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TRAUMA AND IDENTITY: MEDIALISATION AND CONSTRUCT

Abstract

*This text focuses on the connection between socialist modernism in Croatia during the Yugoslav period and contemporary art's references to the ideological and formal aspects of socialist modernism and its historical revisionism. The central example and first case-study is the competition for the partisan monument with a memorial park on Petrova Gora (opened in 1982 after two competitions for the project of the monument held in 1971 and 1974). The second case-study is David Maljković's trilogy of video and video installations, *Scene for a New Heritage* (2004–2006) on the subject of the monument's (on Petrova Gora) de-ideologized form, here considered as purely aesthetic form. My intention is to analyse two connected case studies, from two different periods of art. Partisan symbolic production has become 'culture and art' once historical events have released it from its social and historical contexts.*

INTRODUCTION

Henri Lefebvre's key concept of the modern city is that of space as a concrete abstraction: architecture plays the role of a technical setting for the ideological image that space is the substitute for the monumentality of the ancient world.¹ Art, architectural and urban projects in ex-Yugoslavia are often highly valorised heritage that could be the trigger for urban or national identification, or regional collaboration, such as in the case of the exhibition *The Concrete Utopia, 1948–1980* in MoMA New York in 2018.² In contemporary art, modernism, understood as 'multiply modernities' including socialist modernism, is often subject to anthropological or sociological mapping as well as archiving, according to Hal Foster's definition of the artist "as Ethnographer" and the "ethnographic turn" in contemporary art.³ In their work, contemporary artists often refer to (or exploit) the legacy of modernity and modernism, which is an approach called "modernology" by Sabine Breitwieser,⁴ by adding a dimension of meta-

435

1 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 232.

2 Curators: Martino Stierli and Vladimir Kulić. The exhibition "introduces the exceptional work of socialist Yugoslavia's leading architects to an international audience, highlighting a significant yet thus-far understudied body of modernist architecture, whose forward-thinking contributions still resonate today." It explores "themes of large-scale urbanization, technology in everyday life, consumerism, monuments and memorialization, and the global reach of Yugoslav architecture." "Toward a Concrete Utopia Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980," MoMA, accessed October 20, 2021, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3931>.

3 Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer?," in *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, eds. George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1995), 302–309.

4 Sabine Breitwieser, ed., "Modernologies (Contemporary Artists Researching Modernity and Modernism)," exhibition catalogue (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona), 2009.

language or meta-discourse of a work of art in the context of contemporary art production. Modernology refers to attempts at re-evaluating and revitalising the project of modernity and modernism in contemporary art. Beginning with Michel Foucault's and Gilles Deleuze's understanding of modernity as an approach to the present that can be adopted in any period whatsoever – the notion that modernism “should not be interpreted as a historical epoch between a kind of archaic premodernism and an uncertain postmodernism”⁵ – many contemporary artworks and exhibitions “demonstrate the relevance of modernity and modernism for our own time, not as historical developments but as the unfulfilled possibility of our relationship to the present.”⁶ This is certainly the case in Croatia.

Igor Zabel, a Slovenian art historian and curator and theorist of contemporary art, explained the “retro-principle” as a working method, in way that we can connect with “modernology”: “‘Retro-principle’ implies not only the use of already given forms and models for new needs, but also a conscious political position on which this appropriation is based.”⁷ As already mentioned, some examples of Croatian modernist fine art, architecture and urban projects, and intermedia, are often highly valorised heritage. Its actual problems are the following: inversion of the symbolic language of an artwork, especially public art and in particular memorial sculpture; technological obsolescence; and, valuation of modernist heritage as a non-priority for restoration are the causes for the deteriorated state of emblematic socialist architecture.

436

In contemporary mapping and criticism of modernity, the leitmotifs of modernism were “production of space,”⁸ the architectural space and the social and political space in conflict and harmony at the same time, or the conflicts and correspondences between the architectural space of modernity and the social and political space; and the concept of a “universal language” in the form of abstract symbols and forms. Many contemporary artists exhibit ambivalence and seek (attempt) to develop new readings of the rhetoric of modernity, to document and archive the concomitant grammar of modernism, its conditions, constraints, and consequences – by means of a critical reflection, mapping narratives, alternative points of view, lines of conflict, and unresolved contradictions of modernity, both modernism's ideology and modernism as a socio-political movement aspiring to cultivate (create) a universal language in the form of abstract aesthetic symbols and forms. The main elements of modernism were born out of general efforts to create a more egalitarian society,

5 Karel Císař, “Modernology: Art after Postmodern Art,” in *Between the First and Second Modernity. 1985–2012*, eds. Jiří Ševčík and Edith Jeřábková (Praha: Vědecko-výzkumné pracoviště, 2011), 65. All translations are by the author.

6 Ibid., 49.

7 Igor Zabel is connecting it with “retro-gardism” (“retro-avant-gardism”) as the ideological position of the Laibach Kunst. Igor Zabel, “Art and State: From Modernism to the Retroavantgarde,” in *Essays I* (Ljubljana: Založba, 2006), 319.

8 Henri Lefebvre moves from metaphysical and ideological considerations of the meaning of space to its experience in the everyday life of home and city, claiming “the right to the city.”

and today this is a starting point for theoretical, artistic and political critiques of the contemporary ideological conjuncture. Contemporary artists in Croatia during the last fifteen years often use strategies of mapping, documenting, and archiving the topics of the National Liberation War during World War II: antifascism, revolution, and international conflict. Yugoslavian or socialist modernity expressed a consistent political trust in geometry and technology as imperative components in the development of the new state.

