

“Past Future Concrete” revisited: Ex-Yugoslav monuments shaped as destinations via online image practices

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Abstract

Spomenik is the Serbo-Croatian word for monument. Internationally, the term is used for the partisan monuments that were erected throughout the former Yugoslavia to commemorate events of the Second World War. With the wars in the 1990s that led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia, many of these objects became detached from their original function, and thus became a dissonant heritage between differing nationalist narratives of the past. With their modernist architecture, the Spomeniks have become, since the late 2000s, popular internet motifs, and tourists are now showing growing interest in visiting the monuments. In order to capitalize on and institutionalize this increasing attention, a cultural route for tourists has recently been established. In this process of valorization, presenting the condition and decay of the monuments and characterizing them as “lost” places, which has become a decisive aesthetic in their circulation online, plays a large role in the constitution of these sites of memory (*lieux de mémoire*). This picturesque image practice as a phenomenon of cosmopolitanism will be exemplified by online representations of the Tjentište Monument in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Key words

dissonant heritage, tourist gaze, valorisation, image practices

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1. Introduction

“Photos of Yugoslav monuments known as Spomeniks are often shared online, exoticized and wrenched from context” (Hatherley 2016), insists journalist Owen Hatherley in an essay about the “real” meaning behind the images of these often called “surrealistic” concrete objects that appeared online in the late 2000s. Atlas Obscura, a popular American tourist guide and online resource for unique, “off the path” destinations, has dedicated two full pages to the brutalist monuments of the former Yugoslavia, known “for their raw, imposing aesthetics” (Foer et al. 2016: 76). Furthermore, it offers an annual guided 13-day trip to the “Past Future Monuments of the Balkans” to explore the “otherworldly” monuments on a “dramatic road trip” across Southeastern Europe (SEE).¹ These exoticizing descriptions of adventure and alien objects (e.g. Surtees 2013) can be linked to the othering mechanisms of Balkanism (see Todorova 2009)² and lead directly into an ongoing moral debate on the behavior of tourists from the “Western world” towards this heritage of the Yugoslav Federal Republic (SFRY). However, social media representations, as part of a pop culture phenomenon around the Spomeniks, have been criticized as orientaling image practices, or were seen to be articulating disrespect for the victims of war, in whose memory the monuments were constructed (see Kulić 2018: 2f.).

Nevertheless, I want to show in this article that these image practices have an iconic origin in picturesque image practices that are often repeated in the photographic representation of decaying architectures. Through media affordances and the economic logic of social media communication, in recent years, these representations have become almost hegemonial regarding the circulating content about the national liberation (NOB) monuments online, as I intend to demonstrate with a small-scale analysis on Instagram. These image practices are even used by local people in their posts about the monuments and can be valued as a new approach towards this dissonant architectural heritage of Yugoslavia that is now becoming revalorized as a travel destination.

1 Atlas Obscura: Past Future Monuments of the Balkans. [2020-05-20] Retrieved from: <https://www.atlasobscura.com/unusual-trips/balkans>.

2 What Todorova describes as Balkanism is the practice of imagining parts of Southeastern Europe as the “cultural other” within European societies with a long intellectual tradition.

There are hundreds of these abstract WWII memorials across SEE.³ In 2012, local historians of architecture pointed out that:

"all the ideals these monuments used to stand for are forgotten and those remarkable structures now represent unpleasant cultural and architectural heritage with which the post war society is trying to establish relationships. Unfortunately, very often these monuments are left to decay" (Dizdarević – Hudović 2012: 455).

Directly after the wars of the 1990s, many locals understood the Spomeniks to be "Tito's property" – that is, remains of the socialist state that are detached from their lived experience (Dizdarević – Hudović 2012: 463). For the Yugoslavian leader Josip Broz Tito, these monuments, and architecture in general, were important tools of his policy to shape a Yugoslavian identity. He expressed the socialist representational needs of Yugoslavia as follows: "We must build and create something new. We should go somewhat more boldly and more contemporarily forward" (Tito 1963, in: Stevanović 2017: 116). Therefore, Tito advocated modernist discourse in the implementation of his socialist program. Architectures that prospered all over the country were to confirm that Yugoslavia was on the road of modernization. The use of abstract forms promoted the homogenization of the Yugoslavian people, emphasizing "brotherhood and unity", and working as a visual and supranational mode of expression (Stevanović 2017: 117–119, 125; Perica 2002: 100). However, these meanings, as well as the state model, began to fade with Tito's death in 1980. As early as 1988, at the beginning of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the Bosnian Newspaper *Osvobodjenje* was no longer mentioning Tjentište, the example to be used in this paper, as a memorial of the national liberation war (NOB) (Dizdarević – Hudović 2012: 462).

