

**ИСТОРИЯТА НА ПСИХОЛОГИЯТА
ПО ВРЕМЕ НА ВТОРАТА СВЕТОВНА ВОЙНА:
МЕТОДОЛОГИЯ И ПРАКТИКА**



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THE CULTURE OF “SHORT” MEMORY: THE FORGOTTEN MONUMENTS RELATED TO THE EVENTS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN SERBIA

Zvezdana Elezović

The paper deals with the culture of memory, the phenomenon of forgotten monuments dedicated to the events of the Second World War. Among the different forms of cultural and historical heritage, memorial monuments occupy a special place. Periodical upheavals led to the emergence of their new meaning, whose duration may be short-lived, reflecting the inability of people to enjoy the historical heritage as a means of creating new cultural patterns. During the second half of the 20th century, thousands of monuments throughout the former Yugoslavia were built, which, in their own way, mark the events of the Second World War. Monumental sculptures are constructed as abstract plastics. Today most of these monuments, as well as their symbolism, are neglected and unwanted.

Key words: monuments, World War II, the culture of memory, Serbia

Among the different forms of cultural and historical heritage, memorial monuments occupy a special place. Periodical upheavals led to the emergence of their new meaning, whose duration may be short-lived, reflecting the inability of people to enjoy the historical heritage as a means of creating new cultural patterns. According to Kirk Savage, the lack of clear guidelines on evaluating cultural heritage leads to the fact that the state, united by the national idea, does not pay enough attention to the monuments that represent this idea, which undermines the integrity of the existing system.¹

In humanities, unfortunately, there is a tradition that the monument is considered as a sort of material, which is worth in itself, an object of fixed value, torn away from the socio-cultural context and which ignores the context of aging. Thus observed, the monument carries distorted

¹ **Kirk Savage.** *Monument wars: Washington, DC, the National Mall, and the transformation of the memorial landscape.* University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2009, 148.

information. Such objects can easily be manipulated in order to create partial myths, the content of which is subject to constant change.

The culture of memory, or the politics of the culture of memory, is a strategy, an ideological construct that determines what past we remember and how. Unlike the memory that represents activation on an individual basis, remembrance is a process of storing and sorting information and differs from perception and imagination. Freud's psychoanalysis is based on the psychopathology of remembrance. Psychoanalysis is a set of strategies where the foggy, suppressed memories are returned to conscious. Through psychoanalysis through remembrance, we try to reach memory through the deduction of memory traces, similar to the decoding of signs of illness and disorder.²

One of the definitions of cultural identity explains that it is a matter of self-consciousness of members of a group that has historically emerged and developed depending on the criteria that this group establishes in relations with other social groups. Given the symbolic-cultural criterion and/or historical criterion (orientation of ethnicity to the past), as a segment of cultural identity, one can distinguish the domain of the culture of memory of a social group: nations, ethnic groups, families, and even individuals. Thus, the field of the culture of memory includes a set of beliefs in the common origin of members of a particular social group, common myths and historical memories, and orientation towards the past. In this sense, the culture of memory is made by the ways/mechanisms of social transfer of knowledge about past, inventing, processing, maintaining, using, suppressing, forgetting and changing the past. The culture of memory contains patterns of past processing in the context of everyday consciousness, suppression, relativity, falsification, planned forgetting, etc., which constitute individual and collective constructions, that is, images of the past created by individuals and groups in certain situations in order to interpret the present with the help of the past vision of the future, and determine / consolidate their own identities. During the second half of the 20th century, thousands of monuments throughout the former Yugoslavia were built, which, in their own way, mark the events of the Second World

² **Ivana Ančič.** [2016]. Uloga umetnosti i istorije u reprezentaciji holokausta. Kultura, (151), 305.