In my research on contemporary art that refers to the modern art and architecture legacy in Croatia, I seek to identify key controversies related to its symbolising of values and continuity. To quote Vojin Bakić: “After 1945, all of us artists faced the very important task of recreating the abundance of themes and subjects from our recent history of the National Liberation and also from contemporary life. In doing so, we were supposed to avoid all formalistic playing around with the matter, and even all imitation of previous forms and models: we were to invent a new form, a higher and better form that would be adequate for our new man and the time in which we lived.”⁹

Considering that the cultural policy of Yugoslavia since the mid-1970s was moving in the direction of ‘re-ideologization’, i.e., realisation of the ideological goals of the socialist state by using high modernist art and contemporary popular-cultural forms, a space for critical questioning of relations between art and ideology began to open only at the end of the 1980s, and above all through the subversive activities of retro- or neo-avant-garde art. The term “retro-avant-garde” refers to heterogeneous work of artists working in late socialist and post-socialist contexts, from late 1980s to 1990s, aiming “to produce visions and embody the topography of the time loop of the present as ‘the tomorrow’s past’.”¹⁰ It is a “presentational device” developed around the notions of copying or reproducing an already existing visual repertory, as a specific system for ‘displaying’ the art of the past and linked “on the one hand to the notions of disappearance, effacement and death, on the other to criticism, or even negation of the historical process.”¹¹ Following the end of Yugoslavia (in early 1990s) and the apparent and also formal abolition of socialism, first there were no significant shifts in the direction of critical analysis of relationships between ideologies and artistic practices of socialism. Croatia’s independence and abandonment of the socialist socioeconomic order happened along with a pronounced emphasis on the national state and Christian heritage, as well as with a reimagination of elements of the Croatian cultural and artistic tradition, as usually occurred during transitional processes or radical changes/shifts in dominant social, economic and ideological paradigms.

9 Vojin Bakić, excerpt from the interview “Glasam za narod, glasam za škole” [I Vote for the People, I Vote for Schools], 1950, published on page 45 in publication that has been released on the occasion of the Vojin Bakić exhibition at the Grazer Kunstverein, “Apstrakcija i simboli” [Abstraction and Symbols], held from June 4 to August 24, 2008, curated by What, How & for Whom / WHW and Ana Bakić. It was a somewhat modified version of Vojin Bakić’s exhibition in the Gallery Nova in 2007. Publisher: Grazer Kunstverein, Graz, 1970.

10 Juliane Debeusscher, “Retroavangarde: Vertiginous Forms of Representation,” Irwin, accessed October 20, 2021, <https://www.irwin-nsk.org/texts/retroavangarde-vertiginous-forms-of-representation/>.

ARCHITECTURE OF THE MONUMENT ON PETROVA GORA

Giorgio Agamben perceives architectural practices as formations of the relations of power (his term *dispositive* is derived from the juxtaposition or the interpenetration of relations of power, for example, through governmentality, and relations of knowledge [discursive and non-discursive ones], which perceives art practices as formations of the relations of power)¹² and 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. Although its purpose was the politicisation of culture:

... Partisan symbolic production is now more accessible to us because it is no longer involved in the dominant ideology. (...) 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.¹³

An emblematic architectural monument on Petrova Gora ("Peter's Hill" in Croatian) is an example of a big national project suffused with the ideological symbolism of antifascism and socialist utopia. Many similar monuments had already been built and were shown in Yugoslavia's pavilion at the Venice Biennale 1980. Presented there were large partisan monuments which were actually modernist landscape sculptures, erected on locations with historical memory – commemorating victories in battles, mass murders in lost battles and massive executions of civilians. As such, these monuments "produced the basic elements of a social structure in which fascism would no longer be possible."¹⁴ Two were made by Vojin Bakić (1915–1992) who is today: "... perceived as an 'authentic' modernist sculptor, the main figure of the break with socialist realism who forged the paths for abstraction and freedom of artistic expression in the 1950s, and on the other, as a 'state artist' in service to socialist ideology. Bakić is highly acclaimed in official art histories, yet his monuments to the anti-fascist struggle were devastated and destroyed in the heat of the nationalism and anticommunism of the 90s."¹⁵

11 Ibid.

12 Giorgio Agamben, *Che cos'è un dispositivo?* [What Is an Apparatus?] (Roma: Nottetempo, 2006), 5–6. Agamben's concept of an apparatus was first mentioned here, with English edition *What is an Apparatus? (and Other Essays)*, 2009.

13 Rastko Močnik, "The Partisan Symbolic Politics," *Slavica tergestina*, vol. 17 (2016): 20–21.

14 Ibid., 25.

15 WHW [curatorial collective What, How and for Whom], "Revisiting Modernism," *Galerija nova newspapers*, no. 17 (2006): 3. Special issue on the occasion of the exhibition Retired Compositions by David Maljković (https://www.whw.hr/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/novine-17-david-maljkovic-retired-compositions_compressed.pdf).

Igor Zabel stated that from the 1950s onwards, there was a particular symbiosis in Yugoslavia between modernist art and the party-and-state apparatus (I would add: after Miroslav Krleža's speech on October 5, 1952, at the Congress of writers in Ljubljana, when he connected socialist realism with Stalinism), which not only tolerated and even supported modernist artists, but often used modernism for its own public image. As Zabel wrote, in the 1960s in Yugoslavia "... modernism was not only supported by the party-and-state apparatus; it was accepted as its own visual style. (...) As early as the 1950s, not only socialist realism but any academic realistic tradition became outdated in monumental sculpture. In this kind of sculpture, the 1950s can be seen as a transitional period from the realist models of around 1950 to modernist figurative and abstract models of around 1960."¹⁶

The General Yugoslav Anonymous Tender for the design concept of the monument and memorial park and centre dedicated to the Uprising of the People of Kordun and Banija in the Second World War on Veliki Petrovac, the highest peak of *Petrova Gora* and close to the site of the partisan hospital, was issued in 1970 by the eminent Fund for Landscaping of Petrova Gora Memorial Park through the Croatian Architects' Association, the Croatian Association of Artists, and the Union of Croatian Town Planning Associations.¹⁷ The 15-member jury of the tender was presided by Lieutenant General Rade Bulat, engineer, and included art historian Vera Horvat-Pintarić, architects Neven Šegvić and Josip Seissel (who was also a painter), sculptor Vanja Radauš, painter Zlatko Prica, and writer Mirko Božić. The competition program was an important step forward with regards to previous memorial concepts. It was requested that the object should also have a utilitarian function, i.e. that, in addition to a monument with symbolic meaning, there should also be a museum and a viewpoint with all the necessary accompanying facilities. Thus, the synthesis of architecture, sculpture and signs with the desired meaning was a precedent in the concept of monuments not only in the former Yugoslavia but also on a global scale. In principle, it could be compared only with the project of the Monument to the Third International or Tatlin's Tower. Furthermore, and in contrast to previous practice, this program marked the first time that other important historical events were also mentioned as a component of the site's meaning, apart from the National Liberation Struggle. In this case, for example:

