

The Non-Aligned Movement and Cultural Politics in the Former Yugoslavia¹

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¹This essay was first presented at the 'Bandung Humanisms' Conference at Columbia University, New York on 16 April 2014. It was slightly re-written in October 2015 for this catalogue.

² I am referring here to Gal Kirn's text *Od primata partizanske politike do postfordistične tendence v socialistični Jugoslaviji*, http://www.academia.edu/1063164/OD_PRIMATA_PARTIZANSKE_POLITIKE_DO_POSTFORDISTICNE_TENDENCE_V_SOCIALISTICNI_JUGOSLAVIJI (accessed 13 November 2015).

The emancipatory potential of the non-aligned movement had its roots, from the perspective of the former Yugoslavia, in the people's national liberation struggle, that is, the Partisan resistance movement of the Second World War, and later, from the 1950s onwards, in the special Yugoslav brand of socialism, called the self-management system. Some political philosophers speak of the so-called 'politics of rupture', the three historical sequences that enabled the beginning of a radical novum, something that was completely different from the established state politics in Yugoslavia of that time.² Those three sequences were, as mentioned, the Partisan liberation struggle, self-management and the non-aligned movement.



Yugoslavia, illustration from the children's encyclopaedia *The World Around Us* 1960

³ See reference in Rastko Močnik: *Partizanska simbolička politika*, *Zarez*, number 161, 2005, Zagreb, <http://www.zarez.hr/clanci/partizanska-simbolicna-politika> (accessed 18 November 2015)

But when we discuss emancipatory potential, we also have in mind the specific cultural production of that era, which was inevitably linked to the social revolution and which had a deep impact on cultural politics in Yugoslavia after the Second World War, especially after Yugoslavia's break with the Soviet Union. The question is: why was the Partisan cultural revolution in the former Yugoslavia so significant? Not because it transformed the inner order of culture or the position of the cultural sphere in the social structure, but, as Slovene sociologist Rastko Močnik suggests, because it eliminated the cultural sphere, which by its own existence embodies the 'barbarity of classes', and re-established culture in the sphere of human emancipation³.

This is particularly important as it sheds new light on the art practices of that period. For a long time these art practices have been associated only with their ideological function – but seen in this new light, through this new interpretation, they can be considered an *event*; they broke with the preceding art practices and began something different, something new. Not only did art involve ‘the masses’ in the process of artistic creation (illiterate Partisans, men and women, not only learned to write – they wrote poetry) but art and politics also traversed the resistance movement and the social revolution. As my colleagues in Ljubljana wrote:⁴ the art produced in relation to the Partisan movement was actively involved in the movement’s transformative process by being itself subject to it; it contributed critically to the articulation of the struggle’s symbolic coordinates, which also dictated that art be self-critical.

⁴ Miklavž Komelj, Jože Baršič, Lidija Radojević and Tanja Velagič on the occasion of the exhibition *How to Think Partisan Art?*, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana, <http://www.mg-lj.si/node/482> (accessed 13 November 2015).



20th Century. Continuities and Raptures, installation view of Art of the Partisan Resistance, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana 2011

If we look at the Partisan movement and its unique cultural production as a precursor to what happened in Yugoslavia’s cultural politics from the 1950s onwards, we can find some parallels to the relationship between culture and revolution in writings by political theoreticians and philosophers from Africa, Asia and Latin America. Amilcar Cabral (Guinea-Bissau), for example, wrote that people are only able to create and develop the liberation movement because they keep their culture alive despite the continual and organised repression of their cultural life

and because they continue to resist culturally, even when their political and military resistance is destroyed⁵. And it is cultural resistance which at a given moment can take on new forms – political, economic, military – to fight foreign domination.

Enrique Dussel emphasised the importance of so-called ‘popular culture’⁶ (popular not in the sense of populism but as ‘coming from the people themselves’), saying that the culture of cultural poverty... represents the most uncontaminated and irradiative core of resistance of the oppressed against the oppressor... Similarly, Miklavž Komelj⁷, the Slovene poet and theoretician, pointed out that Partisan art of the Second World War was political because of its very circumstances of origin. Poetry equalled combat, or to put it differently: words became weapons.