Partly destroyed in the Bosnian war following the declaration of independence from the SFRY, when the meaning of the monument shifted from unity to ethnic separation, Tjentište fell into a state of limbo for years. To understand this process of becoming dissonant heritage and the origins of the previously mentioned differing historical narratives, the second part of this article attempts to summarize the historical background of this place of remembrance in the valley of the Sutjeska river.

3 Of the approximately 14,000 memorials erected in ex-Yugoslavia, about 3,500 are classified as "authentic monuments" such as war hospitals and other historic buildings, i.e. the most visitable and preserved (see Karge 2015). In this article, the focus is only on the "monuments of honor" (*spomeniki u čast*) with their abstract and figurative appearance.

This monument still stands today, but it is not well preserved. And, as cultural producer Darmon Richter, who offers tours to abandoned places in SEE, pointed out in an essay, “few of the Spomeniks are forgotten; ‘orphaned’ might be a better word. They stand like children of a vanished state now scattered as memory markers across a post-Yugoslav Balkan landscape” (Richter 2017). The significance of the Spomeniks in SEE societies is today shaped by changing needs (Dizdarević – Hudović 2012: 462f.). This means that today the Spomeniks have become destinations again, but in a new light. After having been “orphaned”, as Richter called it, the monuments were not well preserved, but were still visited for “yugo-nostalgic”⁴ reasons and, in some cases, they still provided spaces for commemorative events.⁵ But while this happened on a small scale for years, most people ignored these monuments as symbols of supranational oppression, as spaces of forced educational visits during Tito’s dictatorship or as places of remembrance that differed from their own conception of WWII history and social realities of the successor states. The Spomeniks became dissonant heritage with the break-up of Yugoslavia. Not just because the state that erected these places and used them as a tool of representation and political education vanished, but also because of the differing narratives about Yugoslavia and the Second World War in SEE which were never publicly discussed during the period of Tito’s regime. Today the different ethnic groups in SEE share different truths about the liberation war in SEE and have implemented them in school curriculums and public discourses (see Rathfelder 2017; Moll 2018: 54f.). Against this background, the Spomeniks contain various messages for the local population depending on their age, their nation and their community. Nevertheless, more and more people from the post-war generation are starting to adopt these difficult heritage sites as a part of their own reality and have built new narratives around them. For example, a 25 year-old tourist guide from Sarajevo explained his relation to the NOB monuments in a narrative interview as follows:

“There is a magic emanating from these places because their architecture is strong and affects a lot of emotions and this experience makes them worth visiting. [...] For me, there is no interest in glorifying Yugoslavia, neither do I want to ignore our past. Let’s put it like this: For me and many of my friends, these monuments stand as memorials

4 A longing for Yugoslavia exists in all of its former republics and can differ from retro-trends in lifestyle to social counter-discourses, emotions and imaginations of utopia towards the past and the future (see Palmberger 2008: 357f.).

5 Fieldnotes and interview with a park ranger, 29.9.2020, Sutjeska National Park, Tjentište.

to the uprising against Fascism. It is about the brave fight of partisans from different ethnic groups against the oppressors, against inhumanity and for freedom. [...] I know about the bad aspects of the following history of Yugoslavia, but, still, these monuments tell the story of an unbelievable victory and they transmit values, like unity, freedom and hope. We should come to terms with that past and accept it as a good part of our history... better than in recent years, of course." (Interview with Arman,⁶ 24. 9. 2020, Sarajevo)

This passage shows that young people from the region are starting to put the Spomeniks in a different light; valorizing them by picking up on several relevant aspects of the historical meaning and neglecting other parts. For the following analysis it is important that the architecture of the Spomeniks is definitively mentioned as the main reason to visit these places.

