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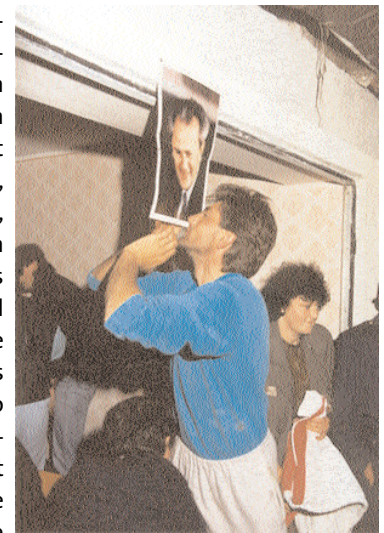
¹ The most prominent position in this respect was formulated in Jameson, Frederic, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. In: *New Left Review* 146 (1984), pp. 53-92.

² This article summarises results of the research project *Aesthetic Tricks as a Means of Political Emancipation*, currently financed by the FWF, Austrian Science Fund. I would like to thank everybody who discussed with me issues concerning this article, especially: Jasmina Čubrilo, Wladimir Fischer, Johann Kneihls, Mirjana Boksan, Saša Marković, Raša Todosijević and Škart.

Parody and irony, it is repeatedly asserted, became ineffective forms of political speech and display in the second half of the 20th century, because they had become a socially dominant way of speech and representation. Parody and irony are depicted as empty forms devoid of any political explosive force.¹ This article firmly opposes this widespread opinion. The following is a historical study of a milieu at the end of the 1990's, in which in a time of social crisis and political upheaval, irony and parody were taken up euphorically by diverse actors, became linked to political claims and were involved in a kind of »image-struggle«.² A re-emerging image worship in Serbia in the 1990's, and the renewed effort to use images and media for political purposes, provoked a range of aesthetic responses which engaged with and against each other in a struggle for recognition. In this »image-struggle«, the aesthetic vocabulary of the avant-garde presents itself as a tradition that can be taken up and used by different sides, that can constantly be re-actualised and linked to new demands, throwing up completely unforeseeable, milieu-specific articulations and relations.

Three Photographs: 1990 – 1980 – 1999

Serbia 1990. In a photograph, taken during an unidentifiable gathering (picture 1), we can see a threshold, a passageway occupied by a lot of bodies in a rather run-down building. Out of the crowd squirms the robust body of a young man, who moves elastically up and is on the point of kissing a poster with a portrait of Slobodan Milošević, hanging from the door-beam. The accentuated, sporty, almost »ragged« get-up of the unshaven young man in light track-suit-trousers and a turquoise sweatshirt, as well as the dynamically upwards turning movement and the simple portrait of the politician hanging from the door gives this scene the appearance of a spontaneous image-worship. With his eyes almost closed and the two hands as well as the mouth gently brought up to the portrait, the young man is completely caught up in a devout action. But his sporty get-up, his unshaven appearance and the dirty clothes are in sharp contrast to this gesture of devotion. Above all, his appearance stands out against that of Slobodan Milošević's, who is shown on this half-length portrait carefully shaved, with neatly combed hair, in a black suit, white shirt and narrow tie. Despite this contrast in the features of both of those involved in this act of worship, they are linked to a dynamic figure, which cuts the picture horizontally: the jumping body, the hands and the absorbed face of the worshipper forming a unity together with the smiling upwards inclined face of the image being kissed. The spontaneity and casualty of the action is also enhanced by the fact that all the other people present in this passageway are paying no attention to this scene; they are passing on the side, without in any way relating to it. Only for the photographer, Dragan Petrović, does this scene seem to have had something important enough for him to photograph it and then add it to a collection of photographs he made in Serbia in the 1990's, almost incidentally, as a kind of annex to his regular work. Officially, in those years, he was on the road trying to earn a living at public events: Christmas festivities, huge family meetings or private gatherings of the newly emerging upper-class. In parallel, he produced images of such confessions, of the emergence of new power-structures, but also of strange identifications and performances of the self. With images like this one, Dragan Petrović mutates from a contract photographer to a documenter and ethnologist. We, as viewers, can then read these photographs as evidence of forms of the *mise-en-scène* of the self as well as of political power. For this we can combine them to other information, for example, the tip from an insider pointing out that in the early 1990's the young man's sweatshirt being



Picture 1: Spontaneous image-worship, Dragan Petrović, 1990 © Dragan Petrović

3 Cf. Lefort, Claude: *The Image of the Body and Totalitarianism*. In: Lefort, C.: *The Political Forms of Modern Society. Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*. Cambridge/Mass.: MIT 1986, pp. 292-306, p. 298f.

4 It is not possible here to cite the vast scientific literature on the breakdown of former Yugoslavia. Rather, I would like to draw attention to two recently finished dissertations which both investigate in detail ideological discourses in Yugoslavia from the 1950's until the present day using discourse-analytical methods. Both show that the party-elite and associations such as the *Praxis*-group were very influential in defining what Titoism ought to be, even if they declared self-management aimed at direct decision-making by the workers to be the main aim of Yugoslav socialism. On changes in elite discourse in Yugoslavia from a Marxist humanism that managed to internalise national differences within a communist framework to an increased articulation of the national question into socialist discourse after the mid-1980s cf. Jovic, Dejan: *Jugoslavija – drzava koja je odumrla*. Belgrade, Zagreb: Samizdat B92 and Prometej 2003, and Shigeno, Rei: *From the Dialectics of the Universal to the Politics of Exclusion: The Philosophy, Politics and Nationalism of the Praxis Group from the 1950's to the 1990's*. Diss., Essex Univ., Colchester 2004.

stuffed into the elastic waistband of his trousers would generally have been seen as a sign of support for the then president.

This photograph documents a homage to a politician, as it took place in Serbia in the 1990's. A decade earlier, another series of photographs was produced, which also documented the worship of a politician, yet opens up a difference to the picture by Dragan Petrović. Goranka Matic's collection *Days of Grief and Pride* (1980) which emerged out of the three official days of mourning, records the later famous mourning *mise-en-scènes* in the shop-windows in Belgrade's central city streets after Tito's death. These arrangements intensified the usually already quite heavy presence of pictures of the egocrat in public space. (picture 2)



Picture 2: *Days of Grief and Pride*, Goranka Matic, 1980 © Goranka Matic

In every shop-window and in some of the sales-rooms there was a portrait of the marshal in civilian clothes or in military uniform with a black mourning band over the right-hand corner. In most cases red carnations had been arranged in front of the portrait and red cloth and/or the Yugoslav flag imaginatively draped around it. This similar mourning *mise-en-scène* in different shops sometimes led to almost surreal contrasts: Tito's portrait sparkled from behind piles of artistically arranged shoes or between red-and-white sports wear; from one angle, it dominated a whole arsenal of boxes of jewels, it was encircled by a lot of »dancing« brides in white veils, surrounded by tailoring accessories, typewriters, candle-sticks, cakes, southern fruit, lamp-shades, pieces of meat or cosmetic articles; sometimes it even competed with the pictures of women advertising lipstick.

