Abstract: This paper will explore ways of dissent regarding policies of memorialization of Yugoslavia, its common past and recent wars. It will show the difficulties for the development of official memory policies that are not resulting in coherent practices of remembrance in Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These questions are not debated in public and an explicit memory policy does not exist anywhere in the Balkans due to changing ideologies during transition and numerous old and new taboos around the negative past. There is no social consensus on any of the crucial issues of remembrance (while temporary social consensus during the war years was based only on fear and hatred toward the other).

The key theme of this paper is linked to counter-monuments and anti-monuments as bottom-up expressions of the feelings of dissent toward official (implicit and explicit) memory and monument policies. Social oppositional counter movements have often inspired different attempts by artists and civil society (that often go together) to react and offer their visions and options of memory and commemorative politics, particularly regarding taboos and the negative past. Exploring the work of Jochen Gerz in Europe, its impact in the region as well as regional counter-monument projects and initiatives, this paper will try to respond to the following question: have alternative socio-cultural movements produced a platform for genuine counter-monument practices?

Keywords: counter-monument, national memory policy, culture of memory, memory practices, Jochen Gerz, Balkans.

I. INTRODUCTION

Monument policy is at the heart of national memory, creating places and influencing ways of mourning and celebrating heroes and victims. Canons of memory, the intentions of socio-political elites, as well as the relationship between memory and oblivion represent a culture of memory - a socially-constructed remembrance.

Culture of memory is a "body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present and by implications, its future; where focus in fact is not the past, but on serious matters of the present (Bodnar, 1992: 15); it is also social consensus around silence and emptiness - taboos which reveal more than they can hide.
It is exactly the negative past that was sent to oblivion by the common will of political leaders and people who do not want to live within a culture of shame. The only country that was forced to confront its negative past – Germany after the Second World War (Young, 1992), enabled its social scientists and artists to develop different approaches to politics of memory and remembrance.

Jochen Gerz began to work with the negative past in 1968 by developing street performance actions. During this time his practices became more participative, involving different communities. Solo actions could gather public and media interest but obviously had some limits in changing the culture of memory of society and the face of remembrance. Ephemeral actions could provoke but were also quickly forgotten in the collective conscience, particularly because they raised painful and controversial themes from oblivion. “The spiritus movens of his artistic practice is his suspicion of any form of totalization of cultural sermonizing, of the politics of representation and of representations of politics as well. He distrust the way in which, in western capitalist culture, cultural meanings are presented as natural and common sensical and, employing an enigmatic, laconic and not readily transparent mode of artistic expression, he consciously opposes culture’s amazing power to normalize (or doxify) signs and images however disparate (or contesting) they may be” (Pejić in Blazević, project dossier, 2007).

Jochen Gerz developed numerous projects in Germany in the last 30 years, some of them commissioned, some developed on his own initiative. In Saarbrucken he developed a collective production with students from Saar College of Visual Arts. Together, they interviewed Jewish communities in Germany to establish a list of all Jewish cemeteries that existed in Germany before the Second World War. After obtaining the names of the cemeteries that disappeared they engraved them on the underside of pavement stones in the boulevard in front of Saarbrucken Palace (the seat of the state parliament) – replacing original stones with those with engraved names, until all 2,146 stones had been set. This process took three years to complete and was realized as an act of resistance and dissent toward official but non-spoken politics of social amnesia (Huyssen, 2001). A majority of German cities have forgotten Jewish graveyards due to the fact that the Jewish community disappeared in the genocide – there were no survivors to keep the cemeteries functioning or to keep memories about it alive.

In this project the fact that those names were written under stones (thus not visible or readable in this ‘Monument Against Racism’, as this pavement is today known) shows that the main intention of Gerz was to provoke and to direct attention to these 2,146 communities dispersed throughout Germany about their responsibility toward keeping “the memory of the other”. This invisible monument is a counter-monument in its essence, dealing with the negative past and indicating that memory policies still have many deliberately forgotten issues; sometimes the reasons are linked to prescriptive forgetting (Connerton, 2008) or to shameful silence (Dragicević Šešić & Stefanović, 2012).