Moreover, this quote can prove that the *lieux de memoire*, the site of memory, is not the same for every visitor. Regarding the object history of the Tjentište Monument, it becomes clear, that, in Nora's words, the place is a perfect example of a Matryoshka doll of meaning (Nora 1990: 89) that offers multiple interpretations and affects different emotions. As a result of the disagreement about the history, *presenting the past* becomes a difficult task in the "memory management" (see Sorabji 2006) of the multilayered models of local memory transmission, even twenty-five years after the wars of disintegration.

At the same time, some online-representations of Tjentište seem to highlight the atmosphere and its current state of decay. It is exactly these popular motifs that are now implemented in local attempts to valorize the place, such as the EU-funded Balkan Monumental Trail. Therefore, the question arises: What are the references of this construction of the Spomeniks as a destination, and which aesthetics⁷ are privileged here? Could this development change its status of difficult heritage and open up new opportunities for a common culture of remembrance locally? I will discuss examples of representations on Instagram and compare them to a recent promotional film for the Balkan Monumental Trail, in order to show that

6 Anonymized.

7 I see aesthetics not as superficial embellishment, but as a general sensual experience in Baumgarten's sense. In intersubjective communication, aesthetics get verbalized and gain traceable forms. Recognized aesthetics become cultural resources that can be economically and politically used. Within a heritage complex, Regina Bendix argues on this basis, that aesthetics can be instrumentalized to proclaim property and identity (see Bendix 2018: 205, 209, 212–214).

this valorization of a destination is not the linear development it may appear to be, it is not just a sign of the exoticizing tourist gaze (e.g. Urry 1992), and that it cannot simply be evaluated as a sign of Orientalism.

Methodologically, my small-scale analysis follows the fundamentals of qualitative thinking (e.g. Mayring 2002: 144–148). From the object history, to markers of popular receptions, and finally to its migration in the representations of a new cultural route, my analysis is based on the ideas of Multi-Sited Ethnography. This approach is partly legitimized by the basic ideas of sociological sequence analysis, which is intended to understand the structures of new social phenomena. “The production of the new, so the thesis behind it, also takes place in socially pre-interpreted paths and is often also guided by rules, which means that it can be reconstructed [own transl.]” (Reichertz 2011: 17).

Nevertheless, the given analysis can only give an insight into assumptions at this stage of my research. The generated material will be compared with interviews with Instagrammers, visitors, and my own field notes at a later stage, so that insightful statements can be made about the aesthetics privileged here and about the intended pictorial affects and experiences of the place.

2. From a central memorial complex to the status of dissonant heritage

The Battle of the Sutjeska Memorial Complex in the Valley of Heroes in Tjentište is situated in the mountains close to the border of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro. It commemorates the events that took place there from May to June 1943. In the Case Black operation, the Axis forces (German, Italian and Croatian troops) attempted to surround Yugoslav Partisans in the Sutjeska valley and outnumbered them by almost ten to one. After a month of encirclement and heavy fighting, the Partisans managed to break through enemy lines and rescue themselves. Thousands of civilians and Partisans were killed, but the news of Tito's success in escaping convinced more and more people across SEE to support the communist Partisans. This is why the SFRY later remembered these events as “*the to be or not to be* of the Yugoslav Partisan resistance” (Kirn 2014: 320). At this stage of the war, there were several formations of liberation forces involved, all of which had very different ideals about the future of the region and who fought each other. For example, there were the Serb-nationalist and monarchist *Chetniks* who wanted to reestablish a Yugoslavian Monarchy under Serbian supremacy and also the fascist *Ustaše* regime of the Independent State of Croatia, which, at that time, was active in large parts of today's Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, to name the largest of them.

However, Tito's breakthrough at the Sutjeska river provided the impulse for the Allies to start supporting the National Liberation Army and the Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia by providing them with weapons and materials. The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was proclaimed on 29th November 1943 and was later recognized by the Allies.