In contrast to what is happening in the photo by Dragan Petrović, here we encounter an officially ordained homage. The portrait of the deceased »father« of the nation appears in numerous places emphasised by pedestals, drapes and tricks of *mise-en-scène*, but nowhere does it seem to attract such spontaneous homage from passers-by as it can be seen in the »kissing-photograph«. On the contrary: the passers-by visible in these photographs all go hurriedly past the windows adorned with the Tito-portrait. Sometimes it is even noticeable that the shop-assistants in no way relate to the image of the person being mourned. This is not to imply that there were not other, more or less spontaneous outpourings of grief: the story that some people cried for three days after the announcement of Tito's death is repeatedly told. Nevertheless, these images seem to document a gap between the ordained discourse of power, on the one hand, and the experiences that people make of their situations, on the other.

In the mourning period after his death the portrait of Tito is omnipresent in an enhanced way in public space, regardless of how members of society behave towards these images. This representation of Tito, like all the other public images of the egocrat, incorporates the representation of the party, the »people-as-one« and the proletariat – he lends his body and his head to all those other bodies and holds these identifications together.³ In the second half of the 1980's,⁴ with the breakdown of the party elite's political consensus on the neutralisation of antagonisms between the different nationalities, as well as with the dissolution of the party and the installation of a multiparty-system in Serbia in 1990, such an all-embracing head and body finally disappeared from the political stage. It made space, not initially for another head and another body to occupy the now empty space, but for a contest between different representatives, who could only hold political power temporarily and who depended on approval (expressed, for example, in votes). Now the discourse of power could no longer remain separated from the experience people derived from their situation, but was in need of recognition – it had to cause fascination, but also identification and judgment processes. With this – something documented by the kissing scene photographed by Dragan Petrović – old forms of belief in images and of political homage return in new articulations. Potentially, as this photo suggests, Milošević could probably radiate enough fascination to take Tito's place. But unlike the former regime the politician now requires testimonies and worship as performed by the kisser and has to win them in a struggle with other representatives. He is not, like Tito, placed at the head of the state by a logic of identification, which allows as the only difference to be

5 The programme of »free« *Radio B 92*, for instance, was inspired by MTV. In 1998 it was awarded the *Free Your Mind* free-speech prize during the MTV-Awards.

6 »YO« means »YOU«, »Hey You!«, and comes from hip-hop culture; one also hears this expression on MTV.

7 Basketball was and is the number one popular sport in Yugoslavia as well as in Serbia today, and because of this Belgrade is littered with basketball nets. The importance basketball had and still has in (ex-)Yugoslavia is also expressed in the successes of the national basketball team: The Yugoslav national team, for instance, won silver medals in the 1963 and 1967 world championships, in 1970 they finally won the gold medal and in 1995 the national team of the »third« Yugoslavia again won the European championship in Athens.

8 The photo is part of a huge series in which viewers can read myths connected with the actual self-culture against the grain.

9 At its peak in 1994 inflation was 313.563,558.0%. This means that the average daily inflation-rate was 62.02% and the average hourly inflation rate 2.03%. Because of this, people in Serbia at the time preferred to calculate in Deutschmarks and even held their savings in Deutschmarks, the exchange of currency and the creative »organisation« of goods was a daily practice and involved almost the whole population.

the one between the »people-as-one« (that is also the party, the proletariat and the egocrat), on the one side, and its enemies (the bureaucrats, technocrats, capitalists, imperialists etc.), on the other. As the kisser demonstrates in the photograph, the represented now have to find a relationship to the representatives. They have to affirm or reject and to make voting-decisions. Yet, in the case of Tito as well as that of Milošević, it is the body of the politician, his features, his postures, his gestures as well as his eloquence and all the stories and fantasies about his actions, mistakes and emotions that mediate between the represented and the representative.

In Serbia in the 1990's, beside such images and the acts of affirmation they provoked (and rejected: but more on that later), there were also other forms of image-worship present in public space. Initially MTV, but soon also *Fashion-TV* or *Eurosport*, conquered the bars, can-tees, cafés, waiting-rooms, city-passages and shops. In the interval between the work-shifts, while shopping, waiting for buses or trains, café-drinking, alongside chatting or newspaper-reading, people could always enter this constant stream of images, stories, bodies and music, follow them for one, two or three programmes and take the stories, images, sounds and faces found here some way into everyday life. In Serbia in the 1990's, above all in the big cities, MTV especially caused a very vivid fascination-history.⁵ An urban fragment caught on camera in 1999 by the artist Zoran Naskovski (picture 3) provides evidence of this. In this photo, in the middle of a chaotic grey street on a dull winter day, a red-orange-yellow declaration of love to MTV sparkles with energetic gestures. The white back-board of a slightly damaged panel of a basketball hoop displays a painting in glowing colours: the square, which usually shows the target area for the ball, has been transformed by graffiti into an MTV-monitor surrounded by this wild, energetic yellow-red »feverish« scribble, which can neither be read as a drawing nor as inscription, but demands instead to be seen as the unmediated outcome of the actor's self. A thick red arrow, directed towards the goal/the MTV-monitor and the mini-character »YO!«⁶ enhances the identificatory reference, already made visible through the strong gesture-traces in the application of colour. The staging of basketball as the national sport and as positively connoted sign of Yugoslav identity often to be found in Serbia,⁷ merges with an expressive appropriation of MTV. The small painting on the basketball panel, standing out through the wild gestures and the glowing colours, is thus the manifestation of a culture of the self. This culture is closely related to a certain form of sport and the reception of very specific image worlds and etches itself visibly in urban space. The photograph deciphers and rescues this small fragment of a self-classification as basketball MTV culture.⁸ In this way it confronts us with the fact that self and image worlds, as well as the sporty, physical activity of basketball in Serbia (as in former Yugoslavia) are closely bound up with each other. MTV is here isolated, surrounded with moving, »loud« colours and raised to a composition that is also offered to the other passers-by, so they too can behave (affirmatively/rejecting) towards it. In this way the graffiti enters into a struggle with other statements and declarations, plans, projects and memories, which are trying to gain our attention in this social space.

