

Struggling with authoritarianism:

Monuments, new art, new histories



Thursday 20th April

Södertörn University
MA 796

Intro

The rise of rightwing populism, authoritarianism and even fascism is redrawing the relations between contemporary art, memorial culture and politics. The spheres of cultural representation, memory and heritage are being objected to new forms of politicization, whilst artistic practices in turn are disputing simplified notions of nationalism and heroism, as well as the symbolisms of identification.

This workshop engages artistic and philosophical perspectives into the politics of aesthetic historicizations, with a special focus on former Yugoslavia and other countries in former Eastern Europe. What does it mean to remember, what does it mean to forget? What are the tools used by nationalist memory cultures? What are the methods and aesthetic expressions counteracting rightwing populisms?

Program

10.00-11.30

Tora Lane: memory against memory.

Rebecka Thor: Concepts of Monumental Time.

Chair: Yuliya Yurchuk

11.45-12.30

Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen: Putting
statues back in their proper place.

Chair: Magnus Rodell

12.30-13.30 Lunch

13.30-15.00

Mladen Dolar: Nation and narration

Johanna Mannergren Selimovic: Presence
of Absence. Recognising the Missing and
the Mass Graves in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Chair: Florence Fröhlig

15.15-16.45

Cecilia Sjöholm: Animating brutalism —
cinematic renderings of Yugoslav monuments.

Gal Kirn: Partisan Ecology in
Yugoslav Antifascist Art

Chair: Ramona Rat

The participants

Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen

PUTTING STATUES BACK IN THEIR PROPER PLACE

In 1969 the Situationists group re-installed a copy of a statue of Charles Fourier on an empty plinth at Place Clichy in Paris as a gesture of commemoration of the events in May-June 1968 in Paris. The presentation will discuss the event and use it in an analysis of the ongoing monument wars that took off in the summer of 2020.

Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen is Professor in Political Aesthetics at the University of Copenhagen. He is the author of a number of books, including *After the Great Refusal* (Zero, 2018) and *Late Capitalist Fascism* (Polity, 2022).

Mladen Dolar

NATION AND NARRATION

Abstract: Nationalism always relies on certain ways of historical narration. The history of a nation is made in narration, and narratives retroactively create a homogeneous mythical history that is used for the present political purposes. The paper will briefly look at the Slovene case, not for some parochial reasons (given this is my own nationality), but because it may provide some general lessons as to how history is homogenized and how this can be counteracted; how the standard of 'Sloveneness' is constructed and how it can be defused.

The second part of the paper will look at the hero worship that goes hand in hand with nationalist narratives, taking as the starting point two lines from Brecht's *Galileo*: "Unhappy the land that has no heroes" vs. "Unhappy the land that is in need of heroes."

Mladen Dolar is Professor and Senior Research Fellow at the Department of Philosophy, University of Ljubljana. His principal areas of research are psychoanalysis, modern French philosophy, German idealism and art theory. He has lectured extensively at the universities in USA and across Europe, he is the author of over hundred and fifty papers in scholarly journals and collected volumes. Apart from fourteen books in Slovene his book publications include most notably *A Voice and Nothing More* (MIT 2006, translated into ten languages) and *Opera's Second Death* (with Slavoj Žižek, Routledge 2001, also translated into several languages). His new book *The Riskiest Moment* is forthcoming with Duke University Press. He is one of the founders of the 'Ljubljana Lacanian School'

Rebecka Katz Thor

CONCEPTS OF MONUMENTAL TIME

In the early 1990's James Young coined the term "countermonuments" regarding the German memorial culture of the time, in which the monument was doubted as an incitement of public memory. His most prominent example is *The*

Monument Against Fascism realized in 1986 by Esther Shalev-Gerz and Jochen Gerz. Returning to this example I discuss what might be an appropriate term for the present and try out a concept: *postmonuments*, related to the commissioning body's implied interest in what is commemorated, on the one hand, and the possibility of making amends on the other.

Rebecka Katz Thor is a writer and researcher in Art History at Stockholm University and in Aesthetics at Södertörn University. She leads the research project *Remember us To Life - Vulnerable Memories in a Prospective Monument, Memorial and Museum*, following three ongoing commemorative projects in Sweden. She is also a researcher in the project *Distrusting Monuments – Art and the War in Former Yugoslavia*. She is co-chair of Memory Studies Association Nordic, and she is commissioned to produce a strategic vision for a permanent building for the Swedish Holocaust Museum, during 2023. She was a visiting scholar at the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, spring 2022. She is part of the network, funded by the Swedish Research Council, *A new generation of scholars of antisemitism: Novel approaches to antisemitism, the Holocaust and Jewish identity in a post-secular conjuncture of contemporary Europe*.

Gal Kirn

PARTISAN ECOLOGY IN YUGOSLAV ANTIFASCIST ART

Partisan ecology is a notion briefly addressed by Andreas Malm in his text on the Caribbean maroon partisans – the emancipated slaves – who moved to the more mountainous parts of the islands. Taken this notion to another historical context of the Second World War, where Yugoslav partisans fought against the fascist occupation and started a deep social transformation, I will ask whether there are any traces of different politico-aesthetical sensibility regarding animals, plants, forest?

I will be present an array of partisan artworks that point to fascist domination/war over nature juxtaposed to emerging antifascist solidarity among human and animal/nature. From poems to drawings, graphic art, photography there are new impulses given to the liberated landscapes, enlisting nature to antifascist struggle, addressing animals as comrades, and point to a more co-existing relation to nature, in line with a lineage of “decolonising nature”.