After the war, the events in the Sutjeska valley were commemorated in a sense of Yugoslav unity and the victory of the transnational communist state. To this purpose, a first memorial was installed at Tjentište in 1958 with a crypt underneath, containing the remains of 3301 fallen fighters. In the following years, a whole memorial complex was established. By preserving the landscape and building architectural monuments all around the valley and the mountainous landscape on the original sites of battles, a space was created to afford emotional experiences, or, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explained in relation to the making of heritage sites, a "production of hereness in the absence of actualities depends increasingly on virtualities" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 169). This hereness was materialized through landscape, bodies, things and buildings (see Macdonald 2013: 79f.). In this sense of treating the landscape as a part of the memorial site, the Sutjeska Nature Park was proclaimed in 1962, which was followed by the main monument designed by Miodrag Živković, inaugurated in 1972, and later a variety of sculptural and architectural interventions in the landscape culminating in a museum (*Spomen Dom*). Hotels and restaurants also grew up around



Figure 1 Detail from a fresco painting in the Spomen Dom, showing German soldiers performing the Dance of Death and walking over emblems and coats of arms of the involved forces. Screenshot: spomenikdatabase.org.



Figure 2 The main sculpture by Mirograd Živković with the Sutjeska Valley in the background in 2018. Screenshot: spomenikdatabase.org.

its periphery (Dizdarević – Hudović 2012: 461f.).⁸ By allowing visitors to stand in the original location, hike in the preserved natural countryside, witness the site of the buried bodies of victims and view the large murals in the museum (Figure 1), the official narrative of the Sutjeska battle was made comprehensible to everyone.

Today, a key element of the whole complex is the two-winged sculpture situated on the slope (Figure 2). It marks the site of the Partisan breakthrough. Depending on where the visitor stands, the two concrete shapes create a very different effect: they can appear to be monolithic rocks or symmetrical figures, and they are reminiscent of wings, fingers, flames, storm troops, and the palms of hands. These subtle effects of the sculptures' asymmetrical form are, for political scientist Gal Kirn, direct symbols "of the struggle in which the partisans managed to prevail over forces that were greatly superior in number and equipment" (Kirn 2014: 321). The breakthrough was made visual and tangible in an aesthetic that breaks with form. This modernist escape from annihilation is not just a visual path towards something new, it also has a concrete political function. The abstract shape represents the state's power, and at the same time stands for SFRY's modernity and future orientation in the pan-Yugoslav ideal of *Brotherhood and Unity* and in recognition of the state's diversities, aesthetics that were seen to be identity-forming for all citizens of the SFRY, across all ethnicities and social status. These representations of power and communalization are found in many Spomeniks that were constructed in Yugoslavia in the high phase of Titoism (see Karge 2015). Their design can be explained by Tito's aim to find a Yugoslavian living environment which should neither seek to exclude arts and aesthetics from the Western world, nor imitate the ideas of socio-realism (Stevanović 2017: 129–131). The results are figures with abstract geometric shapes and purist aesthetics that imitate nature, machines or micro flakes, but rarely human figures (Dizdarević – Hudović 2012: 457). That there are obvious similarities to the works of architects of the international modern style, such as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe or Oskar Niemeyer, is therefore intended and implemented in the state's future-oriented and ethnic difference levelling ideology (Stevanović 2017: 116f.).

Tjentište became one of Bosnia's most popular attractions and, was one of the most important and most visited Spomeniks.⁹ The site was the

8 For an interactive map of the Sutjeska Monuments by Donald Niebyl, see: <https://www.spomenikdatabase.org/sutjeska-monuments> [2020-05-28].

9 With regard to the popularity of the site, a partisan movie should be mentioned that appeared in cinemas in 1972. It was called *The Battle of Sutjeska*, starring Richard Burton as Tito. It was the most expensive movie produced in the SFRY era.

venue for the annual "Fighter's Day" ceremony on the fourth of July. In 1983, more than 150,000 visitors were reported to have attended this event.