In most of his actions Gerz dealt with the negative past outside of the German artistic system, outside of
major art events and galleries. His intention was to question different issues of the visual representation of German history and culture of memory in order to offer a new base for cultural remembrance of the negative past, which is usually avoided in the construction and representation of national identity. Thus from memory as storage he would contribute toward the creation of functional memory (Assmann, 2012). This is also an attempt to make the counter-monument as anti-policy regarding official memory and monument policies – a policy that does not share an obsession with materiality, solidity, and visibility, which are usually the key characteristics of monuments.

Another important element of his work is a participatory process; Gerz is not obsessed with individual authorship. The majority of his work was signed with his wife Esther Shalev-Gerz, but also with numerous communities throughout Europe that participated in projects he initiated: students in Saar (1993), homeless citizens of Paris (2000), theatre audiences of Berlin (1998), Ministry of Finance civil servants in Germany (2000), voices of forgotten citizens of the GDR, etc. All of these were conceptualized as platforms for participation, addressing and provoking citizens to actively contribute. The most famous is the Monument against Fascism, developed in Hamburg-Harburg, commissioned by the municipal council. Gerz and his wife invited citizens to write their names and different signs against fascism on a twelve-meter tall column.

The process of completing Monument against Fascism lasted from October 1986 to its disappearance on 10 November 1993. The monument was lowered into the ground eight times, and today only a text that is written in seven languages reminds visitors of the 70,000 signatures that are “buried” together with column. This sense is explicitly stated: “In the end it is only we ourselves who can stand up against injustice” (Monument against Fascism, 1994).

In his works, Gerz underlines the fact that memory is not a national question, as he always opens space for transnational forms of memory practices. He succeeded in raising social empathy within communities that have not kept memories of their victims, but he also opened the public sphere for discussions and for the generation of new social perspectives by citizens themselves. Thus, his last project, “The Square of European Promise” (Bochum Germany, 2007-2015), will incorporate the names of 14,500 participants etched into basalt slabs.

“Gerz’s approach to art in the public realm is, and remains, characterised by an interrogation of official (implicit and explicit) memory policy and practices, of taboos and repressed historical truths, of the importance of the public realm and civil society engagement in that realm, and altogether an openness to the complexity of the public realm and its spaces.” (Dragićević Šešić, 2016) This deep commitment to “representation” and phantasms around the negative past, as well as his readiness to explore and understand different issues relevant to different socio-political contexts, is rare in a contemporary art world obsessed with biennials, fairs, and the demands of the market. Therefore Gerz’s art practice is a unique phenomenon of the contemporary European cultural space, succeeding to influence (at least sporadically) other artists and cultural operators also willing to address social and cultural taboos of the negative past.
II. MEMORY AND MONUMENT POLICIES IN THE BALKANS

During the 1990s all Balkan countries were facing new needs for revisioning history and memory politics in order to offer new bases for recently-gained national independence. At the same time, new policies were needed to justify the necessity for the dissolution of Yugoslavia based on victimization and counting different forms of “repression” within Yugoslavia. Thus, from Croatia to Macedonia, public spaces were used and monuments created to transfer the new state message to communities that were suffering both from wars and from economic transition (Dragićević Šešić, 2011b). Monument policies incorporated strategies that started with the destruction of monuments. As such, numerous antifascist monuments linked to the Second World War were destroyed.

To understand the extent of this destruction we can examine the monuments of only one sculptor in Croatia: Vojin Bakić, a sculptor of Serbian origin, whose four brothers were killed in the genocide of 1942. As such, he was considered a symbol of both antifascism and communism.

Destroyed monuments of his in the period 1990-1995 were:
- Memorial Park Dotrscina near Zagreb. Seven sculptures destroyed.

Partially destroyed monuments and memory sites:
- Monument on Petrova Gora commemorating Operation Storm.
- Destroyed memorial sign on the family house in Bjelovar devoted to the four brothers Bakic who were killed.
- Destroyed name on the family grave, at the cemetery in St. Andrija, Bjelovar.
- Altering the street name Brother Bakić (in Bjelovar).
- Removal of Tito’s bust from Veliko Trojstvo to the City Museum Bjelovar.

Today, the situation has changed and Vojin Bakić is considered the most important sculptor of his generation in Croatia. The Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb presented a huge exhibition of his work (“Vojin Bakić: Svjetlonosne forme”) in 2013-14, and the reconsideration of the importance of his public monuments in Croatia has been put on the agenda. This shows the extent to which cultural policy can influence memory policy and practices. Most of the monuments to antifascism were not restored, but Bakić as an artist was given a proper place within art history. Still, all the values that he stood for were suppressed.