In 1948 Yugoslavia broke with the Soviet Union. Soon afterwards, it introduced self-management, which had a profound influence on society as a whole: it introduced a new type of labour management organisation, working people’s participation in decision making, and workers’ councils. Self-management brought about increased autonomy in economic production units, which was a step forward from the planned economy as practised in the Soviet Union, as it handed the factories to the workers (the so-called ‘withering of the state’). Under self-management, the local community became the basic unit of a bottom-up sociopolitical structure, and as Edvard Kardelj, the ideologue of self-management⁸, put it in 1955, it was simultaneously a community of producers and a community of consumers, which enabled citizens to participate autonomously and with full responsibility in the decision-making processes. In the 1970s Tanzania and Algeria adopted some of the principles of Yugoslav self-management.

A particular success, if I may call it that, was the introduction of self-management in the cultural sector. In a specific way the 1950s were a period of cultural blossoming in the former Yugoslavia. For example, the formal status of freelance cultural worker was introduced, part of the national budget went towards cultural activities, modernism was introduced as the favoured style, and so on. This ‘artistic freedom’ was even adopted by the political elite, which addressed issues of social change through art, saying: ‘We want our artists to be freer to create than anywhere else in the world, with no one prescribing the form, the content, or the genre of their artistic expression. Our self-management democracy allows us a cultural policy that could be called the policy of a hundred flowers⁹.’ Some of

⁵ Return to the Source: *Selected Speeches by Amilcar Cabral*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983, p. 60.

⁶ About the ‘popular culture’ concept see Enrique Dussel: *Transmodernity and Interculturality*, 2004, at <http://enriquedussel.com/txt/TransmodernityC20andC20Interculturality.pdf> (accessed 18 November 2015)

⁷ For more thorough analysis of partisan art see Miklavž Komelj: *Kako misliti partizansko umetnost?*, (Založba/*cf, Ljubljana, 2009).

⁸ On self-management and its implementation in Yugoslav society see Edvard Kardelj: *Smeri razvoja političnega sistema socialističnega samoupravljanja*, (ČZP Komunist, Ljubljana, 1977).

⁹ From the speech by Mitja Ribičič, high representative of Yugoslav Communist Party, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of Moderna galerija and the opening of the *Slovene Art 1945-78* exhibition. From the archives of the Moderna galerija, Ljubljana.

the main concerns of Yugoslav cultural policy at that time were, for example, including culture in the entire socio-economic context and transforming citizens from passive users into active co-creators of culture, something that can also be observed today in the context of the 'commons'. Of course, I am not being nostalgic here, but what I find intriguing is that already in 1950s socialist Yugoslavia emphasis was placed on the educative function of culture (such as, for example, organising the so-called didactic exhibitions and seminars on modern art for factory workers) rather than its artistic aspect, and museums were encouraged to address the entire working population; that is, the spheres of economy, education and culture were transferred to the people themselves. That was the idea of self-management – every worker was brought into the decision-making process, including in culture. There the workers were called cultural workers.

These emancipatory cultural practices took many different forms, including, for example, amateur cinema and photography clubs, which were established in factories and other workers' organisations. They provided opportunities for avant-garde experimentation in the spirit of socialist self-management. This is really a special case because in this way certain links were maintained between so-called high culture and the workers. Also in Yugoslavia in the 1970s art was brought from the museums of modern and contemporary art to factories and workers' associations, where special seminars on modern art were conducted. We could say that Yugoslavia had at that time probably one of the most decentralised and democratic cultural sectors. On the other hand, any opposition, even in the form of irony, was proscribed because socialist art museums were ideologically linked to the officially promoted art, that is, 'socialist modernism' (for example, many Black Wave films were suppressed and film directors were sent to prison or banned from making films).