During the wars from 1991 to 1995 that led to the break-up of Yugoslavia, the monument's meaning shifted from unity to enmity as a consequence of the circulation of differing historical narratives that mobilized nationalism and ethnic hatred (Moll 2018: 49f.). Seen from a nationalist perspective, Tjentište symbolized national suppression under Tito, especially from a Croatian or a Serbian standpoint. The commemorated battle in the valley of heroes saw Croats and Serbs fighting each other. Also the subsequent loss of Chetnik influence in the NOB war lies within the narrative of the monument as well as the failure of the fascist Independent State of Croatia (NDH) at a later state of WW II. In short, two nationalist ideas, a sovereign Croatian state, that covered large parts of today's Croatia and Bosnia on the one hand, and a Serbian dominated Yugoslavia on the other hand, came to an end with the success of the socialist Partisans. Both ideas demanded many victims, but were hardly ever publicly debated in the SFRY where they had to disappear under the narrative of brotherhood and unity. This imposed silencing made a common ground to revive the figures and fears of the second world war in order to mobilize nationalism and ethnic hatred (Moll 2018: 49f.). As a consequence, between 1992 and 1995 under the control of the Bosnian Serb Army, many elements of the Tjentište complex were vandalized and destroyed. Today, Tjentište lies in the Republika Srpska, the ethnically Serbian part of Bosnia-Herzegovina that was established after the Dayton peace agreement. After the war and in a "post-socialist state of limbo" (Niedermüller 1999: 98–100), hardly any official attempts were made to preserve or re-design the monument until a landslide in 2018.¹⁰ In this shift from transnational to national memory and a constant discourse of trauma (Kirn 2014: 314), the dissonance of the heritage site is marked by "a field of tension between an aestheticized past and a conflictive present in which the various traditions offer different, usually contradictory interpretations of history [...]. in this way a depoliticized past gains a political function [own transl.]" (Niedermüller 1999: 104).

10 The site is on the list of national monuments of BiH. Nevertheless, the competences of the commission to preserve national monuments remain limited due to the complex constitution of the state with its three entities. After the landslide, the stairways were renovated and the main sculpture was cleaned with voluntary aid and third party funding. Other parts of the monument, such as smaller memorials in the National Park area or near *Spomen Dom* remain in a state of decay. Retrieved from: <https://www.spomenikdatabase.org/tjentiste> [2020-10-02]; own Fieldnotes (4.10.2020).

However, as art-historian Nina Stevanović concludes, on the current status of decay and abandonment of most Spomeniks: “They are released from any context and content. What then remains is the uniqueness of their form which achieves a kind of metaphysical quality” (Stevanović 2017: 141). For those who explore the Spomeniks today, they remain very inspiring: “they could be ‘ambassadors from far-away stars’ [...] witnesses of an unrealized future, and resources for progressive nostalgia and retro-utopia, but also specters that keep haunting the post-Yugoslav present” (Kirn 2014: 315).

3. The picturesque view: Becoming recognized in a state of decay

The NOB memorials first became an internet phenomenon due to the publication of the book *Spomenik* in 2010, a collection of several works and exhibitions by Belgian photographer Jan Kempnaers from between 2006 and 2008. Vladimir Kulić, who later co-curated the first MoMA exhibition on Yugoslavian Architecture (see Kulić – Stierli 2018),¹¹ pointed out in a position paper that these photos made the Ex-Yugoslav monuments popular around the world and shaped the aesthetic discourse about them in the following years (Kulić 2018: 5). The cultural producer Donald Niebyl, an American who started an online mapping project called *Spomenik Database* (spomenikdatabase.org), stated in a problem-oriented interview that his curiosity about the Spomeniks was prompted by Kempnaers’ pictures. And even though Niebyl sees his own work as informative, documenting and educational rather than as art, and although he endeavors to avoid exoticism on his webpage, he recognizes that he cannot neglect the “magic” of Kempnaers’ photos. When Niebyl first started exploring the Spomeniks in SEE, he had to use satellite images to locate several of them, because they were not indicated anywhere¹² Hardly anyone outside of the former Yugoslavia was aware of the Spomeniks’ existence, as Dutch architect Willem Jan Neutelings pointed out (Neutelings 2008: 1). Even in 2015, there was not much valid information available online, which is what drove Niebyl to start his web project (see Interview with Donald Niebyl 2019).