New monument policies have flooded the Balkans because it was the easiest way for the new governments to give a face to new values and to
demonstrate their power. Monument policies offered an easy possibility for political promotion, facilitating the representation of political messages of the new governing structures.

Different groups supported by public policies raised monuments to provoke “The Other” - explicitly humiliating the other, usually minority ethnic groups or those defending different values and ideology. For that reason numerous crosses were raised on the hills facing Muslim parts of certain cities (Mostar, Skopje, Zlatište near Sarajevo), also monuments erected to Draža Mihajlović in Serbia to oppose the ideology of socialism and antifascism (in spite of the fact that the defenders of Draža Mihajlović want to represent him as a strong antifascist).

In Croatia, 17 monuments to the former president Franjo Tudjman were erected, particularly in the regions neighbouring territories where Serbs lived before the Operation Storm exodus. Besides monuments to Tudjman, specific gratitude monuments were raised to foreign supporters such as Mock and Genscher.

A similar policy of gratitude monuments could be seen in Pristina (to Bill Clinton, for example), together with an attempt to use monumentalization as a form of celebrating martyrs of their liberation fight (monuments to Adem Jashari), which is the most conventional form of monument policies (celebrating war heroes and martyrs).

In Macedonia, monuments have covered public spaces in Skopje referring to the reconstruction of Macedonian national identity. Since the rejection of the State of Macedonia’s entrance into NATO (NATO conference in Tbilisi, 2007), taken as public humiliation due to a Greek veto, the government decided to create the project Skopje 2014 and to transfer Macedonian national identity from Slavic to Ancient Macedonian. The main aim was to provoke and irritate Greece with reference to Ancient Macedonian history as its own past.

Thus, the story of the Macedonian nation having its roots in the glorious state of Macedonia as myths of ancestry-mythomoteur (Armstrong, 1982) and its crucial figures Alexander the Great and Philip II became the starting point for new official memory policies of the Macedonian government, by using strategies of renaming as well as monument policy in developing provocative populistic practices irritating their neighbours (Georgievksa Jakovlea, 2014; Bulatović, 2014). Claiming and using antique Macedonian origin as their mythomoteur, they provoked both Albanians (who claim Illyrian origins as the oldest in the Balkans) and Greeks, taking the glorious past of Alexander the Great from their identity.

Within memory politics every new country has selected a different period to be celebrated and glorified. The medieval past and maps of Serbian and Croatian kingdoms became popular artefacts of media and commercial production; monuments to St. Sava, Despot Stevan Lazarevic, King Lazar, and many others were erected in Republika Srpska and Serbia.

In Croatia the return of the Ban Jelachich monument to the main public square in Zagreb symbolized the return to a different type of perspective on the position of Croatia in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In a similar manner the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina began to be seen as a positive historical event in the BH Federation, while Gavrilo Princip and other participants in the Mlada Bosna movement were treated as terrorists.

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The treatment of this movement in Serbia was exactly the opposite. Historical facts have also been revised, and this Yugoslav movement for the liberation and unification of South Slavic nations was Serbianized. Monuments to Gavrilo Princip were erected in his honour. Particularly significant was a monument given as a present to Belgrade from Republika Srpska (2014) as a sign of his new role in history – as the first one who enabled Serbian parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina to gain their statehood. All this shows the difficulty for the development of official memory policies in Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (a Dayton Agreement country which is still today distorted and divided in different ways that are paralyzing every decision regarding shared public policies).

This complex memory processes has been fostered throughout the region by new school programs and manuals offering different interpretation of historical facts. Also, there are numerous civil society groups, cultural centres, institutions, and artists which, by different media, tried to contradict those historical revisions and attempts at creating separate histories based on a dissonant and controversial heritage (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996). There is no doubt that many segments of ethno-national histories were neglected in Socialist Yugoslavia. However, new memory policies went too far in correcting those injustices toward new manipulations and new suppressions. This is most obvious with the continual politics of forgetting regarding many historical events, such as the Thessaloniki process in 1916. Most of the events linked to the Balkan Wars as being part of the negative past in Serbia are also suppressed (e.g. the conquering of the Albanian ports Elbasan and Durres). Also, many of the facts related to the Second World War are suppressed due to different politics of forgetting the active collaboration during the occupation (in Croatia, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina).