What can we learn or deduce from the self-management cultural politics of former Yugoslavia for today's situation? Which progressive socialist cultural policies, museum models and directions, as well as emancipatory utopias, could be applied to the new types of museum of today? It is perhaps worth mentioning a UNESCO seminar in 1972 in Santiago, in the then socialist and non-aligned Chile, where a new type of social or integrated museum was discussed, a museum that would link cultural rehabilitation with political emancipation. A museum closely following social and cultural changes would be socially

¹⁰ *Palabras del presidente de la Republica*, typescript, 1972. From the archives of the Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende, Santiago, Chile.

progressive without being ideologically restricted by any political representation. Even Salvador Allende, inaugurating the Museum of Solidarity in Santiago in 1972, seemed to understand this new museological vocation when he exclaimed: This is not just a museum anymore. This is a museum of the workers!¹⁰

Now I am coming to the core of my essay, which is Yugoslavia's membership of the non-aligned movement and the effects this membership had on its cultural politics. Yugoslavia fitted well into the discourse of non-alignment. Socialist revolutions had a lot in common with anti-colonial and anti-imperialist revolutions, which made the Yugoslav case of emancipation in the context of socialism particularly significant. The non-aligned movement provided an opportunity to position Yugoslav ideology and culture globally on the basis of the formula modernism + socialism = emancipatory politics. As A. W. Singham and S. Hune put it in 1986:

Some cynics would like to relegate the Yugoslavs' position on non-alignment to being concerned solely with their own survival, especially with regard to relations with the Soviet Union, but this overlooks Tito's commitment to a new universal social movement. It was Tito who revealed to the Afro-Asian world the existence of a non-colonial Europe which would be sympathetic to their aspirations. By bringing Europe into the grouping, Yugoslavia helped to create an international movement¹¹.

¹¹ A.W.Singham & ShirleyHune: *Non-Alignment in an Age of Alignments* (The College Press, Zimbabwe, 1986), p. 52.

The concept of non-alignment became the main component of Yugoslavia's foreign policy very early on. President Tito travelled to various African and Asian countries on so-called 'Journeys of Peace' (for example, his famous visit to Western African countries on the *Galeb (Seagull)* boat in 1961), not as a conqueror, but to support the independence of post-colonial states. These travels subsequently acquired a strong economic dimension and created new spheres of interest and exchange among the countries of the non-aligned movement. This intense economic collaboration at first included Yugoslav construction companies working on projects in Africa and the Middle East (Energoprojekt, Industrogradnja, Smelt etc.), companies that had sprung up as a consequence of the rapid urbanisation of Yugoslavia after the Second World War. Construction companies provided everything 'from design to construction', including architecture and urban planning. One of the first examples was the building of the Kpime Dam in Togo in 1961, after Tito's visit to the country. Some younger

generation architecture scholars from Belgrade are currently looking at the development of this kind of 'non-aligned modernity' from a new perspective. Dubravka Sekulić researched the ways in which Yugoslavia and the decolonised countries in Africa became unexpected allies in the process of articulating how to be modern by one's own rules, that is, how to direct one's own modernisation process.¹² Examples of this were the architectural and urban planning projects in various African and Arab non-aligned countries, such as Energoprojekt's Lagos International Trade Fair (1974–77), where architects (notably the company's chief architect, Zoran Bojović) combined Yugoslav socialist modernism with tropical modernism and the local contexts.

¹² See the book *Unfinished Modernisations / Between Utopia and Pragmatism* which was published on the occasion of the exhibition with the same title (Maribor Art Gallery, 2012; Museum of Architecture and Design, Ljubljana, 2013) in which Sekulić's text is included.

One of the consequences of the change in the economic system in Yugoslavia in the early 1950s, when central planning was abolished and foreign trade policy changed, was that a great deal of emphasis was placed on the construction of trade fair sites all over the country: Ljubljana Trade Fair (1952), Zagreb Fair (1956), Belgrade Fair (1957). These were built with the purpose of providing a meeting point between the Western and Eastern Blocs and the non-aligned countries. After the 1960s market liberalisation and the development of so-called market socialism in Yugoslavia these fairs provided a space for presentations, exhibitions and exchange of goods, and also to promote the newly independent African and Asian countries and stimulate trade and cooperation with the non-aligned.