Jan Kempnaers did not only coin the term “Spomenik” as categorization of the NOB memorials, taken from the word for monument in Serbo-Croatian, he also portrayed them in a picturesque manner that had a lot of influence on further receptions. Neutelings writes about Kempnaers’

11 “Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia 1948-1980” [Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York: 15 July 2018 – 13 January 2019]. Retrieved from: <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3931> [2020-05-29].

12 See Web-Interview with Donald Niebyl. Freiburg/Illinois (14.5.2019).

Spomenik pictures: "The monuments have been the objects of blind fury and now, of indifference. What remains is pure sculpture in a desolate landscape" (Neutelings 2008: 1). As art historian Steven Jacobs explains, "Kempenaers evokes [in his series] in several ways the notion of the *picturesque*, which originated in the eighteenth century. In this ideal, nature was approached indirectly, through *pictures*. On the one hand, nature was perceived as if it was a picture and, on the other, landscapes were carefully created and staged *in situ*." (Jacobs 2007: 1)

As explained, the NOB monuments were built in the landscape where the commemorated historic events took place. The abstract figures and forms were designed in dialogue with the surrounding countryside, which was, in several cases, preserved as part of the SFRY's memory politics. Kempenaers's picturesque view can be read as a tribute to this careful integration of the monuments into their surroundings. In addition, the Spomeniks' decaying condition plays a major role in Kempenaers's narrative: "Notwithstanding their futurist designs and their space age associations, these monuments have become modernist variations of the Romantic ruin, another preeminent icon of the picturesque" (Jacobs 2007). And finally, ruins, have a strong symbolism of being in transition between culture and nature, past and future, life and death, and this gives them a metaphysical status that determines the fascination with abandoned places (see Simmel: 2008).

Going through Kempenaers's series, the described picturesque view is emphasized by low color saturation and many image recordings in bad weather conditions. In addition, the memorials remain mysterious, because neither a photo caption nor any other information is given. Vladimir Kulić recognized Orientalism in this image practice, as it seems to cut off the



Figure 3 Spomenik #16 (Tjentište) by Jan Kempenaers (2007).
Screenshot: jankempenaers.info

historical context and meaning and reduces the monuments to simply their appearance: “[They] have only become further integrated into the economy of digital images with the same anonymous detachment that ignores both their original meaning and their artistic merit” (Kulić 2018:2). Regarding the circulation and appearance of the monuments in blogs, newspapers and on Instagram, it could be argued that the NOB monuments “have become a pop-culture phenomenon [...], phenomenally successful in capturing public imagination, especially in the digital world, where they continue to be endlessly re-blogged” (Ibid.). But why is this?

Kempenaers reproduced images that are close to the popular aesthetics of *decay photography*, which seeks to bring out the atmosphere of a forgotten, timeless place in its condition of disrepair. In a web-interview, an *Urbexer*¹³ from the German Black Forest describes lost places and her motivation to visit them as follows:

“Lost places are abandoned and forgotten, mysterious and sometimes eerie. [...] One wonders: Why was all this left behind? [...] Through Facebook and Googling, I could see very quickly that there are abandoned places everywhere and for me as a photographer, these places are wonderful motifs. I love to do research about their past and try to imagine who lived there once. [...] For me a fascination emanates from these places – to see how nature ultimately conquers everything. It’s another world, full of possible imaginations about the past. These places are like time capsules [own transl.]” (Jana¹⁴ 2020).

With their affective potential, as Urbexer Jana described her emotions in response to motifs showing decay, it can be assumed Kempenaers’s “hot images” (Eder 2017) have encouraged more and more tourists to seek out the Spomeniks. I will now take a closer look at the pictures of the Sutjeska memorial complex that have been circulating on Instagram.

4. #tjentiste: Visualizations on Instagram

Communication on Instagram takes place to a large extent via images and their affects, and a strongly egocentric presentation is already inhe-

13 This shortening relates to the hobby Urban Exploration. It describes the visiting of abandoned places in order to take photos, discovery and for several other reasons. First described by Canadian Zine author Jeff Chapman (“Ninjalicious”) in his book: “Access all Areas. A user’s guide to the Art of Urban Exploration” in 2005.