The photograph that records the spontaneous tribute to Milošević, as well as MTV's expressive appraisal on the basketball back-board, tell us that moments of confrontation with visual worlds have now become very important and inform the creations of the self in an enormous way. At the same time, however, all the commodities interwoven with MTV, western films and music are now, when the »kissing-photograph« was made in 1990, more unattainable than during socialism. What in the beginning of the 1990's and particularly in Serbian regions of former Yugoslavia was still tersely called the »crisis«, led in the following years, especially after the economic sanctions imposed in 1992, to a rapid inflation. Its peak was reached in 1994 and resulted in the impoverishment of huge strata of the population as well as a parallel increase in wealth of a small (semi-)criminal elite. This fostered developments that pushed the prosperity that most inhabitants of ex-Yugoslavia associated with western democracies into an increasingly dim and distant future.⁹ With the start of the Serbian-Croatian war in 1991 and an immense number of new parties and growing religious communities, economic insecurity was joined by political and ideological uncertainty. In addition, about 400,000 mostly



Picture 3: Basketball MTV Culture, Zoran Naskovski, 1990 © Zoran Naskovski



10 On this cf. also Salecl, Renata: National Identity and Socialist Moral Majority. In: Eley, Geoff et al.: *Becoming National. A Reader.* New York, Oxford: Oxford UP 1996, pp. 417-424.

11 Arendt, Hannah: *Walter Benjamin, Berthold Brecht. Zwei Essays.* Munich: Piper 1971, p. 49.

12 Nootboom, Cees: *Rituals.* Fort Washington: Harvest 1996, p. 117.

13 Ibid, 122.

young and well-educated people left the country while there was an influx of some 600,000 Serbian refugees from other regions of former Yugoslavia, especially from Kosovo and Bosnia. In this situation, characterised by the danger of the extension of the war, mass-migration, poverty and an enormous spectrum of different political and ideological alternatives, democracy appeared to an increasing number of people as mere *form*.¹⁰ Thus, in their opinion, democracy did not have the capacity of procuring the material prosperity and political stability immediately that were so much desired and so closely associated with it. Many of these people became involved in diverse searching movements on the newly emerged political and religious market or they drew back from political judgement in general.

Belief and Image Cult in a Fragmented World

At the end of the 20th century Yugoslavia displayed a very specific form of fracturing of the world. Modern existence is already marked by a break with inherited forms of order and the authority and tradition related to them. Here such a break is present in multiple forms, accompanied by the disintegration of the country itself. At the same time, a whole range of different groups emerged, competing to make sense of these fragments or how they can be related to each other again.

Modernity, in East and West, is generally inhabited by uneasiness, the dissolution of certainties, endless questioning, but also by new forms of relating to one another and achieving security. As Hannah Arendt¹¹ among others has pointed out, following the revolutions of the 19th century (and as early as the 16th century there had been the first signs of a reflection on religion and politics), a way of relating and differentiating oneself by showing oneself and being seen, by speaking out and being heard gained enhanced importance, because other, traditional forms of how to relate oneself to and differentiate oneself from others, which were previously guaranteed by the social unities of families and villages, the power of kings and the inherited religions, had shattered. Religion and the holy does not thereby disappear, it rather re-emerges in the shape of traditional as well as in new, enlarged forms. Faith, religious attitudes, and imaginations do not thus necessarily imply a faithfulness to a church – even a militant atheism can give evidence of a religious sensibility – but nurture modern rituals, described for instance by the Dutch writer Cees Nootboom as necessary transformations of earlier religious rituals:

People were incapable of being alone in the world. No sooner had they buried the wretched god of the Jews and Christians than they had to go traipsing about the streets with red flags or in sloppy saffron sack dresses. Clearly the Middle Ages would never end.¹²

Nootboom here highlights that the »death of God« does not eliminate faith and religious rituals, but brought with it a new re-emergence of faith, ecstasy, mysticism and religion. Details of the earthly world can become for us a *passage* that sets our believing in motion or through which we can become affected by the holy. In Nootboom's case, these details are the red flags and the orange Hari Krishna monks' clothes but these can also be images, a face, a gesture or any other detail of the world of appearances however small. It is characteristic of this modern form of experience, however, that such an occurrence of belief and of the holy requires objects, images, or other details: only through a clash with an object, a body or a piece of music can we grasp such an event. Again, Cees Nootboom writes: »What a strange animal was man, always somehow needing objects, ›made‹ things with which to facilitate his journey to the twilight realms of the higher world.«¹³ Modernity thus again offers signs and symbols that can mobilize belief, but now they are open to a variety of competing interpretations.

In Yugoslavia, similar to other »real-socialist« countries, the state also made carefully directed efforts – sometimes stronger, then more reserved – to push back traditional institutions that formerly guaranteed social relations and the influence of religion and the traditional families and clans. Between 1945 and 1953, in particular, there were evident strict measures. For example, in the suspension of a whole range of newspapers and magazines, the closing of religious hospitals, orphanages, old-people's homes, in the nationalisation of schools, in the imprisonment of priests, in the separation of theological faculties, etc. Furthermore, the custody of the state for children and the youth was extended into leisure time. This was done through »membership-duty« in various »clubs« and in the state taking over the care of the old



14 Pomian, Krzysztof: Religion and Politics in a Time of Glasnost. In: Hill, Ronald J. et al.: Restructuring Eastern Europe. Towards a New European Order. Worcester: Elgar 1990, pp. 113-129; and Ramet, Sabrina Petra: Balkan Babel. Politics, Culture & Religion in Yugoslavia, Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview 1992, p. 132f.

15 Ramet 1992, p. 140f.

16 Pomian 1990.

17 The second successor party to the communists was the *League of Communists-Movement for Yugoslavia* (SK-PJ), also founded in 1990 and headed by Milošević's wife Mirjana Marković. In 1995 the coalition party *United Yugoslav Left* (JUL) was founded, with Mirjana Marković's SK-PJ as its strongest member. JUL is characterised by a closeness to the Milošević party (they had some common members), had access to national media and government positions, even if they factually never participated in an election. Other stronger parties between 1990 and 1998 were: the *Serbian Radical Party* (SRS), the *Serbian Renewal Movement* (SPO), the *Democratic Party* (DS) and the *Democratic Party of Serbia* (DSS). Between 1990 and 1998 there were almost 200 registered political parties, most gained less than 4% of votes but were important in forming of coalitions or drawing votes away from other parties. – Cf. Milosevic, Milan: Political Guide to Serbia 2000. Directory of Yugoslavia. Belgrade: Medija Centar 2000, p. 83ff., and Gordy, Eric D.: The Culture of Power in Serbia. Nationalism and the Destruction of Alternatives. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvanian State UP 1999, p. 25f.

and the ill.¹⁴ But after the break with the Soviet bloc 1948, the regime had already loosened measures against believers, seen, for example, in the final re-establishment of full diplomatic relations with the Vatican as early as 1970. Nevertheless, a variety of continually smouldering conflicts continued to determine the relations between churches and state.