But it soon became clear that simply exporting Yugoslav goods to foreign markets was not enough; the products also had to be designed in a modern style. One of the important elements of rapid industrialisation and modernisation, besides architecture and urban planning, was industrial design. The Biennial of Industrial Design was organised in Ljubljana in 1964, the first of its kind to bring industry and designers together, not only from Yugoslavia but internationally. Some prominent companies (such as Iskra) had their own design departments, as it was becoming increasingly important for companies to have well-designed and functional objects in order to be competitive in the international markets.¹³ As the organisers of the exhibition *Iskra: Neuvrščeno oblikovanje* put it: 'For post-war Yugoslav design, the desire to build a new (and better) society was a key factor behind its desire for modernisation ... The construction of a new society was conceptually aligned with the idea of modernism ...'¹⁴

¹³ See the catalogue *Iskra: Neuvrščeno oblikovanje 1946–1990*, ed. Cvetka Požar and Barbara Predan (Ljubljana: Museum of Architecture and Design and Pekinpah, 2009).

¹⁴ Barbara Predan, *An Overlooked Giant* in Barbara Predan and Cvetka Požar, *Iskra: Non-Aligned Design 1946–1990*, (The Architecture Museum of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, 2009) p. 45

Yugoslavia used its specific geopolitical position extensively not only in the economic sense but also, as we have seen, culturally.

A special committee was established after the Second World War called the Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, which dealt with exhibitions across Yugoslavia's borders and whose chairman was the surrealist writer and artist Marko Ristić. I have already mentioned architecture, urban planning and industrial design as state-promoted vehicles of new modernist tendencies compatible with the idea of creating a new socialist society. These ideas were in line with similar issues that non-alignment frequently addressed, such as the question of cultural imperialism; cultural equality became one of the important principles of the non-aligned movement. At the sixth conference of the non-aligned countries in Havana, Josip Broz Tito spoke of a successful aspect of the non-aligned movement: the 'resolute struggle for decolonisation in the field of culture'¹⁵. Interpreted from today's point of view this struggle also included new kinds of historicisation, rewriting historical narratives or even writing history anew. In other words, the emphasis was placed on questioning intellectual colonialism and cultural dependency. The idea therefore was not only to study the Third World, but to make the Third World a place from which to speak! This reflects Enrique Dussel's claim about trans-modernity¹⁶, which rejects modernity and post-modernity, not out of excess or surplus, but out of a condition of peripherality; trans-modernity as a horizon *beyond* modernity, a perspective of one's own cultural experiences.

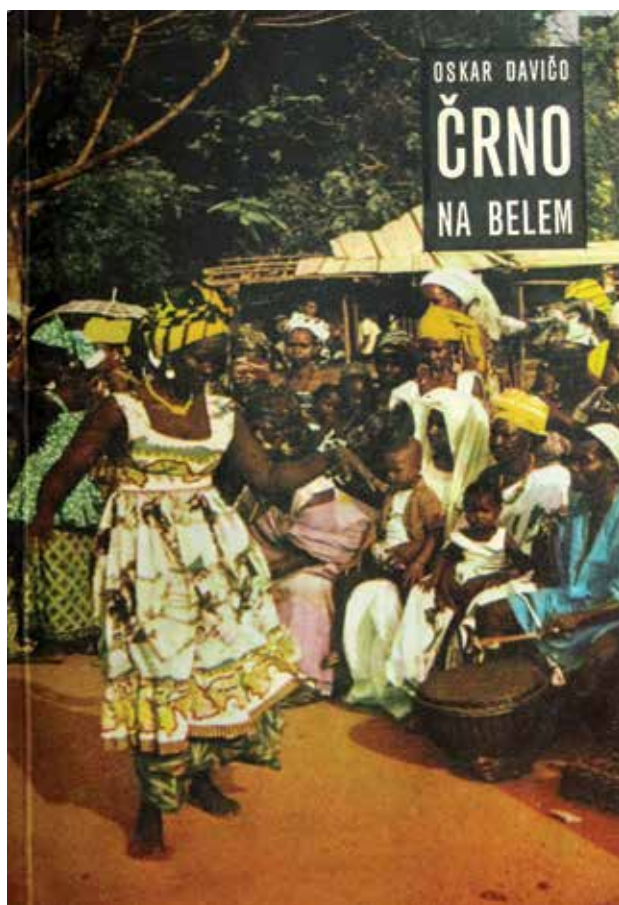
¹⁵ See for example a special issue of newspaper Delo, 4 May 1982, Ljubljana, Slovenia (Yugoslavia), dedicated to Josip Broz Tito death anniversary (he died on 4 May 1980). One chapter is about Tito's role in the Non-Aligned Movement.

