

The Meaning and Possibility of a Monument
The Artistic Production and Critical Reception of
Monuments in Socialist Yugoslavia

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Introduction

- ❑ Symbolic function
- ❑ Utilitarian function
- ❑ Aesthetic function



- ▶ “Relying on the memorial tradition of the past, the commissioner is still primarily led towards traditional types of solutions, carrying the belief that monument of public interest can serve its function only if it transmits its content in a way which is acceptable to diverse social groups. (...) Even if we disregard the question of the construction of such monuments in contemporary times, (...) we still cannot avoid another question: is the contemporary moment, marked by the emergence and development of the abstract art (...), even able to accept a public monument aimed at consecration and glorification of a certain historical event or person, and which would at the same time be effective in communication, that is, in transferring its message to wider social strata?”

- ▶ “With the emergence of the abstract art in memorial sculpture, a coded language was introduced, indiscernible to the wider public. At the same time, the idea that mass audience recognise and receive the meaning of a message by the means of new (abstract) plastic signs, that they accept the language the comprehension of which requires developed visual thinking and a high level of perceptive cognitive ability, seems utterly utopian.”

- ▶ “Is the language of contemporary art to such an extent incomprehensible to the non-professional observer, that a monument with such features really has lost any reason to exist, or is it that for the representatives of the social commissioning (who are also burdened with obsolescent conventions of the past) are those characterised by the aforementioned level of (underdeveloped) perceptive capabilities and (atrophied) visual thinking, that is below the average of the so-called „wider public“? Immediate experience which, however, have not yet been tested by the means of scientific analysis – leads us towards the affirmation of the second part of the previous doubt.”

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- ▶ Bratislav Stojanović: *O spomenicima Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi*, Crvena zvezda, 15/8/; 31/8/; 15/9/1952
 - ▶ Mahmud Konjhodžić: *Kakve spomenike zaslužuju najslavniji dani naše istorije*, Crvena zvezda, 15/1/1952
 - ▶ Maja Vujaković: *Za spomenike trajne umetničke vrednosti*, Crvena zvezda, 10/3/1953
 - ▶ Stjepan Bek: *Problem koji traži zajednička rešenja*, Crvena zvezda, 24/3/1953
 - ▶ M. Đoković: *I opet oko spomenika*, Crvena zvezda, 15/12/1953



- ▶ “The reasons of why are there so few artworks among hundreds of the erected monuments, lies (...) in their burden of reality, their burden of shovels, spades, bombs, guns, machineguns, cannons, tanks and airplanes, in their theatrical pompous gestures, their Laocoon-like, unconvincing shouts, their petty narrativity, in their sterile naturalism, their non-inventiveness and the emptiness of associations...”
- ▶ Such conjunctures and non-artistic tackling with the problem of our Revolution and our social reality, such superfluous operating with various objects (bombs and olive branches), which, in their banal general symbolism, are supposed to express all greatness, depth, heroism, self-criticism, patriotism, solidarity, class consciousness, ideals and humanity, human pain, tragedy and enthusiasm of the revolution and the uplift, such superfluous, narrative and declarative tackling with the problem, such expression of THINGS, and NOT HUMAN BEING, this is exactly what brought us to the fact of the “existence of hundreds of statues and monuments, but too little artworks”, and has brought to the crisis of the creative process and the search for the way out of it. How such an escape should look like is dubious.”

- ▶ „Between fascism and socialism the difference is incomparably bigger than between the Egyptian slave-ownership society and the Greek civil slave-ownership society. That historical fact tells us a lot and obliges us a lot. Because Egyptian and Greek societies largely differentiate in artistic expressions of their respective socio-philosophical-economic units. Isn't it then necessary that this difference must be by far bigger between fascist and socialist communities?“
- ▶ „A monument that features the elements of past social concepts, is by no means able to express its own society.“

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- ▶ *Čovjek i prostor. Arhitektura, slikarstvo, kiparstvo i primijenjena umjetnosti* (Zagreb), 90, 1959
 - ▶ *Arhitektura. Časopis za arhitekturu, urbanizam i primijenjenu umjetnost* (Zagreb) 1-2, 1960
 - ▶ *Arhitektura – urbanizam. Časopis za arhitekturu, urbanizam, primenjenu umetnost i industrijsko oblikovanje* (Beograd), 10, 1961
 - ▶ *Čovjek i prostor. Arhitektura, slikarstvo, kiparstvo i primijenjena umjetnosti* (Zagreb), 124, 1963
 - ▶ *Sinteza. Revija za likovno kulturo* (Ljubljana) 7, 1967
 - ▶ *Arhitektura. Časopis za arhitekturu, urbanizam, dizajn i primijenjenu umjetnost* (Zagreb) 155, 1974
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- ▶ “Monument communicated the spirit and the emotion of the time with great gesture, big expression. In a way which is from contemporary perspective temporally and spiritually distant, in a way which is to us visually alien. Maybe too often, maybe even from an unfair position, in the years that followed, we judged it according to the parameters of different times and different emotions, as a way that is too primitive, naïve, raw, and primary.”
- ▶ “The patios of the monument has calmed down, but the social gesture is still pronounced. We are not sparing money, stone or concrete. Social gesture is even too pronounced. Not adjusted to our needs and possibilities.”