Belief and religious sensibility as well as religious conflict continued under Titoism, but together with the democratic aspirations they became more influential again, that is, they appeared in renewed and expanded form and were finally, as in the other former socialist countries, decisively involved in the events after 1989. The break with the USSR, as well as the inclusion of the whole of the population in processes of collective self-management lent the communist party in Yugoslavia a very long-lasting legitimacy. This is why traditional appearances of religiosity (for example, participation in religious rituals, religious education of children) – again with huge variations between different regions, especially between »cities« and »rural areas« – initially went into steep decline after the takeover by the communists.¹⁵ At any rate, religious conflicts continued in those times, too. Especially since the uprising of Croatian nationalists in 1971, they were again overlain with national conflict. Religious and national conflict do not coincide with each other exactly, as Krzysztof Pomian¹⁶ has shown. The national tradition has always had two faces: one that is religious and a second that is anti-clerical or atheistic. The national anti-clerical tradition, for example, differs considerably in strength between Serbs, Moslems and Croats, which consequently leads to a huge range of different articulations between nationalism, faith and religion, as well as different directions in the desire for reform.

For a long time, the figure and the face of Tito held this conflict-prone, movable structure together: through a power-system dominated by him *in personam*, which rested on a complex distribution of power between the different ethnic communities, as well as the religiously permeated representation of his portrait as being the one of the people. The former showed itself being more fragile, which became clear as early as in the late 1960's and finally 1971 after the marked nationalist uprisings. In 1974 this led to the adoption of a new constitution granting the individual republics more authority and autonomy. The latter was relatively stable until Tito's death. Most evident is the religiously loaded representation of his portrait as that of the »people-as-one« in the *mise-en-scène* of the »partisan-shrine« which emerged in the beginning of the 1970's during the creation of the Sutjeska national-park as a total art work and one of the biggest (17,000 m²) memorials to battles fought during World War II. The shrine is composed of an image-cycle in 13 parts, in which the picture of Tito as main strategist of the war occupies the place of an »altar-piece«. During the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990's these frescos were covered with graffiti and damaged by bullets. But even before then, homage-gestures, that one might have thought had been overcome, re-emerged with the nationalistic (and democratic) aspirations. There were new articulations of Catholicism, of Orthodox belief and Islamic faith, as well as new articulations of image-worship, as evidenced by the above-mentioned photograph by Dragan Petrović. The struggle to gain and to maintain power is now again conducted to a huge extent via images and the media.

Even if the Milošević-led SPS (*Socialist Party of Serbia*),¹⁷ founded in 1990 as one of the successor-parties to the communists, was unable to gain absolute majority either during the first multiparty-elections in 1990 nor during any other subsequent election, it was able to safeguard its power through coalitions – with Milošević and the SPS co-operating with the strengthened nationalist *Serbian Resistance Movement* (SPO) as well as with the Old Guard of the communists and the military, although both of the latter were heavily shaken by the economic and political reforms. In this way the SPS maintained a monopoly over political power, the police and the most important media, which survived the transition towards »pluralism«. Nevertheless, the regime now depended on approval. In the struggle for this, its influence over television, radio and magazines, as well as the public celebration of the portrait of the new »leader« became of enormous importance.

The Elections 1990 and the Struggle with the Multi-party System

In the last years of the one-party system a huge range of cultural institutions, organisations and spontaneous groups articulating alternative political positions and often linking the demand for democracy to national questions had already emerged. The first opposition parties were founded in 1990, but only in July that year did the one-party system pass a law to legali-

18 Gordy 1999, p. 32f. and p. 35f.

19 Thompson, Mark: *Proizvodnja rata: Mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj, i Bosni i Hercegovini*. Belgrade: Medija Centar 1995, p. 88.

20 Quoted in: Ramet 1998, p. 18.

21 Ibid., p. 161.

22 SPO (*Serbian Renewal Movement*) 15.8% (19 seats), DS 7.4% (7 seats), independent candidates 9.1% (8 seats) etc. Cf. Gordy 1999, p. 36.

23 Ibid., p. 63ff.

se the (already existing) opposition parties, at the same time as submitting a new constitution. Due to conflicts with the opposition parties over the election law, the respective law was changed only two weeks before election. At the same time there was uncertainty as to whether the opposition parties would participate in the elections at all. Within just one week the opposition declared an election boycott, started an anti-election campaign and finally gave this campaign up again. In the national media, the SPS presented itself as being both moderate, experienced and in tune with the Serbian people with the slogan »with us, there is no uncertainty« (»s nama nema nezvesnosti«).¹⁸ At that time, in contrast to the SPS, the opposition-parties were, although in different ways, insufficiently organised and to some extent had only vaguely defined ideological positions.

By distributing instructions to national media journalists to present the »truth meetings« which the SPO (*Serbian Resistance Movement*) had been organising everywhere in Serbia since 1988 and which had secured Milošević's rise to power, in the most favourable way through their news reports, the SPS skilfully used its influence within the old communication channels and the cadre-structures of the communist party. The former news-director of RTS reported that she received instructions to reserve a special place for these meetings in the evening-news. They were to inflate the number of participants, to enhance the »heroic status« and the popularity of Milošević, and to cut out nationalistic symbols such as Četnic symbols and the old Serbian flag.¹⁹

In parallel, the SPS promoted their proximity to the Orthodox church, by publicly emphasising the role of religion in national history and trying to integrate themselves into this history as well as to formulate it for the future. Thus, for example, one could read in the newspaper *Politika* on September 2, 1990 that the Orthodox church »[...] is the spiritual basis for and the most essential component of the [Serbian] national identity.«²⁰ Conversely, the image of Milošević was included in the religious worship during church festivals. Thus, for instance, the participants in the Orthodox mass celebrated on the occasion of the 600th anniversary of the battle in Kosovo on June 28, 1989 could admire portraits of Milošević among the religious icons.²¹ (The co-existence of saints and the image of Milošević is also documented in picture 4.)



Picture 4: Slobodan Milošević and other Serbian Saints, Dushan Drakulich, 1989 © Dushan Drakulich

During the December 9, 1990 elections, the SPS indeed gained the largest number of votes (46.1%), but not an absolute majority. However, because of the new election law it held the majority of parliamentary seats (194 seats, or 77%).²² A few weeks after the final announcement of this result on March 9, 1991, the opposition and the students organised demonstrations against this distribution of power, during which the new regime for the first time used the military against the civil population. On the basis of this intervention, the demonstrators were able to expose the regime's lack of legitimacy, but they did not succeed in using this public visibility to establish a new balance of power between the political forces. Subsequently Milošević secured the power of SPS with the help of the above-mentioned coalitions, as well as by an »exchange« of former decision-makers with regime-friendly figures in all the relevant institutions. Furthermore, the outbreak of the Serbian-Croatian war in 1991 bolstered the position of the new leader of the »Serbian people«, especially among the army.

But the demonstrations after March 9, 1991 were not just announced because of what was regarded as the »unjust« distribution of power, but also addressed the image-policy of the new regime in particular. Thus, they pushed that into the centre of struggle. The demonstrations were staged as answer to the month-long silencing and defamation of the opposition parties in the news in national television as well as against the role national television played in the reporting nationalist conflicts in former Yugoslavia – they demanded the resignation of the directors of national television stations.