The Greek Civil War and its Macedonian victims still has to find its place in the history courses of Macedonia but also in other former Yugoslav countries, as the closure of the Greek border in July 1949 is a part of the common negative past (done to obtain Western credits). In a different manner in Montenegro, the elements linking Serbian and Montenegrin history and culture are deliberately forgotten – not as a negative past but as a potentially confusing past or as a “type of forgetting as necessity for a new identity” (Connerton, 2008).

Jovan Komšić (2015) analyses four axes of division in contemporary Serbian society (which can also be applied to other Balkan societies): socio-economic, historical-ethnic, cultural (value-based), and ideological. All those divisions can be seen in memory and monument policies and practices. Every government intends to declare its “difference” to the previous by using those divisions and demonstrating their stand according to those lines in offering new interpretations of history, ethnic divisions, and consequently emphasizing “cultural gaps” that prevent any form of cooperation, dialogue, or social consensus.

It was only in a short period of the first decade of the new century that public policies in Croatia, Serbia, and Macedonia consciously involved NGO and civil society leaders in public policy-making. Thus, independent actors from the “other Serbia” introduced issues of conflicted, dissonant memories and their politics of remembering as themes within the public cultural sector. That was the case in Belgrade with
Branka Prpa as the director of the City Archive, Katarina Živanović as the director of the Museum of History of Yugoslavia, Ana Stolić as the director of the Museum of History of Serbia, et al who raised numerous actions in countering the current of official processes. However, all of their actions were more exceptions than rules; with political and cultural policy changes (2008), all of them had been removed from their leadership positions. Thus the memory themes they have introduced (socialist urban heritage, the remnants of the non-aligned movement, history of Roma - citizens of Belgrade; Jews as lost neighbours; Belgrade’s forgotten concentration camps, etc.) are still on the agenda as “the surest engagement with memory lies in its perpetual irresolution” (Young, ibid, 270).

Official monument policy today is facing numerous problems. As there are no explicit memory policies, and numerous issues are sensitive enough to be openly debated, the calls for art projects are often unclear (especially given that all governments are coalition governments uniting political parties of different ideologies, and with different responsibilities and views toward the “negative past”). Governments launch a call under the pressure of public opinion without giving a clue as to what the real purpose of the monument is. Questions that are avoided are: how to memorialize those mobilized to “defend Yugoslavia” who were killed in the wars of the 1990s on the territories of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina; how to memorialize victims of the NATO bombardment – and who is the perpetrator in this case?; how to celebrate policeman killed in Albanian attacks on Kosovo before 1999, when Kosovo was a legal part of Serbia (and could he be among those who exacted revenge on Albanian civilians a few days before?); and, if Kosovo is a part of Serbia why we do not memorialize innocent Albanian victims?

Although organized through competitions and with juries, since 2001 nearly all competitions failed. Juries are scrutinizing the proposals and often postponing decisions, as values embedded both in the calls for proposals and in the monument proposals themselves were not clear. Slowly, memory about the contest (concours) disappears from the public sphere. Thus, all those concerns and dissonant memories which provoked the need to raise a monument in the first place also act as paralyzing factors, showing the extent to which there is no consensus about the common values one monument should reincarnate. A real public debate is absent and political leadership does not share the same concerns and visions.

III. GERZ AS AN INSPIRATION FOR BALKAN ARTISTS

The main research question of this text is who is the Balkan Jochen Gerz? Who are the artists who have been inspired by his work and who have tried to introduce the practice of counter-monument-making in the Balkans? It is important to also explore to what extent official public memory policies has provoked counter movements and inspired diversified attempts of artists and civil society groups to react using the counter-monument as a strategy? Although it is sometimes difficult to measure the influences and interactions happening in the art sphere, it is obvious that the topic of memory entered the social sciences and humanities only at the end of the century, and that artists have been first to offer their visions and reflections, as they are often the first to be asked for their services for public commemorations, celebrations, and the creation of memory sites.
The word counter-monument has been translated as anti-monument and codified in the region through the works of Todor Kuljić, a sociologist and expert in the culture of memory. "Countermonument is multi-dimensional, expresses more alternative memories, it is turned toward antiheroes and to community" (Kuljić, 2015). However, many projects and texts written in the region in the English language have used the word anti-monument, usually meaning a counter-monument, and sometimes in the sense of an ironic monument to a despised person.