- ▶ “Memorial architecture and memorial sign appear today more and more often instead of the memorial complex. A utilitarian architectonic memorial object, conceived with a clear function, a sculptural memorial sign of a smaller scale yet not of a smaller impact. (...)
- ▶ A what about the looming future, that which we cannot yet anticipate? Instead of architectonic and sculptural intervention in the ecologic environment – perhaps – the social environment itself as a memorial sign? Parks, lakes, forests, tree-lined lanes ... The harmony of the environment, instead of the harmony in the environment. The whole instead of details. Yes or no?”

- “Luckily – and I really mean luckily – there has been no record of the financial means invested after the liberation into the construction of monuments whose artistic qualities we usually do not discuss out of piety for their consecration.”
- “A good, contemporary monument should not feature the gesture of glorification, but: the act of the continuation of the idea and work of those to whom the monument is erected. Accordingly: let the function of the monument not be the signal for the meditation about the past, but an act for the future.”



- ▶ “I think that projects dedicated to the symbols of the victims of fascism in German death camps, Auschwitz and Dachau, were especially helpful in that (solving the problem of memorial sculpture). In them, by the claims of the critics, I managed to achieve that psychological identification of symbols and methods. Ne simple example of understanding that symbolism will, I believe, offer a better explanation: when I am nailing down a bunch of nails in a piece of wood, it means – in a psychological sense – a torture of a living organism. After I fixate the metal coat, I use the method of burning the wood, after which the metal coat remains as some kind of an eternal witness and trace of the former life.”
- ▶ “(...) I believe that this type of engagement (i.e. in memorial sculpture) has an influence on the method of my studio art practice.”