The anger of the opposition was aroused in the first place by the continuing SPS media monopoly. Because even if there was a wide range of media in Serbia 1990/91, the most important were »faithful to the regime«: for example, the three national television-channels (RTS *Radio-Televizija Srbija* 1, 2 and 3), the national radio, the newspaper *Politika* and the weekly NIN. In addition to those, there was a variety of other media-channels that were sometimes promoted, then ignored and then again eliminated by police force.²³ But whereas the national TV-programme RTS 1 and the national radio-network could be received everywhere in Serbia, the

24 In some periods in Belgrade the independent station NTV *Studio B* had more viewers (36%) than RTS 1 (26.4%), which provides again evidence of the gap between »urban Belgrade« and the rural areas. – *Ibid.*, p. 68.

25 Cf. also Interview with Gordan Paunović. In: Eydel, Katja/Diefenbach, Katja: *Belgrade Interviews. Gespräche und Texte*, Berlin: b books 2000, pp. 31-38.

26 Slavujević, Zoran: *Borba za vlast u Srbiji kroz prizmu izbornih kampanja*. In: Goati, Vladimir et al.: *Izborne borbe u Jugoslaviji, 1990-1992*. Belgrade: Radnička štampa 1993, p. 103. The writer Pedrag Matvejević called this kind of political system »demokratatur«. Cf. Matvejević, Pedrag: *Die Welt »ex«*. Bekenntnisse. Zurich: Ammann 1997, p. 40.

27 1994 almost 200 parties were registered, cf. footnote 17.

28 On the religious market in former socialist countries since 1989 cf. Verdery, Katherine: *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies. Reburial and Post-socialist Change*. New York: Columbia UP 1999, p. 79f. and p. 50f.

29 The new adoration of politicians was accompanied by a renewed relic-cult.

30 Milošević called his programme an »anti-bureaucratic revolution«, which implied a struggle against the former communist apparatus as well as against the »bureaucratic systems« of other republics and provinces, especially those of the Kosovo, which had in his opinion thus far prevented a democratic re-organisation of Serbia (and the Yugoslav federation). In this discourse the »Serbian people« were equated again and again with a more democratic and more universal orientation, which legitimated their claim for leadership within the federation.

independent media (radio, television, newspapers, magazines) could barely be received outside the bigger cities, and even then not on a regular basis.²⁴ Above and beyond this, public space in Serbia was formed out of messages coming from completely different directions: here different music-styles (*turbofolk* and Rock), advertising, propaganda, meetings, speeches and demonstrations crossed each other, and in this being-against and being-in-favour of voices images of politicians and of military leaders – among those especially that of Slobodan Milošević – played an important mediating role.

The treatment of the opposition during these first demonstrations in 1991 clearly showed that the new government was meeting the democratic challenge with a totalitarian tendency: after the demonstrations the two Belgrade-based independent media-channels, *Studio B* (local television) and *Radio B 92*, were temporarily eliminated by police-violence. Here for the first time a method was applied that would later be repeated on several occasions: in 1996 during the second wave of huge demonstrations, in 1999 during the Nato bombardment, and in May 2000.²⁵

The democratic challenge, which in 1990 was tangibly close, was answered from differing sides – from the regime, but also from other nationalistic political groups and their supporters, as well as from military units – in a way that tried to fuse power and society together again and to eliminate the unpredictability and insecurity that accompanied democratic processes by distinguishing between an (undivided, undifferentiated) »people-as-one« and its enemies. At the same time, the regime nevertheless adhered to the new constitution, which prescribed an essentially democratic multi-party system and provided a basis on which opposition parties and other forces that wanted to become politically active could rely and exercise a right to participate on the political stage. The political system in Serbia between 1990 and 2000 can thus not be called »totalitarian« (even if democratic competition for power was sometimes violently eliminated). It can perhaps best be described using a notion of Zoran Slavujević, as »predominant-party-system«.²⁶

The break that took place in Yugoslavia between 1989 and 1992, with an already fragile balance of political forces, mobilised a variety of questions for all those involved in this political struggle – starting from the very specific organisation of everyday life, through the handling of national conflicts to questions regarding the order of the world in general, for which one had now to find answers going beyond the old ideological frameworks. In searching for sense and explanation of current events the world was again re-organised from different standpoints, with already existing vocabularies being renewed, enlarged and re-institutionalised: nationalism, traditional religions, but also anti-feminism and a celebration of masculinity. But alongside this there were also political performances that presented democratic methods in the public space and demanded such methods from their audience. The current insecurity was also intensified by the task of deciding between a variety of old and new parties²⁷ as well as between old and new churches and religious communities. This implied a choice and pushed the inner state of the believer/convinced to the fore. The decision for one or the other offer now rested in an enhanced way on individual creed and one's »own« conviction and not on tradition or on governmental order.²⁸ And, conversely, the results of political intervention could no longer be forced »from above«, but depended on citizens' reactions with completely different articulations occurring in which the new possibilities became mixed up with already available concepts of belief, belonging, history, right and wrong, one's own and the alien, nationality, authority, morality, space and time, etc. Like the bones of dead heroes, in this disorientating environment the portraits of living politicians²⁹ proved to be a very efficient vehicle to re-configure the world and to establish meaning.

The image of Slobodan Milošević in particular now gained ritual recognition. These public rituals (masses, speeches, national festivities, *truth-meetings*, television programmes) nourished the image of the involved politician with an almost religious (as well as nationalistic) authority. In them the image was linked to a series of moods and motivations and became a model »of«, »for« and »against« – it conjured up a »better«, »more secure«, »more peaceful«, »national« future and rejected the »atheist« or »bureaucratic«³⁰ communism and »anti-Serbian« attitudes. The politician's body, his authority, now become linked to specific mythological world-views. The representation of this »naturally national« body acts as a mediator between the cosmic qualities of a certain world-interpretation and the human, and provokes affirmative rituals. In public meetings it could thus come to almost »carnal« unification between the »great individual« and the mass of his followers. Thus, for instance, during the »counter-de-

31 Colović, Ivan: Piano. In: Colović, I.: The Politics of Symbol in Serbia. London: Hurst & Company 2002, pp. 228-231.

32 *Magnet* was formed by: Miroslav Nune Popović, Ivan Pravić, Jelena Marjanov, and others.