In the project "Normalization – Dedicated to Nikola Tesla, Suggestions for the Anti-Monument", launched by the WHW curatorial team and held in Gallery Nova, the team wanted to deconstruct a new form of manipulation with the personality of Nikola Tesla. "In this way we are asking where Tesla was in 90’s and why no one thought about him as Croatian heritage. It was because of his Serbian origin. And now, three monuments are in construction, all like XIX century monuments - and he was the man that brought the future to us", said Sabolović. This proposal for a Nikola Tesla anti-monument (counter-monument) gathered 48 works by different authors, including a poem by Laurie Anderson translated in Croatian.

Another proposal, developed within the political and not the cultural realm, came from Herzegovina: an initiative to create an anti-monument to Wolfgang Petrisch. This proposal created irony around the role of Petrisch in Bosnian politics, as the initiative asked for a monument representing Petrisch in a Stalinesque dictatorial posture on a tank with the ATM of some Austrian bank. This proposal exposed itself as a nationalist pamphlet, as it was clear that the word anti-monument was not understood by the organizers.

The word anti-monument was also used in a different meaning in cases of critical analysis of the removal of the Tesla monument in Zagreb (the City Mayor in 2006 moved the monument from the park of the Institute Rudjer Bošković in the center of the city). Thus, Saša Blagus has written: "Institute has lost Tesla monument, while Zagreb has not received new monument, it just received anti-monument" (Bago-Majača, 2009). This meaning of the word anti-monument is used to describe political actions that are not part of a coherent memory policy, wanting to quickly gather some political popularity. In a few other texts the notion of anti-monument was also used in slightly different tones, but in further analysis we will focus on the anti-monument projects that are using the same idea that sustained Jochen Gerz in his counter-monument practices.

"De/construction of Monuments" by Dunja Blazević and SCCA in Sarajevo (Blažević, 2008) was the most important project which really introduced and discussed the concept of the counter-monument in the region. It was realized in the period 2004-07, constructed as a multidisciplinary project with several dimensions, including: series of panel discussions; lectures and seminars; artistic presentations; exhibitions and actions in the public space. The most important part of the project was a competition for new monuments. It was not only that through lectures and seminars the project questioned important experiences of the post-Yugoslav counter-monument works, but it initiated a new generation of artists to react to official memory policies. Thus, the project enabled a systematization of different counter-monument practices which happened throughout the former Yugoslavia as individual acts. The project
followed the development of the counter-monument since the 1990s, analysing works by: Mladen Stilinović, Irwin, Sanja Iveković, and Raša Todosijević; the middle generation, with Erzen Shkololi and Kurt & Plasto; and the youngest emerging artists ready to critically analyse and offer interpretations of the symbolic representation of the past.

The project was realized in five phases, each debating a different issue. The first, from 5-10 July 2004, was devoted to art in the public space as an introductory seminar about the meaning and reading of public monuments. The seminar was led by Bojana Pejić, whose main guest was Gerz with his presentation "Monument to a Negative Past". Important contributions were given by Sanja Iveković ("Lady Rosa of Luxembourg"), Braco Dimitrijević ("Anti-Monuments") and Kurt & Plasto ("By the Commission Decision: Everyone to One's Own").

The first seminar presented artists famous for installations in public spaces that contradict the typical official policies of representation. The presence of Gerz, whose “Exit/the Dachau Project” (1972-74) started questioning the processes of the institutionalization of history, was extremely important in indicating to what extent an artist can take the lead in social agenda-setting regarding the culture of memory. Like Gerz, who from that moment on was taking responsibility for the cultural remembrance of the past of his own country that was not dealing with "the past itself but with the process of facing the past – work that only be done in the present" (Pejić, op. cit. p. 63), numerous artists in the region discussed controversial and dissonant historical issues.

