in many respects even as the 'official' art of Yugoslav communism. Yet, despite this, the autonomisation of culture in the specific conditions of one-party rule also tried to revive the historical situation which Gramsci (149), writing under a fascist one-party rule, described as follows:

[I]n countries where there is a single, totalitarian, governing party ... the functions of such a party are no longer directly political, but merely technical ones of propaganda and public order, and moral and cultural influence. The political function is indirect. For, even if no other legal parties exist, other parties in fact always do exist and other tendencies which cannot be legally coerced; and, against these, polemics are unleashed and struggles are fought as in a game of blind man's buff. In any case it is certain that in such parties cultural functions predominate, which means that political language becomes jargon. In other words, political questions are disguised as cultural ones, and as such become insoluble.

By granting autonomy to the cultural sphere, the ruling ideology and its practices operating under the conditions of one-party rule achieve the depoliticisation of social tensions and conflicts (which thus become accessible to the technical, propagandist, police and, say, moral

operations of the apparatuses of domination) and at the same time a situation in which those resisting domination can articulate social struggles only through a ‘cultural jargon’, directing themselves onto a dead-end street of historical ineffectiveness. Generally and hence superficially, yet perhaps still with sufficient accuracy, one could say that the strategy of domination in Yugoslav one-party system acknowledged the so-called autonomy of culture precisely for reasons analysed by Gramsci in relation to the historical case of Mussolini’s fascist politics. The one-party domination would have probably achieved the results such as those described by Gramsci, had not anti-fascist cultural politics found a solution to circumvent the pitfall of the autonomous cultural sphere even before this domination was established. For in the case of the Partisan cultural politics, the cultural disguise of which Gramsci speaks was no longer ineffective, as the anti-fascist cultural activity transformed the very position of culture within the social structure. This required, and at the same time induced, a transformation of the entire social structure, that is, a social revolution.

Thus, in conditions of Yugoslav socialism resistance against one-party domination had to hide, in large part, under a cultural disguise, but this did not render it ineffective insofar as it referred to the anti-fascist tradition in which ‘culture’ had already ceased to be but an arena for cultural masquerade.

3. WHICH ARTISTIC METHODS?

Yet precisely because the cultural and artistic practices that were opening new historical horizons in the specific conditions of one-party domination were connected to the Partisan cultural politics, the Partisan symbolic production was not accessible during the socialist era:

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The debate took place during 1944 in the 'cultural workers' company' on the liberated territory and in the agitation and propaganda department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia at Base 20, the People's Liberation Army Headquarters. The majority of Partisan artists and cultural workers took part in discussions, together with top political, ideological and military cadres of the liberation movement.

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Le salaire de la peur, France and Italy, 1953, director Henri-Georges Clouzot, cast Yves Montand, Charles Vanel, Peter Van Eyck and Véra Clouzot.

it was perceived merely as an outdated, transcended, irrelevant stage of one and the same project. The historically, culturally and artistically relevant cultural practices in socialism were speaking precisely from the position of enunciation that was produced by the Partisan symbolic production and were largely unperceptive of, if not blind to, it, insofar as any practice is partly blind to the position from which it is exercised. For the same reason, these practices were not able to evaluate in any significantly positive way the results of the Partisan establishment of their position of enunciation, since, viewed through such lenses, these results were seen as even more outdated, irrelevant and without currency.

However, these results of the Partisan symbolic production are presently contributing to the opening of our eyes: today, we can understand the positions that even the Partisans considered to be radical excesses of headquarters propagandism. Today, for instance, we no longer have difficulties with understanding the famous doctrine of the 'Partisan birch-tree'. As passed on to us by its opponents, this propagandistic doctrine, supposedly unworthy of art, maintained that even a well drawn birch-tree cannot be a work of art if there is no rifle leaning against it or if it is not pierced by a burst shot.⁹ Who could not recognise today in this demand the device, praised by French film theorists as 'acousmatism', whose effects are achieved by not showing the killer and by registering only his heavy breathing instead, or by showing not the killer's axe-wielding hands but only the wide open eyes of the horror-stricken victim? This method is used with particularly strong effect in the film *The Wages of Fear*,¹⁰ in which Yves Montand is rolling a cigarette when a gust of wind blows away the cigarette paper, and the spectator becomes aware that this was a gust caused by the explosion that killed his friend.

This also explains why the circular letter, signed by Nikolaj Pirnat, who was by no means a naïve person, excluded from the invitation to contribute works of art ‘still life and landscapes typical of the work of petit bourgeois painters’.¹¹ This exclusion derives from a refined sense of the historical, that is, class character of artistic genres, thus effectively escaping from the ivory tower of ‘autonomous culture’, which for us is the most important achievement of the Partisan cultural politics.

11 Pirnat graduated from the Arts Academy in Zagreb and went on, in 1925, to specialise with Ivan Meštrović; he later studied in Paris and was influenced by Picasso for a while. In 1942, he was confined in the Gonars concentration camp, and in 1942, after the capitulation of Italy, he joined the Partisans.

CONCLUSION: WHY IS IT THEN ‘CLOSE’ TO US AGAIN?

Now we can say, at least approximately, why anti-fascist art used to be remote from us: the difficulty stemmed from the crossbreeding of two processes—the *continuity* of social and political practices and the *discontinuity* of artistic practices.