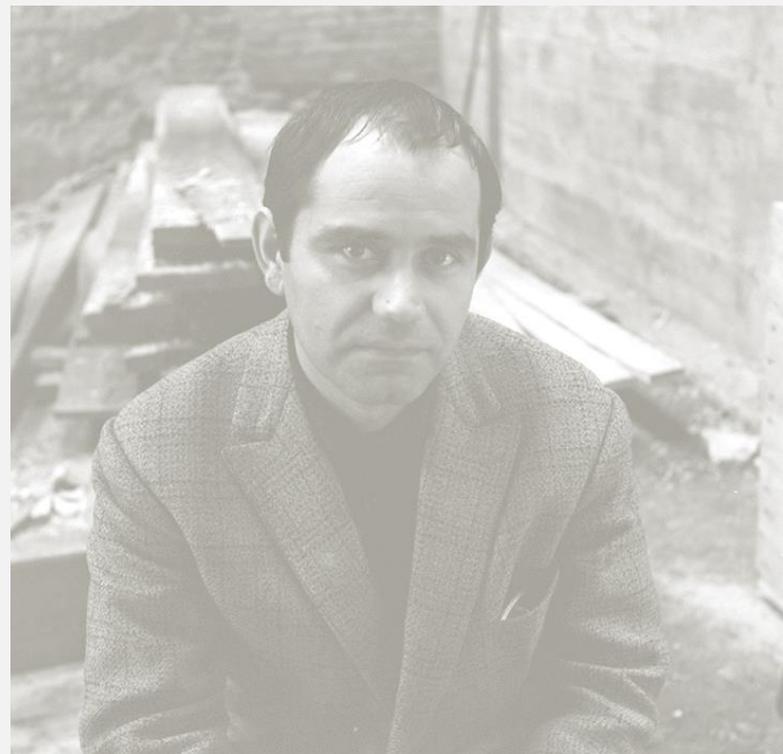


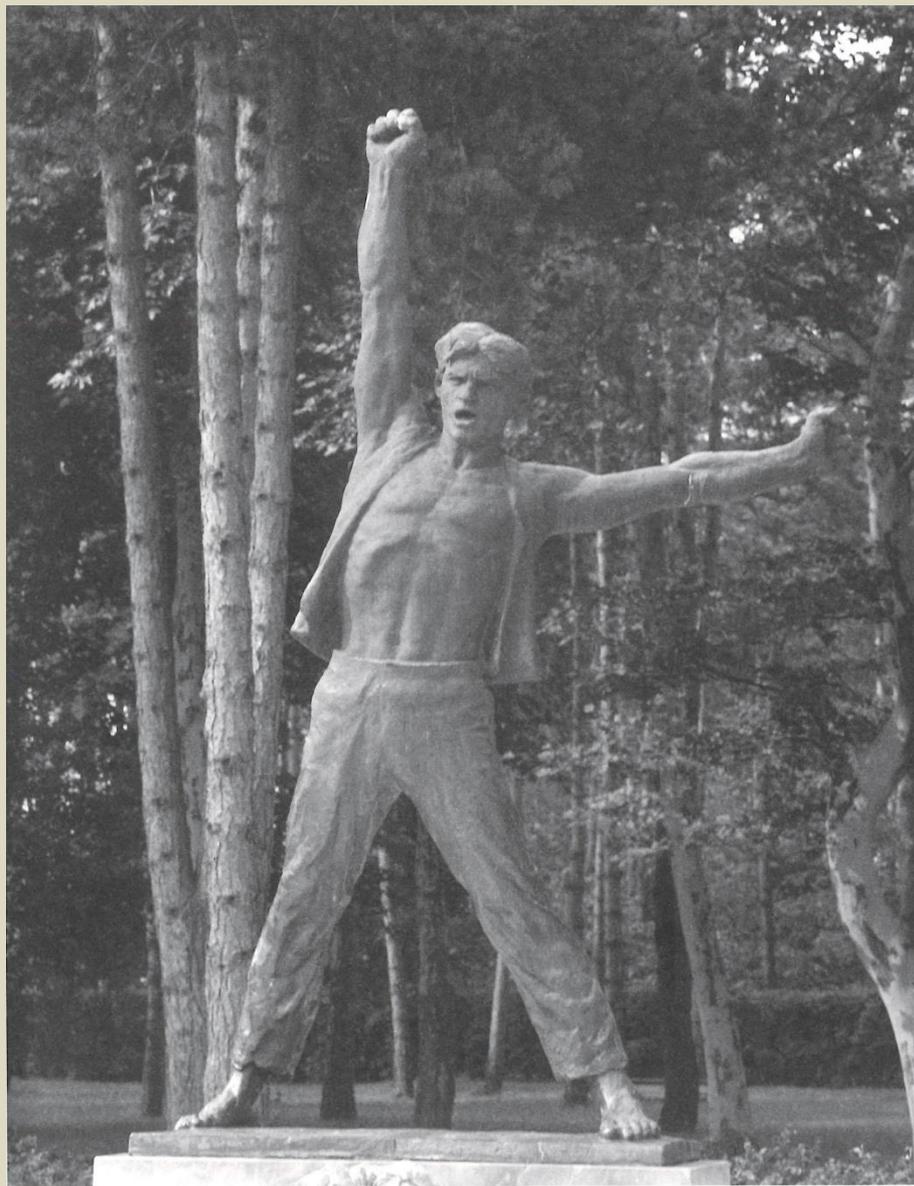
- ▶ “Džamonja is the only one of this group who found himself, from the very outset, at the heart of the revolutionary process and who therefore dedicated himself to this “future-in-the-making” rather than to the historical past. This is the reason why his sculpture has been and remains manifestly avant-garde, despite the recurrently commemorative and official nature of his commissions.”



- ▶ “Both monument and statue have always been associated with the structure of society and with history: and it is, in fact, through them that historical events take on moral connotations and thus gain social significance. These are statuary forms which reveal and propose (or impose) certain ideals and values, conferring on them, through their own claim to universality and immortality, permanence and stability. But are statue and monument really ineluctably linked with power, with authority, and with the presentation of the traditional structure of society? If the concept of history changes, might not the idea behind the monument and statue also change?”
- ▶ “Just as it is right that an artist should not be expected to put his work at the service of political authority and ideological propaganda, it would obviously be absurd to pretend that a culturally up-to-date country, such as Yugoslavia today, should not identify herself in the work of one of her greatest artists.”

- ▶ “I carry deep inside of me war traumas. Terror and death, my own and the life of my family, fleeing, refugee stations, rented humid apartments, the horror that each days had brought along... this war nightmare is not disappearing. My participation at the competitions for monuments of war victims in no coincidence, it can only be explained by my wish to relief myself thus from the nightmare. These are not tasks, not obligations, but something much deeper, associate with my sub-consciousness, for my whole being.”





▶ Vojin Bakić: Monument to the victims of shootings – call to arms, Bjelovar, 1947

„I don't think that any kind of abstraction can be the symbol of the struggle or a monument to the struggle. In fact, one abstract form is not really abstract. I, for example, see the elements in it in another way. Because, when people ask: „what does it represent?“, the answer is: it represents nothing, in a same manner as an obelisk represents nothing as well.“



- ▶ „The event is the basis. Sometimes even a fragment of an event can lead to a solution. This is why descriptions of an event, and the impressions of those that have taken part in it, are precious. In most cases they relate only the essentials, making sure they remember – a conversation, the appearance of individuals, the mood of a specific moment – trying not to miss anything. Descriptions given by participants contain the event which has not yet become a legend burdened with superfluous admixtures. . (...)”
- ▶ Initial considerations are present in later stages of creation, too. Even in a time when we are ridding ourselves of anything that might prevent our expressing ourselves in a concise form. A form whose life should always run in the present.”