The significance and value of Petrova Gora completes the memory of the fateful the Battle of Gvozd¹⁸ in 1097, in which Croatia lost its independent state due to the death of its leader Petar Svačić. (...) Croatian statehood was re-established on the same territory

16 Zabel, "Art and State, From Modernism to the Retroavantgarde," 324.

17 The General plan of the Petrova Gora memorial park was created already in 1969.

18 As it was called in the past. It is situated in the central part of Croatia.

by the state-making decisions adopted by the Third session of ZAVNOH,¹⁹ resolutions of which are incorporated into the constitutional and legal foundation of the modern Republic of Croatia, in Topusko in 1944.²⁰

That same narrow geographical area therefore has a special symbolic meaning. The program of the competition was created in the general atmosphere of the Croatian Spring.²¹ Furthermore, it was written in the tender: “The area of Petrova Gora was a scene of intense fighting with the Turks. (...) Therefore, taking into account its role throughout history, (...) Petrova Gora symbolizes the struggle of the people.”²²

This is how the second aspect of the synthesis was outlined, in which different meanings of the burdensome historical, including temporally distant events, are united into a general sense of the historical continuity of the human struggle for freedom. It was above all a semantic problem, how to present the human history through the form of the monument. In addition to the above, it was requested that the monument should be “maximum integrated into the landscape.”²³

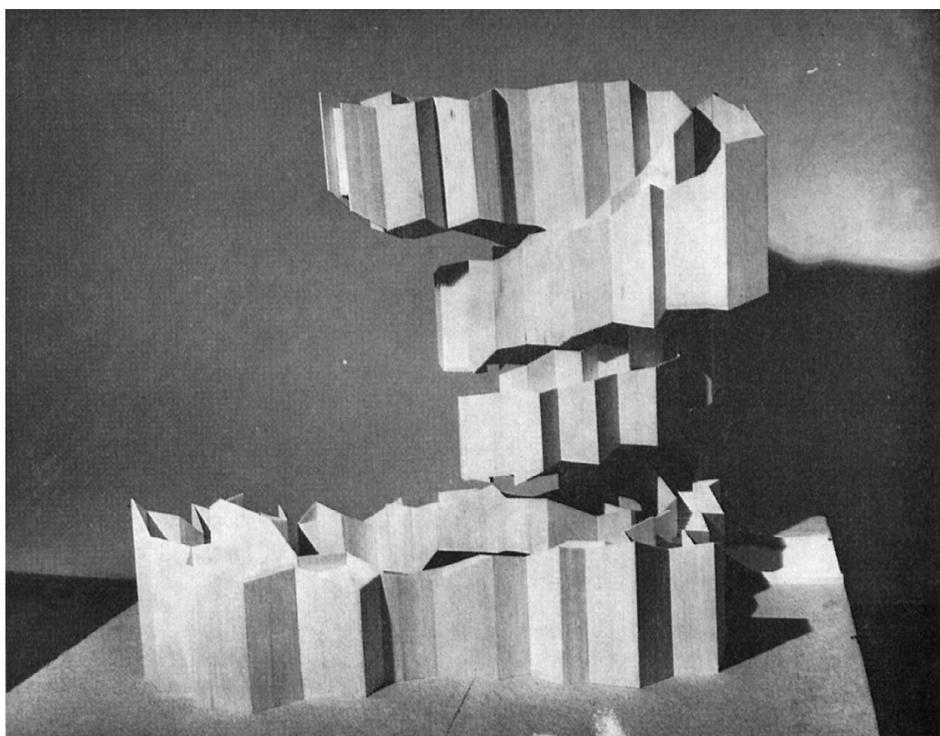


Fig. 1. Igor Toš, the architectural concept design of the monument at Petrovac, First Prize at the general Yugoslav anonymous tender of 1971. Collaborator: Tumor Čvegdjav, student of architecture; model: Ivica Susović, mechanical engineering student (listed were also the author of the light for the photography, the author of the budget, and a technical collaborator). Photography of the model: Petar Keleminčić, in: *Čovjek i prostor*, vol. 222, no. 9 (1971), 17.

19 The State Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Croatia, commonly abbreviated ZAVNOH, was the chief political representative body in World War II Axis-occupied Croatia.

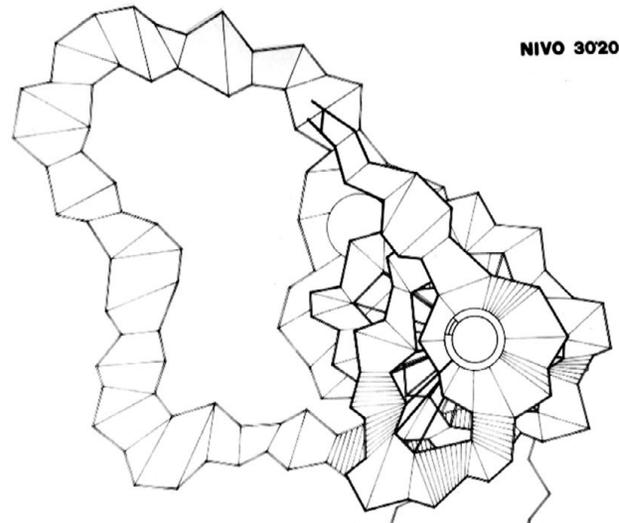
20 Igor Toš in an interview with Silva Kalčić, held in Zagreb in 2019.

21 The Croatian Spring refers to a political conflict that took place from 1967 to 1971 in the Socialist Republic of Croatia, at the time part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Eventually, the Croatian Spring was accused of economic nationalism and suppressed.

22 Igor Toš in an interview with Silva Kalčić, held in Zagreb in 2019. Toš emigrated to (then Western) Germany after the second competition.

23 Ibid.

Fig. 2. Igor Toš, Layout of the architectural concept design of the monument at Petrovac, 1971. From the archive of Igor Toš.