Sanja Iveković’s project "Lady Rosa of Luxembourg" questions both misuse of women’s bodies to glorify the past as well as monument policy as the main identity pillar in the representation of nationhood. Her replica of the monument devoted to the victims of the First World War in Luxembourg had a new statement with texts in three languages. In English feminine stereotypes are quoted: "Madonna, whore, bitch and virgin". French was used for words symbolizing the most positive stereotypes of nationhood (all in the female gender): la résistance, la justice, la liberté, la independence. In German, it was words related to contemporary cultural production: Kitsch, Kultur, Kapital and Kunst. The sculpture was also changed – the figure of the woman was a figure of a pregnant woman. With this Iveković wanted to point out that a woman’s body should not be used for the glorification of war victories, as women are often raped and tortured as victims of war, which is usually forgotten when the time of liberation comes and the celebration of warriors.

Works by Kurt & Plasto are a typical example of artistic action in a public space, questioning the real meaning of public space and its ownership; their action has been inspired by the removal of the sculptures (busts) of the famous Bosnian antifascist artists and national heroes from the park in the city center. First they put their photographs on empty pedestals; after a while they replaced them with self-portrait sculptures (busts) on empty pedestals, which provoked a significant public discussion. This finally led to the return of the seven busts – but the eighth one, the national hero Veselin Masleša, was not re-erected (as he had been directly linked to the communist past).

Braco Dimitrijević presented his extensive work related to history and memorialization. Since 1972 he has developed projects that question the authorities
who are designating persons and places of historical importance. As a student he made a marble plaque with the inscription “This could be a place of historical interest”. He used this during his travels and exhibitions, pointing out that any place can become a memory space – lieu de mémoire (Nora, 1998). This led to a work titled “11 of March - This Could be a Day of Historical Importance” – the obelisk in Carrara marble (Charlottenburg 1979).

Braco Dimitrijević’s numerous works – from “Monument to a Passerby” in Barclay Square (London 1972), with huge photographs of casual passers-by that were mounted on important buildings throughout the world, to his “Triptychos Post Historicus” – made him a pioneer of conceptual art in the Balkans, who has questioned relations between history, identity bearers, and everyday life. His monuments to anonymous people and the relations he established among the most famous artists and ordinary people in his dual compositions (“About two Artists: Leonardo – Evans”, 1988) are counter-monuments in their essential message: opposing established ways of pedestalization and glorification of so-called historical personalities.

The first seminar was followed by numerous exhibitions, panel discussions, and presentations. The most important part of the project was a competition for a counter-monument proposal, for a new monument trying “to demystify and demythologize the past, to deconstruct the realities of transition in post-socialist, particular in post Yugoslav countries so that our time could be thought in a new and creative way” (Blazević, 2006). More than 30 proposals were received and grouped in several areas:

- A) Interventions on existing monuments and objects
- B) Monument form – pedestrals
- C) Objects and words
- D) Monument – sign
- E) Ambience projects (interventions in nature and urban space)
- F) Monumental sculptures objects
- G) Banners

Proposals were extremely diversified not only in form but also in their relations toward different aspects of transitional life, gender issues, relations toward past, official monument policies, different ideologies, and finally problems of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, its identity and perspectives. There were proposals honoring childhood and mothers; or those questioning historical monuments to Tito, Regent F. Ferdinand, and Gavrilo Princip; as well as those suggesting monuments to monuments, to citizens of Bosnia, etc.

The proposals were evaluated by an international jury who chose three submissions – all from the group Monument form-pedestal. Two proposals (Braco Dimitrijević; Nermina Omerbegović & Aida Pašić) were supported unanimously and the third got 4 out of 5 votes (Nebojša Šerić Šoba). All three were erected, as the jury thought that all three expressed the intentions of the competition in the best possible way.

Braco Dimitrijević’s “Monument to the Victims of War and Cold War” is just a simple pedestal stone on which those words are written in three languages: “Under this stone there is a monument to the victims of the war and Cold war”. The work of Omerbegović and Pašić (also a pedestal, but smaller) was situated in Eglen Park to stimulate the participation of people in
public life. It could be used as a cornerstone for speakers or as a gathering place. On each side of the pedestal is written: „I see, I think, I speak”. The counter-monument by Nebojša Šerić Šoba gathered the most popularity and notoriety due to its dark humour. Erected in a form of a can symbolizing humanitarian aid sent to the inhabitants of Sarajevo during the siege, it still today raises contradictory feelings not only related toward the past but mostly toward the inappropriateness of present Western policies of humanitarian aid regarding numerous world crises.