War. Monumental sculptures are built as abstract plastics, today these monuments, as well as their symbolism, are ignored and unwanted. According to Kuljić, a critical or alternative culture of memory tends to be limited not only to the recognition of various symbolic structures within the individual and group processing of the past but always takes into account the interest, ideological, political and personal conditionality of these complex processes. The critical culture of memories raises the question: “Who remembers what and why?”, because the key question is not: “What do the remains of the past say?”, But “How are your remains interpreted?” The critical culture of memory contains not only the material remains of the past, marked places of memory, different past symbols and meanings, but also ideologies, myths, prejudices and stereotypes present in the (actual) use of the past.³

Like historians, artists who seek understanding and meaning in traumatic events are creating works to keep those events memorable. Although both the historian and the artist are motivated by a strong sense of responsibility to commit such human malice, the challenge for the artist is to incorporate the emotional truth in the aesthetic framework of the artwork in combination with the facts of the event. Teodor Adorno, one of the greatest philosophers and aesthetics of 20th-century music, says that Nazi parties have destroyed many artists and intellectuals and put all cultural activities into the service of the totalitarian system. In 1949 Adorno wrote, “Writing poetry after Auschwitz is a barbarism” and criticized Schoenberg’s composition *A Survivor from Warsaw*, op. 46 (1947) for too much direct confrontation with the topic. Adorno’s subsequent symptomatology recognizes this statement as a self-conscious downtime, as a knowledge that is also infected by the same reason why it became malapropos to write songs. Songs are another name for the creatures of the spirit, and not for craft work, which, in an essentially different, even “more eclectic” way than music, for example, would fall into troubles and suffer the temptations of a tragic historical event. But seventeen years later, in 1966, Adorno changed his mind and wrote: “Lasting suffering has the same right to expression as the one who tortures must scream; so it

³ **Todor Kuljić.** *Kultura sećanja : teorijska objašnjenja upotrebe prošlosti.* Beograd: Čigoja štampa, 2006.

may have been wrong (my assertion) that after Auschwitz, the songs can no longer be written.”⁴

There is a very interesting study on the theme of the culture of memory and the monumental culture in the area of former Yugoslavia by photographer Jan Kempenaers,⁵ who was involved in recording lost relics of history. He recorded twenty-five major monuments in the Yugoslav territory, created as a mark of the events of the Second World War. One of the examples from Kempenaers’ selection⁶ we will put here, as an illustration of the monumental heritage of an epoch today forgotten and ignored.



Kosovska Mitrovica, Serbia – A monument to the fallen miners
in the National Liberation Struggle

Often, in practice, the value of the monument is determined by its users, citizens, regardless of its artistic value. Sometimes the monuments removed due to the change of the social paradigm are once again put back into use and they succeed in reaching the viewers, regardless of the

⁴ **Ivana Ančič.** [2016]. Uloga umetnosti i istorije u reprezentaciji holokausta. Kultura, (151), 39.

⁵ **Jan Kempenaers.** Spomenik, Amsterdam : Roma, 2010.

⁶ Ibid.

social climate and the recognized cultural values. According to Malcolm, as a consequence, there is a disintegration of value, which affects all aspects of the cultural, social and economic life of people.⁷

Todor Kuljić writes that public monuments are one of the elements of social integration and national self-awareness, but only as long as the paradigm in which they were created continues to be in force. When the paradigm changes / collapses, the monuments become mere molded material and cease to illuminate the symbolic force. This tells us that public monuments, in addition to their artistic values, have an important role in which the strength does not come from the monument itself, but from the cultural, social and political milieu within which they are built and whose values they should represent. How the conceptual environment of the monument changes, so its interpretation and importance for society change.⁸

Generally speaking, the original function and message of the monument are to commemorate the past and direct the memory of key milestones in the history of a community. More precisely, this unique function of commemorating moments from the official historiographic meta-narration of the national and state communities transforms the monuments into instruments and exposes them to the dictation of the dominant ideological symbolic order. This ideological dictation directs and shapes memory, reassesses the significance of historical events and processes them into a compact narrative. Thus, monuments are not the subject of an interpretation of the current history, but the means for the ideological re-creation of the past and history. They have been instrumentalized to create an unmistakable great story of the historical development of the nation and the state, regardless of the complexity and qualities of objective circumstances and current events in the past. After the Second World War, thousands of monuments throughout the former Yugoslavia were built marking events from this great conflict in the history of civilization. Monumental sculptures are constructed as abstract plastics, today most of these monuments, as well as their symbolism, are neglected and unwanted. This particularly applies to monuments with an emphasized ideological basis.

⁷ **Miles Malcolm.** *Art, Space and the City: Public Art and Urban Futures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997.), 102.

⁸ **Todor Kuljić.** *Kultura sećanja : teorijska objašnjenja upotrebe prošlosti.* Beograd : Čigoja štampa, 2006.

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