First prize was awarded to the work submitted under number 20 (**fig. 1, fig. 2**),²⁴ and behind that project number was the winning author Igor Toš, a young and unknown architect only 28 years old.²⁵ The jury's elaboration of their decision, published in the journal *Čovjek i prostor* (Man and Space), notes the quality of the monument's "fluid space," or "liquid space," that is, the monument's design as ambience and the project of panoramas in the manner of progressive perception of detail in this opening and closing of the vision of the monument to those who approach it. By designing a twofold broken fluid rock, a space was obtained for the future integration of a museum. "The area of Petrova Gora was a major field of battle against the Hungarians, Ottomans, in World War II and it was a part of Serbian Krajina in the 1990s. (...) The jury stated, considering its role throughout the entire history, (...) Petrova Gora is the very symbol of the struggle of nations."²⁶ As Igor Toš wrote in his project proposal, it proceeded from the generalisation of the notion of the struggle for freedom, ranging from the struggle for freedom of an individual, of oppressed nations, or of entire nations throughout the whole of human history, which never ends and must necessarily be continued in the future, with faith in further conquest of freedom in every sense. The struggle for freedom is expressed with a form consisting of two "walls-rocks fluid in parallel" which, alongside the overcoming of eternal resistances, "convulsively ascend" up to the moment "of victory that wavers, broken by memory," in a form that does not end, but rather aspires into the future. Due to the complexity of the program's requirements, primarily

24 "Natječaj za izradu idejnog rješenja spomenika na Petrovcu u Petrovoj gori" ["Tender for the Design of the Monument on Petrovac in Petrova Gora"], in the section "Natječajji" [Competitions], *Čovjek i prostor*, no. 222 (1971): 16.

25 His associates were: a student of architecture, Tumur Cevegđav, and the model was made by Ivica Susović, mechanical engineering student; collaborators on the project were also Petar Keleminčić (photography), Zoran Šonc (lighting), Marko Kučinec (cost calculation) and Borislav Doklestić (technical cooperation).

26 Igor Toš in a recorded interview we had in Zagreb, on March 20, 2017.

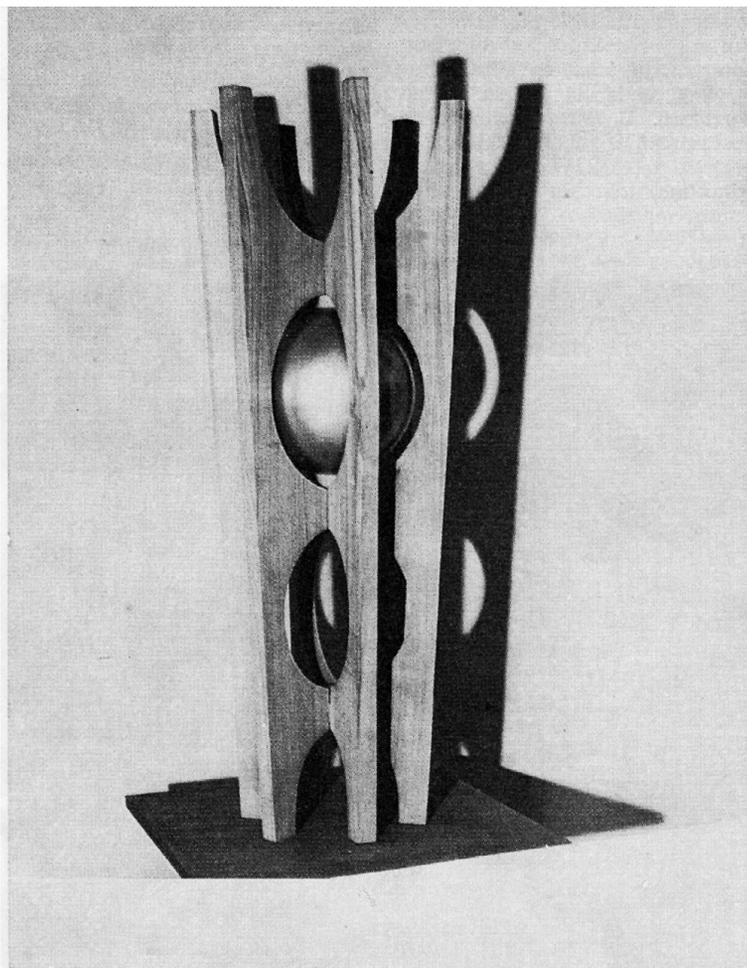


Fig. 3. Vojin Bakić, the conceptual design of the monument at Petrovac, Second Prize at the general Yugoslav anonymous tender of 1971. Horticulture: Dragutin Kiš; architecture: Zoran Bakić and Jadranka Jugo; photography of the model: Aleksandar Karoly, in: *Čovjek i prostor*, vol. 222, no. 9 (1971), 17.

was an artist who, on one hand, was perceived as an ‘authentic’ modernist sculptor, the main figure of the breakup with soc-realism and the proponent of abstraction who forged the paths for freedom of artistic expression in the 1950s, and on the other hand, as a ‘state artist’ whose art was in service to ideology. In October 1974, after the suppression of the idea of reform and the abolition of the Croatian Spring, the Monument Construction Committee made a decision announcing the Supplementary Invitation to Tender. The jury liked the optimistic ascending line of Toš’s monument, I would dare to guess, but his concept was not acceptable because it was too general, it was not focused on the Second World War and it did not emanate the opinion that it was the ultimate and last war. An invitation to participate was sent in November 1974 to the authors of the first three awarded works (Toš, Bakić, and Luketić and Vitić). Toš did not participate in this tender due to the (mailed) invitation being received too late, and the decision to award first prize to Vojin Bakić was made by the Committee in March 1975.

in terms of the required multiple synthesis (architecture, sculpture and signs with the desired meaning, and the synthesis of historical events), which was an extremely difficult and new task, a number of tender works did not successfully solve the problem of synthesis but simply suggested separation of the monumental sculpture from its utilitarian function, which would be embodied in another architectural object. Toš’s proposal successfully solved such a synthesis, in a way that was completely new in a commemorative plastic form.