14 Anonymized.

rent in the media affordances of the platform. For media scientist Sandra Kuhlhüser, Instagram users "want to convince others of their abilities, their own personality and their own life with their posts in order to get them to express positive recognition" [own transl.] (Kuhlhüser 2017: 89). In this communication space, image acting can be seen as active, intended practices of dealing, handling and communicating with and through images (see Müller – Geise, in: Kuhlhüser 2017: 90). This is important in two ways: firstly, it means that image acting practices can be traced, described and interpreted; secondly, in the logic of media rhetoric (for photography, see Kreuzbauer 2016: 317), successful, persuasive image operations are repeated and therefore canonized, and they have pre-iconic, iconic-symbolic, and narrative-stylistic elements (Ibid.: 322f.) that can be read through comparison and thick description. The kind of images and videos that are primarily shared on social media is based on their power of action, which Jens Eder calls "hot images", images that can directly transmit emotions: "They aim to trigger intense affective responses as motors of action in the general public, political factions or powerful individuals" (Eder 2017: 63). Eder unravels the multi-level structure of such powerful images and films as follows: Firstly, in order to acquire meaning, the work must have a certain form and a symbolic character in a certain circle of recipients, i.e. in whose reality and horizon emotions are already evoked by color, setting, music, staging or facial expressions of persons shown (Ibid.: 66–69). Ultimately, the image must stimulate individual reflection through the transmitted affects, but because "the underlying perceptual-cognitive processes become more complex and less intersubjective" (Ibid.: 69), it is difficult to predict the individual reactions on a micro scale, which is why this article attempts to make my own perception transparent through a subjective description of what is seen.¹⁵

To trace the dominant representations of Tjentište on Instagram, I used the search function by hashtag to create a list of the most popular posts marked with "#tjentiste".¹⁶ From the first hundred pictures of this generated list, I formed four categories that my coding revealed followed similarities

15 In my dissertation project I try to objectify this subjective approach by speaking directly with individual users on Instagram. I then contrast their answers to my observations.

16 In total, there were 6,643 posts with #tjentiste (state: 09.06.2020). For the results of the internal search engine, Instagram uses a frequently re-programmed algorithm, which, in principle, follows the engagement rate that combines the likes (can be expressed through clicking a heart shaped button) and comments on a post with personal information about the user's behavior on the platform. To get more objective results, I searched on a computer and a mobile device, and compared the results.

and remarkable differences, and, of course, the basic questions of image analysis in anthropological research (Falk 2014: 213).

The first category reproduces picturesque images including landscape and decay. The captions range from information about the architect, the place's history, the user's own assumptions and thoughts, to simply highlighting their own photography skills without naming the place. The image in Figure 4 shows the two-winged sculpture from the top of a hill, where a small forum is located. It was chosen to stand for the most often repeated reception of the place. From this perspective, shot downwards, the two concrete wings appear as a massive arc that opens its gates towards the valley and stands in contrast to the mountains in the background. From this view, the monument's dimensions appear to be larger than they would be from the valley. Additionally, the monument seems out of place in its natural surroundings, which is underlined by the complete absence of people in the picture, and the weather conditions. Fog veils the valley, grass is growing over the pavements and benches, and the sculpture seems to open a gate to the mist. The chosen filter bathes the scenery in blue and purple tones, highlighting and dramatizing both the forest landscape and the mountain relief by means of the strong contrast. This image is also interesting because, if it is accepted that the Spomeniks can be othered through image operations by foreign tourists (Kulic 2018: 3f.), it is an example of an overlap of local and external receptions. The picture was posted by a channel called *Our Republic*, which posts pictures of destinations in the *Republika Srpska*. The channel often posts images with sepia, or black and white filters, contrast and light manipulations, showing the monument abandoned, or focusing in on details of its decay or extreme weather conditions.



Figure 4 The Sutjeska Memorial in a wide shot downhill. Screenshot: Instagram.com.