¹⁶ See Enrique Dussel: *Transmodernity and Interculturality*, 2004, at <http://enriquedussel.com/txt/Transmodernity%20and%20Interculturality.pdf> (Accessed 18 November)

From the late 1950s onwards Yugoslavia had special relations with the newly independent countries in Africa, and in a specific way all these networks led to a 'recolonising' of Africa by means of socialism's newly established connections in the non-aligned movement. Exchanges of all sorts happened in the field of the arts and education; students from non-aligned countries came to study in Yugoslavia; museums acquired various artifacts (the Museum of African Art opened in Belgrade in 1977 as a result of this ideological and political climate), not only ethnographic museums but also museums of history, such as the former Museum of the Revolution of the Yugoslav Nations, which became the steward of a large number of artifacts – gifts that President Tito received on his travels in the non-aligned countries or that were given to him by foreign politicians. This era also saw the birth of a specific travel literature about 'exotic places'; the most prominent example is the work of Oskar Davičo, another surrealist writer and politician, who visited Western Africa on the occasion of preparations for a non-aligned movement meeting. He wrote a book about the journey called *Black on White* in which he analysed the African post-

colonial societies of that time.¹⁷ His analysis is probably one of the most interesting interpretations of the new world order from two perspectives: from the position of an artist/writer and from the position of somebody who himself was coming from a non-aligned and non-African country.

¹⁷ Branimir Stojanović Trša pointed out this example to me.



Book cover for Oskar Davičo: *Black on White* 1962

Last but not least, there is the unique case of the Ljubljana (International) Biennial of Graphic Arts which was established in 1955 (in the same year as Documenta in Kassel) at Moderna galerija. Its founder was Zoran Kržišnik, a long-time director of this institution, who saw the biennial as a chance 'for a projection of values such as the presence of freedom, modernity, democracy, openness and so on in society'. The biennial was set up to pave a way into the world ('we make a biennial in order to make our way into the world'), to introduce

abstraction into the art world in Yugoslavia (following the period of Socialist Realism), and to prove that even 'fine art can be an instrument of a slight liberal opening'. It combined 'a modernist concept permeated by a humanistic desire supported by political aspirations'.¹⁸ Kržišnik pointed out in one of his interviews that he showed President Tito that the biennial of graphic arts was actually a materialisation of what was being referred to as openness, which was then seen as non-alignment.

¹⁸ Text by Petja Grafenauer on the occasion of the 30th Biennial of Graphic Arts Ljubljana, in *The Biennial of Graphic Arts – Serving You Since 1955* (2013).



Exterior installation, 4th International Exhibition of Graphic Arts, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana 1961

Why graphic arts? First of all, for practical reasons – prints were easy to transport. Secondly, graphic art held a special place in Partisan art in the Second World War, which meant that there was already a well-developed printing tradition in Slovenia.

Finally, graphic art was considered the most democratic artistic medium. Jerome Mellquist said on the occasion of the first biennial: 'No technique is barred, no approach condemned. Now men want to express, not to inscribe. No frontier has been ignored and no barrier permitted.' President Tito publicly praised the graphic arts biennial, saying: 'It is marvellous that we have this gathering of artists from all over the world. New currents are being established, though I don't completely understand them.' Since this exhibition project was unique in Yugoslavia, many people visited the biennial: artists, workers, students, domestic and foreign art critics and politicians. With regard to the last, Kržišnik humorously commented: 'We opened an exhibition, while the politicians resolved their problems.'¹⁹

¹⁹ See *Intervju z Zoranom Kržišnikom*, interview by Beti Žerovc, 29th Biennial of Graphic Arts, <https://29graficnibienale.wordpress.com/zgodovina/intervju-z-zoranom-krzisnikom/> (Accessed 18 November 2015)