Under the work code 13²⁷ (**fig. 3**) there was a proposal-conceptual design and a model by sculptor Vojin Bakić: within the six radial, spaced masses of reinforced concrete with harpoon jets, there is a sphere whose inner space is two-sided.²⁸ It consists of a museum with an outer shell of steel, and a gazebo that is glazed, inside a transparent exterior with mirror glass to preserve the glow effect of the sphere, which was also designed with the night view of Petrovac in mind. To resume, Vojin Bakić

27 “Natječaj za izradu idejnog rješenja spomenika na Petrovcu u Petrovoj gori,” 17.

28 In collaboration with Dragutin Kiš (horticulture), Zoran Bakić and Jadranko Jugo (architecture), Aleksandar Karoly (photo).

FIRST PRIZE IN THE REVISED COMPETITION FOR THE MONUMENT ON PETROVA GORA

If we look at the monument's concept authored by Vojin Bakić (fig. 4)²⁹ at the Supplementary Tender (in reality it was a new invitational competition) we can see that formally and conceptually it had nothing to do with his concept at the first tender of 1970/1971, but was rather an elaboration of Toš's proposal from the first tender, and we can conclude that now the symbolically strong and expressive form obtained proper ideological aspects that were missing in the first awarded project, three years before. The construction of the monument (save for its interior decoration) was completed in 1981, authored by architect Berislav Šerbetić³⁰ and sculptor Vojin Bakić, and ceremoniously opened on July 4, 1982.³¹ The monument is one of the principal realisations of the socialist modernism project, and one of its most important public monuments; Vojin Bakić had been working on it for more than a decade. "In the age of socialism,

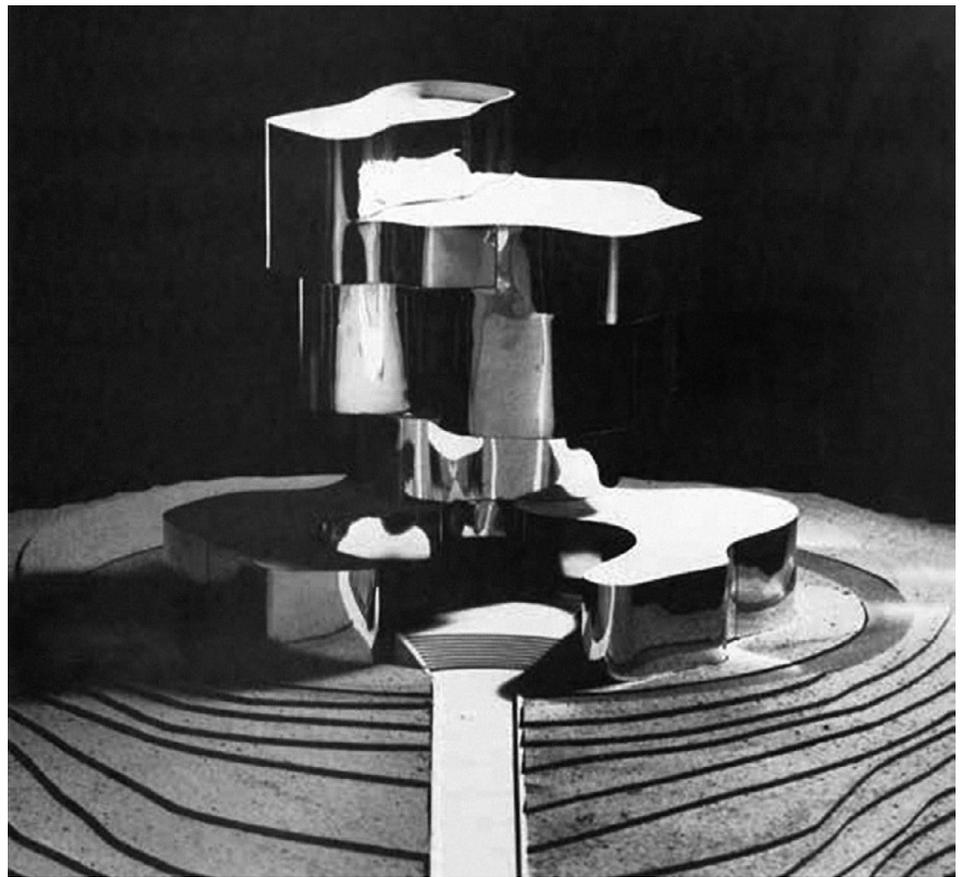


Fig. 4. Vojin Bakić (concept), Berislav Šerbetić and Tomislav Odak (architecture), monument on Petrova Gora (Monument to the Uprising of the People of Banija and Kordun), First Prize at the Supplementary Call for Tender, 1974.

29 Photography of the model is found in *Design of the Monument on Petrova Gora* (Institute of Architecture at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Zagreb, 1981), 51.

30 Sanja Horvatinčić, "Memorial Sculpture and Architecture in Socialist Yugoslavia," in *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Yugoslavian Architecture 1948–1980*, eds. Vladimir Kulić and Martino Stierli (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2018), 107. In the same catalogue, in the description of the illustration, Zoran Bakić was mentioned as the architect alongside Berislav Šerbetić, while Tomislav Odak was omitted. On page 106, "partisan war" was translated into English as "guerrilla warfare."

31 The whole process was described in the book by Silva Kalčić, *Svijet prema labirintu: eseji o visokoj modernosti i postmodernizmu 1970-ih i 1980-ih* [*The World Toward the Labyrinth: Essays on High Modernism and Post-modernism in the 1970s and 1980s*] (Zagreb: ULUPUH, 2017), 400–412.

almost obligatory visits to this monument amounted to a collective social ritual.³² Jerko Denegri commented on whether Bakić was a “state artist”:

I wouldn't say in advance that someone working like Bakić automatically worked for the system or that he was manipulated by it. The question is who constituted that system; perhaps it consisted of small, progressive groups that also wanted to improve their environment. And if a monument to the victims of war was to be done, then it was done in a way that suited the modern idea of sculpture, rather than one that was anachronistic as such.³³