Gal Kirn is an assistant professor and a research associate at the Sociology department at Faculty of Arts (University of Ljubljana) and is also affiliated with Södertörn University in the frame of Distrusting Monuments research project. Kirn's research has focused on the theme of transition in (post)socialist context, in particularly in the fields of art,

politics and memory in the period of national liberation struggle and the socialist Yugoslavia. He published two monographs *Partisan Ruptures* (Pluto Press, 2019) and *Partisan Counter-Archive* (De Gruyter, 2020), and recently co-edited (with Natasha Ginwala and Niloufar Tajeri) a volume *Nights of the Dispossessed. RiotsUnbound* (Columbia Press, 2021).

Tora Lane

MEMORY AGAINST MEMORY

I will discuss the politicization of cultural memory in Eastern Europe against the backdrop of the debate between those who see cultural and collective memory as history writing and ideology (Nora, Sontag, Koselleck) and those who argue for a constructive transcultural and integrating “benign” concept of memory as counter-memory (Jan and Aleida Assman). I will approach this debate by looking into how temporality frames different concepts of memory in Eastern European memory writing.

Tora Lane is currently working as a Research Coordinator at the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies, CBEEES, at Södertörn University, and as project leader of *Writing and Thinking at the Margins: A Philosophical Strategy to Resist Totalitarianism in Post-War Eastern Europe*.

Johanna Mannergren
Selimovic

PRESENCE OF ABSENCE. RECOGNISING THE MISSING AND THE MASS GRAVES IN BOSNIA- HERZEGOVINA

Around 8,000 people are still missing after the war which means that Bosnia-Herzegovina is dotted with yet-to be-found mass graves. This presentation will explore the contentious memory politics around the liminal status of those not yet found and the known/ unknown sites of violence. It connects ethnographic research in communities that search for the missing with reflections on art that seeks to recognise and mark their presence of absence, such as the installations Što Te Nema and Sarajevska Crvena Linija.

Johanna Mannergren Selimovic is Associate Professor in Peace and Development Research and a Senior Lecturer at Södertörn University. Her research concerns peace processes with a focus on the politics of memory, transitional justice, gender, and everyday peace. She takes an interest in the encounter between international interventions and local practices and discourses, and to this end has conducted ethnographic research in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda, Israel, South Africa and Belgium. Some of her recent work has engaged with theories of affect and embodiment in investigations of everyday memory practices around presence of absence as well as museums as sites for transformation.

Her research has been widely published in journals such as *Memory Studies*, *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, and *Cooperation and Conflict*. She is section editor for the *Palgrave Encyclopedia of Peace and Conflict Studies*, as well as a board member of the international organisation *Kvinna till Kvinna* that promotes women's rights in conflict-affected societies

Cecilia Sjöholm

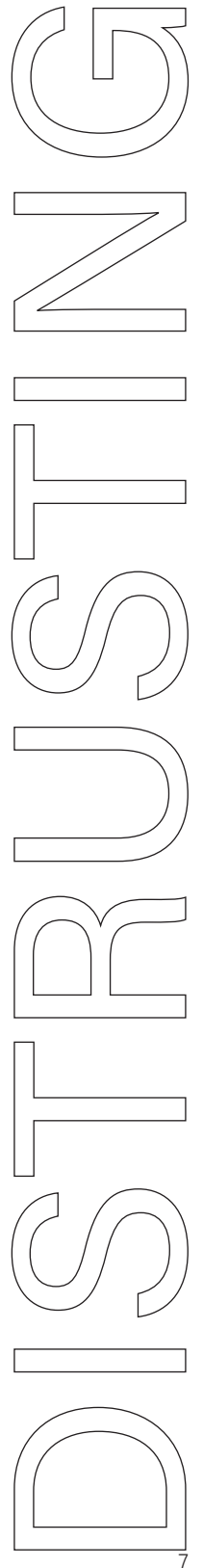
ANIMATING BRUTALISM – CINEMATIC RENDERINGS OF YUGOSLAV MONUMENTS.

In recent times, memory studies has evolved into becoming a paradigmatic feature of the humanities; but only little research is to be found at the crossroads between memory culture and environmental humanities. But there are, indeed, objects that call for such research, such as the anti-fascist, brutalist monuments of former Yugoslavia, some of them the object of cinematic renderings. Situated as many of them are not in an urban environment but in pastoral landscapes, they call for an aesthetic approach that obliterates the relation between object and environment. In

this talk, however, I will reflect on the interference of these monuments in an antagonistic relation between nature and art that has engaged critical theory since Adorno.

Cecilia Sjöholm is professor of Aesthetics at Södertörn University and project leader of the research project *Distrusting Monuments. Art and the war in Former Yugoslavia*. Her research is particularly focused on the relation between art and politics in contemporary culture. She has published extensively on art, psychoanalysis and critical theory, for instance *Doing Aesthetics with Arendt; How to See Things* (Columbia University Press, 2015), and *Through the Eyes of Descartes; Seeing, Thinking, Writing* (with Marcia Cavalcante Schuback, forthcoming at Indiana University Press). She is one of the initiators of Art Forest, a new platform at Södertörn University for research in the arts in times of climate change and societal transformation.

The chairs: Yuliya Yurchuk, PhD is a lecturer in history at Södertörn University. Magnus Rodell is Associate Professor in the history of ideas at Södertörn University. Ramona Rat has a PhD in philosophy and is a researcher at CBEES. Florence Fröhlig, PhD is a lecturer in ethnology at Södertörn University.



Organizers: the project group "Distrusting Monuments"

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