Installation view with the international jury, 5th International Exhibition of Graphic Arts, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana 1965

The approach of the biennial towards acquiring works for the exhibitions was twofold: on the one hand the biennial jury made their own selections, in order to get the best representatives of, for example, Ecole de Paris; and on the other, some countries were offered direct invitations to present whatever they wanted without interference in their selection. Consequently, the biennial exhibited 'basically everything, the whole world'²⁰, especially after the first conference of the non-aligned countries in 1961. This process involved the most competent juries possible, which included directors of museums like the Guggenheim, the Tate and Tokyo, and curators and critics such as Pierre Restany, Harald Szeemann, William Lieberman (the head of the Prints department in MOMA) and others.

²⁰ same reference as 19



Ivan Picelj, poster for the 6th International Exhibition of Graphic Arts, Archives of Moderna galerija, Ljubljana 1965

After the break-up of Yugoslavia, the concepts of non-alignment and self-management became obsolete and almost forgotten; in recent years, though, there has been renewed interest on the part of younger-generation scholars looking for positive aspects of the impact the movement had at the global level at a time of anti-colonial revolutions, struggles for independence, struggles against racism, the search for cultural identity and cultural emancipation and so on. What interests the researchers are such questions as: What are the elements, traditions and references from those past experiences that can be extracted or recuperated in a time of neoliberal capitalism? What can be learned from the non-aligned movement and what from self-management?

Looking back at what happened in the 1990s, it is quite obvious that museums in the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe slowly integrated into the global art system, adopting to a lesser or greater degree the Western canon of art history and subsequently the logic of capitalism. Even the socialist slogan 'brotherhood and unity' was translated into the capitalist form of consumerist sameness, which appears now to be a kind of continuous, uniform space. Boris Groys summarised it well when he said that with the demise of European communism we had lost the most significant alternative to Western uniformity in recent history, in terms of differences and alternatives²¹.

On the other hand, precisely because of what has been happening with the art institutions, there has been a renewed interest in the ideas of progressive socialist cultural policies, museum models and directions as well as their emancipatory utopias, with the aim of investigating whether they could be in any way applied to the new prototypes of museum today. A lot has been written not only by 'art experts' but also by theoreticians of the new social movements about the possible new 'mental' prototypes of institutions and different kinds of institutionality. These debates focus not only on the crisis specific to the traditional forms of organisation, but also on their constituent practices, on possible associations between art institutions, social movements, workers' associations, student councils, migrant groups, etc. and on the so-called 'knowledge protocols' – structures of norms governing institutions and prescribing research, evaluation procedures, and in the case of art museums, collecting policies, displays of objects and so on.

There are currently many groups, collectives, networks and even museum federations actively engaging with various antagonisms in art institutions related to museums' constituent practices and the processes of museums' instrumentalisation by capital and ideology, exposing the contradictions of work and exploitation within culture but at the same time producing new formats of exhibitions, reconsidering the meaning of institutional and social critique, usership in art, possible associations between art institutions, social and political movements and so on. The emphasis is not on common identities but on common necessities; something that joins different positions in a new anti-hegemonic cultural front.

To conclude this essay with a question: *What does it mean to have a museum today?*²² To answer it in the most sincere way would be to paraphrase Gilles Deleuze: 'A [museum] is like a box

²¹ Boris Groys: Back from the future, Mika Briški (ed.), *2000+ Artleast Collection: the art of Eastern Europe. A selection of works for the international and national collections of Moderna Galerija Ljubljana*, (Vienna: Folio, 2001).

²² The question was posed by Toni Negri at the conference *The New Abduction of Europe*, 28th February 2014 in the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid

²³ Michel Foucault: *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. Donald E. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, (Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 208.

of tools. It must be useful. And not for itself. If no one uses it, then the [museum] is worthless or the moment is inappropriate²³. This 'use' Deleuze is talking about (he was actually referring to theory, not museums) can only be understood in the sense of becoming, of becoming a new political subjectivity that considers the museum not as a neutral box but as a space where institutional experiments (or 'tools') merge with the production of new institutions; and most importantly, a space which should make us think as it has already more than once in the past: how do we 'make' a future together?