I wrote about Petrova Gora for the first time in 2017, in the form of an interview with Igor Toš about the results of the first competition, that were published in the magazine *Čovjek i prostor* (Man and Space, no. 222) in 1971. At the exhibition *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Yugoslavian Architecture 1948–1980* in MoMA, New York (2018), the monument was of course attributed to Vojin Bakić and was given as an example of³⁴ – as opposed to the hitherto prevalence of sculpture – “interdisciplinary cross-fertilization between architecture and sculpture, [that] led to the development of new typologies” in most clearly evident in “hybrid design that brought a pronounced sculptural quality to functional architectural objects”³⁵ (where a conference and exhibitions spaces, a library and a lookout were planned). The monument built in reinforced-concrete was covered in stainless steel panels, modulating and multiplying units with mirroring effects, and using expensive, brand new materials at the time, such as stainless steel. Jerko Denegri, a prominent art historian, theoretician and critic, who is one of the greatest experts for the work of the Exat 51 group and Vojin Bakić, called it “impersonal, like the surface of a machine.”³⁶ Denegri also points out:

But Bakić was probably guided by a different underlying motive, perhaps by the issue of interplay between light and what it symbolized, rather than issues that aimed at the topical problems. It would be worth investigating in some detail, but for me it is still a new topic and I am not yet in the situation to explain the processes that Bakić was going through. In any case, it must have been a very extraordinary development. It was, in all respects, a crossroads of two paradigms: on the one hand, there was the

32 WHW, “Revisiting Modernism,” 3.

33 WHW, “Interview with Jerko Denegri,” in *Bakić*, eds. What, How and for Whom/ WHW (Zagreb: What, How and for Whom / WHW, 2008), 58. This publication has been released on the occasion of the Vojin Bakić exhibition at the Grazer Kunstverein, 2008 (https://monoskop.org/images/4/43/Vojin_Bakic_Grazer_Kunstverein_2008.pdf).

34 As well as Toš's awarded proposal from 1970.

35 Sanja Horvatinčić, “Memorial Sculpture,” 106.

36 “Sto napraviti s Petrovom gorom?,” DAZ, accessed on April 20, 2020, <http://www.d-a-z.hr/hr/vijesti/sto-napraviti-s-petrovom-gorom,1637.html>.

sculpture of the 50s, which rejected the real and preserved the plastic form, regardless of its references (...) not crucial enough to violate the pure idea of plasticity; on the other hand, there was change and it could fit into what the New Tendencies were representing.³⁷

Built through the contributions of the county's population, in the period of the self-proclaimed so-called Republic of Serbian Krajina (1991–1995), the monument was an important strategic and symbolic point, but since then it is in a process of decline-decay and has become a ruin. Its stainless steel has been plundered; it allegedly served as a medical waste storage facility, and in 2019 the Ministry of Culture of Croatia and the local municipality gave permission to a German television series to film at the site, which resulted in criticism over its use as “ruin porn”³⁸ in the media.

In the period from 1953–1958, Vojin Bakić detached himself from social realism, working in thematic series such as that of *Bulls* (Bikovi), in which he explored closed volumes in order to create the simplest organization of volume in space. In 1957, Bakić began work on the *Polyvalent Forms* and *Foliated Forms* cycles. His reduction of figuration towards abstract sculptural forms represented an evolution of his own art. The foliated form is that of the Monument to the Victory of the Revolution of the People of Slavonia in Kamenska (1963–1968), with exterior metal plating – like the later monument on Petrovac.³⁹ Bakić described it in the following way: “All that is actually an abstract form, it doesn't represent anything. It is no symbol such as ‘the flame of the revolution’, as some have tried to interpret it – I think that it is no flame; it is a sculpture that has certain elements in its construction, in its logic, so to say, and when it is extended, it expresses that joy of victory.”⁴⁰

445

CONTEMPORARY ART AND “NEW HERITAGE”

With the history of the site as a backdrop, I now refer to the Petrova Gora Monument as a referential object in new media and video installations projects by Croatian contemporary artist David Maljković (b. 1973, Rijeka). This offers an example of Agamben's theory of the contemporary impoverishing of modernist cultural signs, transforming them into “zero signs” or “weak signs”.⁴¹ The concepts of historical amnesia and the reinvention of history are crucial in Maljković's reference to the monument, and to his idea that the architectural

37 “Interview with Jerko Denegri,” 54.

38 E.g., in the text by Jurica Pavičić, “Nijemci su snimili alegoriju Republike Hrvatske. TV seriju o tupsonima...,” *Jutarnji list*, accessed and published on 27 February 2021. <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/nijemci-su-snimili-alegoriju-republike-hrvatske-tv-seriju-o-tupsonima-15053783>.

39 Zvonko Maković, “Spomenička plastika Vojina Bakića” [The Memorial Plastic of Vojin Bakić], in *Vojin Bakić – Sjetlosne forme: retrospektiva*, ed. Nataša Ivančević, catalogue of retrospective exhibition (Zagreb: Muzej suvremene umjetnosti, 2013), 199.

40 Vojin Bakić, “Apstrakcija i simboli” [Abstraction and Symbols], *Bakić*, eds. WHW, 3.

41 Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

sculpture on Petrova Gora whose ideological symbolism will be forgotten in the future, and reduced to its own aesthetic form, will be symbolically silent to future generations, or de-ideologised. Maljković is interested in the formal aspect of the monument – he perceives the monument as an aesthetic form. The ideology behind the monument will be forgotten by, say, 2025 (in his first video work, *Scene for a New Heritage I*) or 2045 (in *Scene for a New Heritage II*) on May 25 – Tito’s symbolic birth date, also observed as Youth Day in former Yugoslavia. The monument itself will be reduced to its formal aspects, which will be silent symbolically to future generations; it will be forgotten that it visualised the idea of social and economic progress in socialist society. “Maljković is exploring the modernist remnants of socialist Yugoslavia and their echoes on the present, as well as their future possibilities. Opening this cracked, almost invisible space for the future, he was also gradually opening it for various, parallel interpretations. For the first time after several decades in the local milieu, but also internationally, the *Scenes for a New Heritage* series summoned the work of Vojin Bakić from oblivion, almost literally.”⁴² The monument is a “Retired Composition.”⁴³