33 Interview with Ivan Pravić, November 13, 2003.

monstrations« organised in Belgrade by the regime against the huge student-protests in December 1996/97, one could hear the later famous exchange of words between the crowd and it's celebrated leader: »We love you, Sloba! – I love you, too.«³¹

Image Struggle: Parodies of a *School of the Avant-garde*

In the mid 1990's more and more groups emerged that subjected the image of Milošević not to worshipping rituals but to completely different »treatments«. On April 29, 1996, for example, the *Magnet*³² group conducted the *Faluserbia* performance in Belgrade's central shopping-street, the Knez Mihajlova. (picture 5) They put a board on a wheelbarrow with a red painted »sculpture« on it, which they pushed through the streets – an enormous, erect penis with a photograph of Slobodan Milošević attached to it. On the front of the wheel-barrow there was a placard with »Projekat Faluserbia« written on it. Nune Popović, who was pushing the wheelbarrow, and Ivan Pravić, using a megaphone to call on passers-by to take part in the worship, wore white T-shirts with the black inscription »Famulus« (»servant«), while Ivan Pravić shouted: »Citizens, this is the unique opportunity to feel, touch and kiss the symbol of creative power of Serbia. Come closer! Become powerful creatures of yourselves!« Jelena, the only female member of the group danced around the penis, touched it, kissed it and caressed it. She had two holes in her T-shirt, revealing her naked breasts and wore a executioner's hood on her head, which hid her identity but served to emphasise her body, its supple movements and naked skin. A penis-like »thing« dangled from the front of her trousers enhancing the grotesque character of the whole figure. Another member of the group accompanied the procession on the drums. He too wore a executioner's hood and like most of the other group-members displayed the red-white-and-blue Serbian flag on his T-shirt.



Picture 5: *Faluserbia*, *Magnet*-group, April 29, 1996
© Magnet

With the megaphone and the rhythmical drumming, the whole action was reminiscent of market traders selling goods or services. At the beginning, the members of this group were more by themselves. Some passers-by stopped, and looked surprised. Some joined the happening, and only a few came nearer, kissed the penis, caressed it or made masturbating gestures. Slowly a growing procession formed, although hardly any people separated from it and became active themselves. A lot of photographers and cameras were present the whole time, which perhaps contributed to the public keeping their distance. After about half an hour the action was stopped by the police: they arrested the participants and loaded all the »evidence« in a car.

In this action, *Magnet* not only parodied and mocked the image of Milošević, but also the worship by his fans. The eroticism implicit in every celebration of power was staged and made explicit. The activists gave the general social situation and not concrete political demands as the motivation for their action:

I was not angry. It was more like a challenge [...] it made me angry to see that people get beaten in the streets. It made me angry [...] to have friends that had drug-addictions. Because when the war started you could buy drugs in school. And people who don't go to school went to school in order to buy drugs. You had a black market in weaponry, I could buy a bomb in my classroom.³³

At the same time, other groups also joined the social struggle with this action. *Magnet* itself developed in the context of the *school of avant-garde*, which was founded in 1993 within the framework of a humanitarian network (*The Children's Embassy*) and the *Soros Foundation*, whose concern was to impart »critical consciousness« to young people between 13 and 21. The »school« was initiated as a »re-socialising project« by literary critics and former members of the central committee of the communist party, who saw the project as a »good opportunity in a bad time«, that is as a place where they could counteract »nationalism« as well as »traditionalism«, which were for them coupled to each other:

At that time the school programmes were darkening consciousness, using phrases insisting on nationalism, in 1993, even before [...] we wanted to promote more open-



34 Interview with Ostoja Kisić, February 18 2004.

35 Ibid.

36 Schober, Anna: Politik der Form. Korrelationen und Brüche im lesbaren Text der Avantgarde. In: Hrachovec, Herbert et al. (Eds.): Kleine Erzählungen und ihre Medien. Vienna: Turia u. Kant 2004, pp. 80-197.

37 There is no guarantee of the »success« of parody and irony. Both are permanent possibilities of communication. Every social action has a parodic component, insofar as always pre-existent meanings became figured anew and the former meaning becomes subverted. On parody cf. Laclau, Ernesto: Identity and Hegemony. In: Butler, Judith et al.: Contingency, Hegemony, Universality. Contemporary Dialogues on the Left. London, New York: Verso 2000, pp. 44-89, p. 78.

ness, a more critic view [...] the step was to tear the nationalistic programme out of the heads of the children, because that was like a road towards war.³⁴

The group thus saw avant-garde practices as particularly efficient tricks for the changes in consciousness they aspired to: because of their »openness« and »freedom vocation«, the opposition role that the historical avant-garde has repeatedly played in history, but also because of the anchoring of avant-garde art as officially recognised art in socialist Yugoslavia since the 1960's:

From the 1960s on Yugoslavia was very open to art-tendencies from other countries, specially in the field of the avant-garde, that was something very distinctive for Yugoslavia among other socialist countries. When Milošević came to power, that communication network was sealed and this information could not come in.³⁵

These groups thus mobilised a belief in the power of breaking images via aesthetic tricks against the forms of ruler-adoration that were re-emerging at the end of the 1980's – avant-garde tricks became tied up with political purposes.

Part of the curriculum of the *school of avant-garde*, where between 1993 and 1996 approximately 20 to 30 pupils were accepted every six months, in addition to the two courses *Contradictorium* and *The Tradition of the Avant-garde from Aristophanes until Now*, there was also the public practice of avant-garde action. In this way, the actions developed during the courses were anchored in public space as events that attracted a growing public and to which also the foreign and independent press was invited, which gave these events a strong media-presence. These actions were thus not just directed at the Serbian public, but also at an international one. This becomes evident in the fact that a lot of material accompanying these interventions was bilingual (Serbian-English). *Faluserbia* emerged from these structures, in which the purposes and wishes of very different groups mingled: those of the teachers of the *school of avant-garde* who viewed themselves as »progressive« and »avant-garde«, those of the *Soros Foundation*, those of the humanitarian networks, and also those of the pupils who participated in this programme for sometimes completely diverging motives – in order to form a basis for their own artistic work and/or at least partly to escape the lack of perspective and poverty prevalent in Serbia at the time.

Parody here shows itself as a »learned« form instead of being a spontaneous and popular one. With it the image of the disliked »leader« was indeed to be called to the viewers mind, but only in order to disfigure it and to anticipate something else. As so often in 20th century,³⁶ the two uncontrollable aesthetic forms, irony and parody,³⁷ again became frozen in a kind of programme subject to study and merged with quite specific political goals.

Nevertheless, those involved in the *Faluserbia* action could not completely control its effects. They could make only a start. The action bundled multiple, contradictory feelings, wishes and stories, with one story not being able to exclude another, which starts here but remains entangled in an open ended struggle for recognition. In this image-struggle the action shows itself to be fundamentally double-edged: On the one hand the image of Milošević as well as the worship by his fans became problematised through a repetition which, like every repetition, acquires something new from being repeated. Being a viewer one can see two forms of consciousness working simultaneously – the pre-existing image is called into mind, as well as thereby also being disfigured and mocked. On the other hand, this re-figuration of the image of Milošević also points in the direction of a policing of the boundaries of the sayable: the new discourse of power that present's itself as »innovative« in comparison with the former communist one is also mocked in the interest of those who wish to continue to say what has always been said (by the communists). Furthermore, paradoxically, the parody also preserves the image it is trying to dis-figure – naturally only as something being problematised. In this way again the whole range of possible links and points of involvement is kept wide open. This intervention can thus provoke articulations that go in completely different directions and affirm existing fascinations and resistance as well as problematising them.