To what extent the project “De/construction of Monuments” was subversive in its intentions and implementation is difficult to judge without specific research related to its effects. There is no doubt that this project succeeded in gathering all relevant agents from the region – activist artists, curators, art theoreticians, historians and social scientists, civil activists, organizations, and individuals creating a specific archive of initiatives and endeavours in this domain. A published book, a DVD of photos, and a video archive is worthy testimony to the time when arts were the key player in subversive reflections about crucial issues related to politics of memory and suppression.

The work of Monument Group (Belgrade-Tuzla, BH) is another example of counter-monument practices that are bypassing national (state) boundaries. The independent group of artists Discussion about Artwork (active between 2002 and 2006), provoked by competitions launched by the Belgrade City Municipality for a monument dedicated to wars on the territory of the former Yugoslavia (without a clear statement and position about the nature and character of these wars), has actively discussed, commented on, and decided to start a separate activity as the Monument Group. Its members include: Damir Arsenijević, Darinka Pop-Mitić, Svebor Midžić, Branimir Stojanović, Mlka Tomić, Nebojša Milekić, Jasmina Husanović, etc. (Tomić, 2015)

Each new competition generated a new challenge for a group work that usually opposed the ideology hidden in the proposal equalizing victims and perpetrators, focusing only on the Serbian victims and heroes. They organized public discussions in the wide field of culture of memory and monument politics, making clear why it was impossible even to name and realize a proposal for such a monument (as previously mentioned, none of those competitions succeeded in choosing a winner). As the group was created around a joint interest in contemporary arts and debating those practices, these new debates usually generated conflicts among the participants. The group Discussion about Artwork was soon dissolved.

At that time the work of Monument Group showed how artistivist projects (Milohnić, 2005) influence and form public memory from below by objecting official monument policies. Counter-monuments also intend to “influence a public memory, but are giving opportunities for discussions, debates. Thus Workshop Four faces of Omarska as serial of encounters, debates, testimonies, exhibitions have left important traces within Serbian public opinion” (Dragičević Šešić 2016). Those processes continue; there is no possibility to conclude, to come up with a result on a pedestal.

IV. CONCLUSION

To what extent work of Jochen Gerz was known in the Balkans prior to his guest lecture in Sarajevo is hard to
say. Regardless, counter-monument practices have been widely used since 1972 in the artistic work of Braca Dimitrijević (Dragićević Šešić in Manus & Vickery, 2016) and in numerous practices of civil society groups and artists engaged in alternative movements. The counter-monument offers a possibility for new links between artists, theoreticians/researchers, and activists, but unfortunately those “project-platforms” were rarely fully used in a real participatory manner, as artistic fields and scientific disciplines are quite separated (even within humanities and social sciences). Thus, there are no texts in economy, sociology, urbanism, demography, or history as such that are considering the artistic challenges of counter-monuments. However, there are a few texts in the field of cultural studies and culture of memory that are related, but crucial debates around counter-monuments were held within the theory of visual arts and related academic journals.

Although at times it might seem that the counter-monument is a part of the new ‘radical chic’ for artistic and cultural elites (when implemented during international biennials), it is often complex and difficult for intellectuals and the media to gain an understanding of these projects. Numerous counter-monument projects that are rarely discussed in the media (dealing not only with the negative past but also the negative present) usually were not perceived by the larger society – even casual passers-by would not stop to look and interact, as the symbolism and messages were too complex or not in accordance with populist politics and citizens’ comfort zones.

The task facing the artist and social activist is huge: “We need to develop a new internationalism, at least at the regional level of Europe, which could offer an alternative to the regression into nationalism which threatens all the European countries to some degree” (Bourdieu, 1998: 41). This can be done only if we face the past, however traumatic and shameful it was, and fight the politics of suppression that are reinforcing the continuity of social and national traumas.

ENDNOTES

[1] The historical archive of Belgrade has issued numerous publications and organized exhibitions devoted to memory of the antifascist past and the repression of memories of Nazi Germany and domestic collaborators (the concentration camp Banjica, the Century of Wars, Light and Darkness, etc.). www.arhiv-beograda.org/index.php/sr/izloze/prehistorija/izloze, accessed 10 December 2015.

[2] He further declares that maybe James Young was not the first to create this term, but the first who defined its notion. See www.kcrr.org/images/stories/.../ANTISPOMENIK.doc - Accessed 15 September 2015


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