Maljković’s works evoke modernism as an unfinished project, and show the inability of today’s public to reconstruct the “emotion” that was its trigger. His *oeuvre* is based on research of the historical, cultural and theoretical legacy of the socialist modernist project and on the mapping of its relationship, as one of the so-called peripheral modernisms,⁴⁴ in comparison with “Western” modernism. In the *Scenes for a New Heritage*, two parts of a trilogy, Maljković deals with the past (embodied in the partisan monument on Petrova Gora, the memorial park and the architectural sculpture) and the collective amnesia of the present, transposed into the future liberated from the historical fact. By linking up personal and collective memories and documentary aspects of contemporary art, he refers to socialist celebrations honouring the conquered as the creation of a community of equal and free people, or the sense of belonging to a community. In *Scene for a New Heritage I* (fig. 5), he connects Modernism and Socialism, and “although they refer to the past, Maljković’s works are not concerned with nostalgia, but the possibility of looking at the past with sober eyes, to reassess its potential for the present.”⁴⁵ Maljković thematised the historical and socio-political conditions of modernism with a

42 WHW, “Revisiting Modernism,” 3.

43 The reference is to David Maljković’s exhibition *Retired Compositions*, accessed April 20, 2020, https://www.whw.hr/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/novine-17-david-maljkovic-retired-compositions_compressed.pdf.

44 The reference is to Ljubo Karaman’s discourse on centre and periphery, or the centre-periphery paradigm in terms of art history. Karaman’s concept of “Peripheral Art” has an emancipatory potential in local contexts. Ljubo Karaman, *Problemi periferijske umjetnosti: o djelovanju domaće sredine u umjetnosti hrvatskih krajeva* [Problems of Peripheral Art. On the Influence of Local Surrounding on the Art of the Croatian Areas] (Zagreb: Društvo povjesničara umjetnosti Hrvatske, 2001), 5–6.

45 “Art Always Has Its Consequences,” eds. What, How & for Whom (WHW) Curatorial collective, Dóra Hegyi and Zsuzsa László, Magdalena Ziolkowska and Katarzyna Słoboda, *kuda.org* (Zagreb: WHW, 2010), 182. (<https://www.whw.hr/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/knjiga-art-always-has-its-consequences.pdf>).

Fig. 5. David Maljković, *Scene for a New Heritage*, 2004, collage, 70 x 100 cm, and the installation with Vojin Bakić's models from 1978. Maljković's exhibition with Joan Jonas, curated by Caroline Bourgeois, *Le Plateau*, Paris, 2005. Courtesy of David Maljković.



special accent on socialist modernism. But instead of directly offering theses and conclusions about this relationship (between Modernism and Socialism), he actually suggested a form of oblivion – by omitting the context of buildings and locations shown in his work, and by posing the thesis that nobody will care about the symbolism of the object on Petrovac. Yet even now, some 15 years after this video work, the ideological aspect of “the object” is still something we are very aware of. However, a new question opens up, namely, the one of a monument’s visual language: Should not its ideological symbolism be able to speak in a universal and timeless language? In Maljković’s video, people of the future speak by singing an atonal traditional polyphonic chant derived from Croatian folklore, with an incomprehensible wailing text. By using a communicative system stripped of the meaning or symbolical transfer of knowledge, past times will be erased, not only interpreted (in a post-truth era), by collective amnesia. Maljković finds this location drastically altered; effaced, forgotten and almost decrepit. He interprets it “as a place of fascinating absence, as a place that was completely absent. If we are to elaborate the facts, we might say that these places do not exist anymore, that they exist only in a physical sense. But for me, what was important was the personal memory which tied me to the location, and the historic part, and Bakić’s place in it, all this just started to emerge. I was trying my best to use the empty space of the future.”⁴⁶

Educated as a painter, Maljković expanded his “situational” research in painting around the year 2000, and began the transition toward real spaces and broader research into history, time and duration. The monument on Petrovac

⁴⁶ David Maljković in conversation with Nataša Ilić, “The empty space of the future,” *Almost Here*, Kunstverein in Hamburg, Dumont, 2007.

is viewed exclusively as a form, evoking historical *formalism*; it is viewed as Clive Bell's "significant form" (in the book *Art* in 1914), a certain combination of lines, as well as surfaces and their relationships that arouse an aesthetic feeling in the viewer. In early modernism, Roger Fry's and Bell's formalist art theory, as it is known, was the prevailing way of looking at the autonomous work of art, outside of life itself, until Duchamp's annulment of the aesthetic quality of art when it became a "consequence of a mental event."⁴⁷ The video *Scene for a New Heritage I* begins with a retro-futuristic scene, with stage props deliberately made as if they were cheap and improvised, like in low-budget movies:

... a contemporary saloon car, entirely wrapped in silver foil, cruises down a country lane; the metallic material conjuring up references to early tv sci-fi, twentieth-century robots and the dawn of space travel. Its destination is a 12-storey curving, monolithic building with a similarly reflective facade: a monument, a bit of further research elicits, erected in the mountain forests of Petrova Gora, Croatia, for victims of the Second World War. Arriving at the building, the passengers of the car congregate with others who have also come to the site in foil-wrapped vehicles. The original function of the building, now in disrepair, is lost on this throng – its purpose long forgotten in the transition between our present and theirs. In an incomprehensible yodelling 'language' (subtitled in English for the viewer), these people of the future discuss the function of this historic artefact. 'Times were different back then', one howls. Another answers, 'Yes, times that don't matter to us!'⁴⁸

448

CONCLUSION

My intention in this text was to rearticulate a suppressed subject in the official versions of history, and further to explore creative possibilities—new programs and revitalisations of the monument, as well as to question the basic idea of the monument as a public and symbolic act, using as a paradigm the decayed structure on Petrova Gora. In the contemporary context, these potentials lie precisely in questioning and deconstructing the mechanisms of political representation, such as in David Maljković's *Scenes for a New Heritage*. "Could an artist like David Maljković have come to the fore 20 years ago? (...) the answer is no, David Maljković's work could only have been made this millennium. It's not the medium that is new, but the world that the work is part

47 Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 8. On p. 9, Danto talks about Wittgenstein's definition of art as undefinable, that is, the definition can only be devised on the basis of institutional factors.