The process of *continuity* was propelled by the politics of resistance against the domination in the conditions of socialism. These politics saw in the anti-fascist symbolic production merely an outdated phase of their own struggle for emancipation, yet this very embeddedness in the same revolutionary horizon as the anti-fascist production made them also blind to the transformation of the structural location and structural effects of cultural practices, that is, to the historical transformation initiated by anti-fascist practices and necessarily carried on by subsequent practices of resistance.

On the other side, the processes of *discontinuity* took place in the field of art, which during socialism found its place within the re-constituted relative autonomy of the cultural sphere. The main discontinuity with respect to the Partisan symbolic politics and anti-fascist cultural practices was precisely this re-establishment of the so-called independent cultural sphere, that is, the introduction of relations of

domination in the new, socialist circumstances. One of the results of the cultural politics of domination during socialism—results that were made possible by that domination and which in their turn *reproduced* that new domination within their specific sphere—was the predominance of modernism in post-war socialist art. This predominance of modernism within the re-established independent cultural sphere buried the Partisan art in the history of art, ascribing to it the status of a harmless episode in which the aesthetic dimension, faced with the external pressure of historical circumstances, had to give way to the demands of agitation, tendentiousness and propaganda. This process, too, contributed to that blindness to the historical break that was the Partisan cultural politics; yet in contrast to the blindness of practices of resistance, which was a ‘practical’ blindness, the ‘aesthetic’ blindness was ideological. While the practical blindness of politics of resistance was a condition for their practicing, the ideological blindness of the autonomist aesthetics of modernism was a *result* of mechanisms that served the reproduction of domination during socialism.

Why, then, does the Partisan symbolic politics ‘feel close’ now? Roughly speaking, the reasons are inversely symmetrical to the reasons for its former ‘remoteness’: because of the *discontinuity* of the ruling social and political practices, which call for the kind of resistance that can establish a *continuity* with the anti-fascist symbolic politics. The social and political rift that restored capitalist domination and involves the depoliticisation and culturalisation of social tensions and conflicts puts the practices of resistance that continue the former emancipation project in a situation similar, in many respects, to the situation of the anti-fascist struggle during the occupation.

On the other side, in the specific field of art contemporary practices are once again attacking the sterile ‘autonomy’ of the cultural sphere.

Contemporary art is either political art or mere aestheticising kitsch. The Partisan symbolic politics cannot be alien to any sensibility touched by contemporary artistic practices. There is of course no ‘continuity’ in this case, but there are more and more *encounters* that are becoming less and less contingent with time. ♡

— Translated by Jernej Habjan and Olga Vuković

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Povzetek

Prevladujoča argumentacija, da je danes simbolno produkcijo jugoslovanskih partizank in partizanov končno mogoče obravnavati kot kulturo in kot umetnost, saj se je končno osvobodila ideološkega nadzora, je sámo ujeto v moderno estetsko ideologijo, po kateri, rečeno benjaminovsko, artefakti morejo biti dokumenti kulture samo, če se pretvarjamo, da niso obenem dokumenti barbarstva. S takšno zastavitvijo razprave o partizanski simbolni produkciji bi zgrešili tiste poteze te produkcije, ki jo temeljno določajo in ki nam jo sploh približujejo do te mere, da želimo razpravljati o njej.

Partizanska kultura in umetnost sta nastajali v radikalni situaciji oziroma, rečeno eksistencialistično, v mejnem položaju. Prav zato sta tudi sami radikalni in mejni. Če ju želimo obravnavati na njuni lastni ravni, moramo misliti radikalno in zavzeti mejno gledišče. Ta članek skicira tovrstno nujno radikalizacijo v treh smereh.

Prvi korak k ustrezni radikalizaciji svojega pristopa k partizanski kulturi in umetnosti napravimo, če potujimo svojo lastno perspektivo. Kajti mar lahko sploh začnemo razmišljati o partizanski simbolni produkciji, če se oklepamo pojmov kulture in umetnosti, ki sta danes avtomatično v obtoku? Kot rečeno, moramo z obema pojmomoma ravnati previdno, saj danes estetika implicira distanco in brezinteresnost, kultura pa pozabo ali celo hipokritsko ignoranco njenih lastnih pogojev možnosti in učinkov. Takšni pojmi nam zagotovo ne morejo približati simbolne produkcije, ki je nastala iz boja za življenje in ki so jo njene lastne producentke in producenti doživljali kot orožje v boju za svobodo.

Partizanska simbolna produkcija je namreč hotela imeti ideološke učinke: s pomočjo zgodovinsko danih umetnostnih postopkov je poskušala producirati učinke na ravni družbene vezi. Zato običajno moderno

umevanje ideologije kot nasprotja in zanikanja umetnosti – umevanje, ki razmerje med umetnostjo in ideologijo obravnava s pomočjo pojmov sredstev in instrumentov – zgreši zgodovinsko preobrazbo in inovacijo, ki ju je vnesla partizanska simbolna produkcija.

Zato sodobnosti ne velja obravnavati kot nove posode, v katero lahko vržemo staro sestavino, partizansko simbolno produkcijo, ki naj zdaj zbujata nov apetit. Sodobnost ni homogena, partizanska simbolna produkcija pa ni pasiven objekt, saj še zmerom simbolno učinkuje na nas. Šele ko je sodobnost začela proizvajati nove politične procese, nove umetnostne postopke in predvsem novo, politično umetnost, so naše oči mogle uzreti zgodovinsko inovacijo, ki so jo vnesle partizanske umetnostne in kulturne prakse. V sodobnosti so morali vznikniti novi politični procesi, da se je v novih bojih mogla vrniti stara zaveznica.

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