More Parodies, Acts of Destruction and a New Aesthetics of Poverty

Only a few months later, during the winter of 1996/97, this image-struggle went on in a heated form in the almost four-month-long student protest known as the daily »walks« through the city.³⁸ The parody forms present in *Faluserbia* and also in other actions of art-groups such

38 The demonstrations lasted from mid-November 1996 until mid-March 1997. The reason was the announcement of the results of the second round of local elections in November 17, 1996 in Belgrade, where the

success of the opposition was not recognised. The demonstrations called for the establishment of an election-commission to prevent the theft of votes.

39 Interview with Jovan Čekić, February 17, 2004.

as *Led Art* or *Škart* were thereby heavily adopted. During the demonstrations, for example, a huge doll in the shape of Slobodan Milošević was carried around, dressed in prison clothes with a convict's number showing the date of the demonstration – »17111996«. Another action was to sit a paper-dummy in form of Milošević in a coffin shaped like the SPS symbol (a red arrow) and sink it in the Danube. The party symbol and the figure of Milošević were also mocked on many other banners and posters. The red arrow, for example, was lampooned as a punk hairdo. Constant whistling, pot-and-pan concerts and loud drumming accompanied these interventions and later became their distinguishing mark. When at the turn of the year the police cordon and demonstrators confronted each other face to face for weeks, some demonstrators provoked the police by holding huge mirrors up to them and thereby confronting them with their own image (picture 6), using them as »models« for caricatures or by parading before them as »party-card holders«.

During these demonstrations, avant-garde aesthetic tricks were also taken up programmatically for certain political goals. Jovan Čekić, who worked for the marketing-agency *Saatchi & Saatchi* and as an editor of the magazine *New Moments in Belgrade*, and who was recruited by the students as their PR adviser, asserted:



Picture 6: Mirroring, Protesting, Belgrade 1996/97 © Vesna Pavlović

My approach was that we need some kind of Dadaism or surrealist-approach [...] some kind of joke [...] this was my strategy, don't explain anything, just request: we want passports, we want to go to Europe, we want democracy [...] We had a very strong experience with the avant-garde, with Dadaism and surrealism, the first Dadaists and surrealists here in Belgrade had strong connections with Paris and in my opinion it was our experience, our culture [...] people know about that even when they were not so educated [...] And in my opinion it was a good strategy, because all strong nationalists were very angry, because of that kind of joke, because of that kind of surrealist approach.³⁹

Here again a belief in the productivity and efficiency of certain aesthetic forms was invoked against the reigning image-cult. Despite this quite similar use of avant-garde methods for problematising the Milošević-regime, members of *Magnet* and the *School of Avant-garde* distanced themselves verbally quite often from the use of this formal vocabulary during the student protest – even if they themselves sometimes participated actively in the demonstrations – by calling the »walks« the »pumping out of energy« or the »manipulations of certain politicians«. In public space the diverse actions merged to an homogeneous »carnival of the streets« which was also fed by further colourful interventions by other art-groups, NGO's and theatre collectives – *Women in Black*, *Led Art*, *DAH-Theater*, *Škart*, etc. In this way a formation of protest emerged, which occupied space, gave a voice to and gained visibility through the dissemination of specific aesthetic forms. Avant-garde aesthetic tricks served the opposition groups to expose their differences compared to the others, that is, the »party-card holders« and »nationalists« in a provocative way and at the same time using these forms they were able to give a unifying, recognisable surface to demands and attitudes that were quite divided. Avant-garde, parodying forms here embodied demands, wishes, projects and fears from quite different sides, which led to a relation of equivalence between the diverse aesthetic statements so that these forms became a symbolic »umbrella« for general opposition to the Milošević regime.

The Milošević regime answered this in itself quite contradictory opposition culture, though »unified« under one aesthetic form, by organising counter-demonstrations dominated by folkloristic topoi and forms, as well as flags and posters of the leader. At the turn of the year, 1996/97, the situation seemed to have reached a deadlock: On one side were the students and the opposition with their avant-garde, burlesque and carnivalesque forms, and on the other side there were the counter-demonstrations by the Milošević fans with the above mentioned chanting: »We love you, Sloba! – I love you, too.« Participants in the »walks« were mostly young and »urban« people, – people from Belgrade. The counter-demonstrations were lar-

40 Towards the end, the Milošević regime tried to »cover« the aesthetic language of the opposition, for example by taking over Radio B92 in 1999, but primarily during the demonstrations that accompanied the bombing of Belgrade in 1999, where in part style-elements of the aesthetic language of the student protest were taken up and where designers from this movement became employed for the production of their »own« PR material.

41 »Otpor« means »resistance«. Today it is no longer a secret that *Otpor*'s activity was financed completely by the US and that its members were trained by CIA-agents. Because of its success in Serbia, *Otpor* was invited to pass on its strategies to other groups in form of »seminars« and »training-courses«: in 2003 in Georgia, today among other places in Venezuela, but also in the USA or for No-Global activists in northern Europe.

42 Besides the above-mentioned placative symbols, *Otpor* also carried on the burlesque tradition of the student protest and because of this several of their actions can be subsumed under the »neo-avant-garde« appearances emerging in manifold ways in Serbia in the 1990s.

43 »We wanted to be political, we wanted to have people coming from different parties and making *Otpor* really universal, we didn't wanted to be »left« or »right«, we wanted to be »progressive« [...] for us »progressive« meant that you're not limited by left or right, to take the best from everything and just push for what was for us really important and that was to overthrow Milošević. For us that meant taking money from the Americans and funding our whole organisation almost completely on American funding, knowing, that it will be the hardest part to swallow for the Serbs especially since the bombing. That meant for us being completely rational, realistic.« Interview with Milija Jovanović, March 2, 2004.

44 Even in the beginning and mid-1990's eggs were thrown at the RTS building and television monitors were smashed on the streets.

gely by the older generation and people from rural regions who were bussed in to the pro-Milošević events. This stalemate between the opponents was also expressed in a slogan the demonstrators raised to promote a new tactic: »A cordon against a cordon«.