48 Oliver Basciano, "David Maljkovic," review first published in *Artreview* in October 2023, published online on July 21, 2014. Accessed on 20 April 2020. <https://artreview.com/october-feature-david-maljkovic/>.

of.”⁴⁹ The preoccupation and fetishisation – the haunting – of contemporary culture by the past is often referred to as “hauntology,” a term introduced by Jacques Derrida (with reference to Marx, specifically his proclamation that “a spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of communism,”⁵⁰ as well as to Hegel), who understands it as a symptom of a lack of political development.

With the fall of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, monuments and memorial sites built by Bakić were destroyed, as was the one on Petrova Gora. His reputation has been minimized and ignored by many – not only in Croatia, but also in the European art community. Arjun Appadurai’s well-known hybrid term “ideoscape”⁵¹ refers to a series of images relating to ideologies and anti-ideologies; in this light, the two case studies in my text form a specific *ideoscape* of socialist and post-socialist visual arts, in a transition from modernist to contemporary post-transitional society. “Why does yesterday’s masterpiece become tomorrow’s trash?”⁵² This was Brian Holmes’s way of evoking Vojin Bakić’s heritage as indicative of a wider political diagnosis. But in recent years Bakić’s work has been reinscribed in the history of Croatian and European art, along with other socialist modernist monuments evoking remembrance for the victims of fascism. Many misunderstandings in the interpretation of Vojin Bakić’s contribution derive from a simplified, “unambiguous understanding of the paradigm of modernism itself.”⁵³

David Maljković’s solo exhibition *With the Collection* at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rijeka, in January 2020, was another example of his manipulation of and engagement with modernist art. Artworks from the Museum’s collection were set up at the same level, above the standard viewpoint of the observer, on a specially designed solid plinth that extended along the 40-meter wall of the exhibition space, 2.20 m height. Such a “destabilised museum collection”⁵⁴ was treated as a collective, panoramic fact, rather than as singular artefacts (**fig. 6**). Amid them, barely visible, was a Vojin Bakić sculpture, which was made by modulating identical mirror units under the influence of the optical experiments of the New Tendencies movement,

49 Ibid.

50 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party”, February 1848, in: *Marx/Engels Selected Works*, Vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1969), 14. Derrida calls on Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, particularly a phrase spoken by the titular character: “Time is out of joint”. Mark Fisher, “The Metaphysics of Crackle: Afrofuturism and Hauntology,” *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture*, no. 5/2 (2013): 50.

51 Ideoscape is a term introduced by Arjun Appadurai (1990) to represent one of the five contemporary global cultural flows (the others are: ethnoscape, technoscape, financescape and mediascape). Ideoscapes are constitutive of linked images and ideas related to the political discourses of the Enlightenment such as sovereignty, freedom, rights, welfare, representation, and democracy. Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” *Public Culture*, issue 2, vol. 2 (1990): 1–24.

52 Brian Holmes, “WHW: The Process of Becoming,” *Maska Performing Arts Journal*, no. 117-118, vol. XIII (2002).

53 WHW, “Izložba je kamen smutnje” [The Exhibition is a Stumbling Block], *Novine Galerije Nova* [Gallery Nova newspapers], no. 12, June 2007.

54 Ivana Meštrov, in her curatorial text for the exhibition catalogue: *S Kolekcijom* [With the Collection] (Rijeka: Muzej moderne i suvremene umjetnosti, 2020), 57.



Fig. 6. David Maljković, *With the Collection*, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMSU), Rijeka, 2020. Courtesy of the MMSU, Rijeka. Bakić's sculpture is on the shelf: Vojin Bakić, *Lightbearing Forms*, c. 1968, stainless steel 990 x 770 x 540 mm, MMSU, Rijeka (inv. no. MMSU-1087).

again in stainless steel. Bakić's training made him "permanently preoccupied with the idea of monumental sculpture, the monument,"⁵⁵ or monumental and memorial forms. Without a doubt, Bakić was a major sculptor of the time, and in 1967 Udo Kultermann included him in his overview of contemporary sculpture,⁵⁶ but his proposal for the monument on Petrovac was much weaker than the awarded one. The project for the monument on Petrova gore should be correctly attributed, or co-attributed to Igor Toš, in order to correct the fact that he was erased from official history. This would not diminish the greatness of Bakić's *oeuvre*. In any case, the monument in question, like many others, was devastated in the heat of nationalism and anti-communism in the 1990s.

450

In the first case-study, Igor Toš's project was taken as a form, its concept (meaning) was changed and it was attributed to the prominent artist who often represented the state or whose work was representative for a state. Vojin Bakić more successfully dealt with the problem of the relationship between art and society, implying the socialization of art (its integration into society). David Maljković, for his part, "is not interested in the phenomenon of modernism in Yugoslavia and Croatia in a general sense. His personal motivation is to attempt to create new platforms on the ruins of existing grounds. For example, the scene for his series, *Scenes for a New Heritage*, is a magnificent and devastated monument on Petrova Gora, on a remote location, a memorial for the greatest Partisan hospital in WW2."⁵⁷ The ideological meaning of the monument was

55 WHW, "Interview with Jerko Denegri," 55.

56 Udo Kultermann, *The New Sculpture: Environments and Assemblages*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968). Kultermann was a corresponding member of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and was also a member of the international editorship of the journal *Prostor* issued by the Faculty of Architecture in Zagreb. See Milan Pelc, "Udo Kultermann (1927 – 2013) – Master of International Overviews and Historical Synthesis," *Art Bulletin*, no. 63 (2013): 216–217.

57 WHW, "Revisiting Modernism," 3.

interpreted, and in the second case study, David Maljković de-ideologised it completely, looking at it as at the pure aesthetic object. He extracted its memory as a reference to the construct of present-day social discourses. “Focusing on the link between the empiricism of buildings and the abstract notion of time (a link that explains the purpose of memorials and the preservation of sites of trauma), the artist uses decaying architecture to further underline the idea of the past as being an active facet of the present, both in the work and the wider world.”⁵⁸ In summary then, my intention was to thematize the status and relations of modernism with contemporary art, to rearticulate a suppressed subject in the official versions of history and to point to the lack of an integral discourse of history and art history.