Finally, the demonstrators' demands were met in mid-March 1997 with the recognition of the opposition's election results. For many activists the walks ended nevertheless with the disappointment, as they only had fostered a victory for the still very divided opposition, which could not and would not considerably change the whole situation. The long period and the inflexibility of the deadlock, as well as the pronounced ritualisation of protest in general also indicate that these two »power-blocs« mutually fortified each other. The students' and the Belgrade opposition's use of parody in an avant-garde tradition ossified a rift that was already present during socialism, but was widened again during the Milošević period (and was temporarily strongly encouraged by the regime) between an »airy«, »decadent«, »urban« elite, on the one hand, and the »rooted to the soil«, »populist« culture of the »simple rural people«, on the other. While the opposition could provoke the »others«, that is, the regime-supporters, with these aesthetic forms and could thus make their own projects and wishes visible, these forms were read by the »others« as evidence of the »anti-Serbian« attitude, »manipulation«, »radicalism« and even the »fascist mentality« of the demonstrators. These differing perceptions were linked to each other by these aesthetic forms. Because such forms were seen in this antagonist way by many spectators, they transformed themselves into significant, nodal points of perception that mutually reinforce each other.⁴⁰

Only after the bombardment of Belgrade by Nato in 1999 did a new group emerge which inserted symbols in public space and used a tactic that could break the stalemate between the opposition and the regime's supporters: *Otpor*⁴¹ emerged to some extent from the 1996/97 student protests. It adopted some of their methods, but generally they emphatically changed the tactics against the Milošević regime. Parody was still used,⁴² but principally activists now banked on the dissemination of a single, very easily read symbol, a black fist in »Techno-style« on white background, as well as the constant repetition of slogans like »he is finished« (»Gotov Je«). The portrait of Milošević was no longer co-used in their own expressions. The most decisive move was that *Otpor*'s activities did not initially focus on Belgrade. The movement built itself up in the provincial towns, allowing it to shake off the negative association between Belgrade and elitist, urban opposition. *Otpor* operated inclusively, in an offensive way, addressing voters in entire Serbia and avoiding any impression of Belgrade-centralism with provocative marketing tactics. The success of this movement was that – in a time of growing dissatisfaction with the regime – its symbols and aesthetic language were able to attract ever more different demands and wishes of diverse social groups (NGOs, workers' associations, syndicates, pensioners' and women's groups), to incorporate them and link them together. *Otpor* understood itself as »progressive«,⁴³ although it did not have a specific programme. Thus, the movement was not able to succeed as party and to collect a significant number of votes after the fall of the regime. They then also had to leave their army of supporters, who came from widely differing orientations, in a situation of political insecurity that had scarcely changed.

In the course of the struggles lasting until the fall of Milošević on October 5, 2000, there were more and more ritual demolitions of his portrait, of portraits of his allies and family members and of prestige buildings connected with the regime. Black paint was thrown at Milošević's portrait radiating from the poster-walls or his face was daubed with blue, his eyes and those of his wife and of other SPS and JUL politicians were scratched out, and their portraits covered with abusive graffiti, with the slogan »he is finished« or the image of the black fist.



Picture 7: Clear Face of Serbia (Detail), Branimir Karanović, Belgrade since 1997 to 2003 © Branimir Karanović

(picture 7) The images were so to speak »punished« because of the offences of the social actors they embodied. Other representation channels were also sometimes triumphally demolished and abused. On banners and city-walls was written »Switch off the television, switch on your brain« or »I think, so I don't watch RTS«. On October 5, the day of the fall of the regime, demonstrators finally demolished a luxury perfumery, part of Milošević's son's extensive properties which had become a symbol for the new glamour capitalism of the

45 On the history of image-initiative and iconoclastic activities in Christian culture cf. Bredekamp, Horst: *Kunst als Medium sozialer Konflikte. Bilderkämpfe von der Spätantike bis zur Hussitenrevolution*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1975.

46 Permanent members are Dragan Protić and Djordje Balmazović. The group has existed since the beginning of the 1990s. *Škart* means »scraps«.

newly emerged *nouveau riche*, based on illegal activities, just as the parliament now became slowly demolished and parts of it were taken away in savouring the fruits of victory.

As different as images used by the regime were, as various were the forms of resistance against them. Image initiatives and iconoclastic activities⁴⁵ thus depend upon each other and enter an open contest. But opposition groups did not operate only with image-destruction or using parody, mockery, ritual demolition and image-mutilations against the newly emerging image-worship in Serbia in the 1990's, but also developed a certain aesthetic style and employed it against the detested presence of public images: a new »aesthetics of poverty« emerged, for which perhaps the design of the *Škart* group is most characteristic. From 1992/93, *Škart*⁴⁶ designed much of the PR material for various opposition groups – books, folders, invitation cards, brochures, posters etc. In addition, they created very different, in part very provocative, but in part also »reconciling« interventions in the social space of Belgrade. All these interventions and products show a specific aesthetic. They use only »shabby materials« and simple production methods (grey or brown recycled paper, old printing presses). They employed only very simple forms, sometimes in Bauhaus-style, and sometimes taking up also »funny« signs from everyday life (a childish drawing of a house, coupling frogs). If there are any colours at all, then they too are simple and placative: white, black and red dominate, but sometimes green-black colours on rose-coloured recycled paper are used. The aesthetic interventions in public space range from *It Does not Have to Be Anything for the Start* 1992, when they distributed poems such as *The Sadness of Potential Consumers* or *The Sadness of Potential Travellers* printed on grey cardboard to passers-by, to the work with refugee women in 2000 with whom they embroidered their wishes onto traditional, white wall-display cloths, which normally only carry sentimental sayings, and presented them publicly. After autumn 2000 they had themselves literally wrapped in rags with the foundation of *Škart Lumpen Orchestra* (picture 8) and in this way started to participate in a more »constructive« and »entertaining« way



Picture 8: *Škart Lumpen Orchestra*, 2003 © *Škart*

of rebuilding after the war. Besides *Škart* itself, the *Škart Lumpen Orchestra* involves a larger number of young people (motivated by a public appeal) as well as musicians from the popular Belgrade rock band *Jarboli* who rehearse weekly and participate in Belgrade cultural life with small musical performances, and also travel together across the regions (also to Croatia) performing as street-musicians in rag-outfit. With these lumpen aesthetics *Škart* is turning against the opulent neo-capitalism in the Belgrade city centre and its loud, garish glamour-aesthetic which both survived the fall of the Milošević regime. At the same time, the singers appear with their self-made outfits and a visibly exposed rejection of conventional self-performance-styles as the avant-garde of an enhanced »individualisation« that generally accompanies social change after the velvet revolution.

Škart again demonstrates that aesthetic forms are emphatically involved, yet in a double-edged way, in how people – also politically – relate to and distinguish themselves from each other. Even if the examples mentioned here are quite spectacular, we can draw the more general conclusion from them that through the execution of many small acts that determine everyday life we sustain a reference-system, sometimes perforated by exceptional events. In this system we are passionately involved, even if the belief in this reference-system, similar to the belief in God, is not dependent on the evidence or on knowledge. This belief is a matter of certainty which doesn't require proof. Images and aesthetic style from very different, sometimes contesting aesthetic traditions are, like our perceptions, emphatically involved in the perpetuation and in the transformation of this reference system. In our deeds we are trapped in images. Yet, as this image-struggle in Belgrade in the 1990's has shown, we can also use images and aesthetic forms to push back the walls of these prisons and to problematise them. We can also make a start through aesthetic provocation and we can thus enter into a struggle concerning the meaning of the world – but the result of this struggle will depend on the reactions of the others. As *Škart* showed with the distribution of the »sorrow« poems: »It does not have to be anything for the start«.



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