Figures 5 and 6 "The explorer pose" and "Looking into the far".
Screenshots: Instagram.com

Being-there as an image practice of evidence and self-representation is the second largest category of representing the place. Looking at the Instagram users' profiles it becomes apparent that most private visitors and tourists reproduce images of themselves at the location. As pointed out before, this self-centered perspective is prevalent on Instagram, and self-representation on holiday in order to document and contest one's own experience and social status is as old as photography itself. It allows tourists to document fleeting gazes (Urry – Larsen 2011: 156). In cultural anthropology, for example, Elisabeth Fendl and Klara Löffler have studied private slide show evenings with a focus on the social logic behind shared holiday representations and tourist experience evidence in the pre-internet era. Even then, the speed and immediacy of reproducibility was already emphasized; as access to technology increases, the feasibility and ease of photo sharing also increases, which leads to a flood of representation. (Fendl – Löffler 1995: 65). The framework of possibilities has shifted further with digital image operations, inductive image processing and the wide range of possible global recipients.¹⁷ Nevertheless, two types of self-portraits can be distinguished within this category. One is the recipient's perspective on the monument, with the visitors included in the photo (see Figure 5). Kuhlhüser labels this as the "explorer shot", which can be considered traditional photographic practice featuring a standardized pose in travel photography (Kuhlhüser 2017: 103). In the picture on the right (Figure 6), a woman from Germany who posts travel content on her profile, stages herself at the memorial site,

17 In the research group "New Travel – New Media" we try to grasp this framework of representational possibilities in the triad of "practice", "experience" and "representation". In this relational dynamic, dichotomies between cultural producers and tourists appear dissolved. See Research Concept. [2020-06-09]. Retrieved from: <https://www.neuesreisen.uni-freiburg.de/en/research-concept/>.

sitting on the main aisle and looking to her right. Here, Živković's sculpture is reduced to a background façade. There are other pictures of people doing yoga in front of the monument, taking selfies or posing between the two wings. What is inherent in all of them is the narrative of (holiday) adventure and an expression of their habitus: what they have seen and achieved, that they love architecture, that they are interested in history, or that they witnessed something unusual on their trip. This multi-use of the Tjentište heritage site may be explained by Foucault's assumption of a heterotopic space (Foucault 1986) that juxtaposes in a single space several incompatible spaces and breaks the real time of the outside world, which emerged through the downfall of the political frame and its memory politics. But, as Christoph Bareither has recently shown in his digital ethnographic analysis of selfie culture at the Holocaust memorial in Berlin, the perhaps "inappropriate happy picture" of or in a place of remembrance is a result of learned tourist routines, media affordances and the sharing culture that many users are aware of. These image practices thus "can become different yet meaningful ways of relating to the past" (Bareither 2020: 14).

Constructing an alien object through image operations is the third category that my coding revealed. For example, in Figure 7 the *OK-Fest*, a yearly music festival in the Sutjeska Nature Park, underlines the often attributed "extraterrestrial" character with a night shot at a slight angle from bottom to top. From this close perspective, the sculpture appears less of an arc and more like fingers or the palms of hands reaching up to the sky. As before, in this reception a total shot from the hillside towards the valley has been chosen to highlight the monument's dimensions, but the landscape appears smaller and more as a stage for the monument in the center. The long exposure time makes the scenery appear surreal and artificial, as the sky becomes brighter and the valley is highlighted by its illumination as a yellowish stripe, reminiscent of stage lighting. With the given hashtag "magic", this interpretation seems to be intended. As the comment on the right shows, Donald Niebyl's Spomenik Database would like to repost this picture on its official profile, showing, by the exchange between one cultural producer and another, that the performed aesthetic is valued. The monument is now used as an identifying label for the music festival¹⁸ and the Sutjeska Nature Park. Additionally, there are several illustrations from graphic designers that depict the shape of the monument on Instagram, and a woman from Belgrade has a tattoo in the form of Tjentište on her forearm.

18 The Tjentište Monument appears regularly on the OK-Fests Instagram account and website. It is further used as an illustration on their merchandise. See Ok Music-Festival. [2020-06-08]. Retrieved from: <https://www.instagram.com/okfesttjentiste/?hl=en>.



Figure 7 Screenshot: Instagram.com



Figure 8 "Happy Smiling" with reflection.
Screenshot: Instagram.com (mobile app).

The last category combines *reflections*, *nostalgia* and *using the memorial for its original function to honor the fallen*. There are fewer examples of this reception of the place in the investigated sampling, but this category is very important for the interpretation as it appears contradictory to the other categories. As the chosen example illustrates (see Figure 8), many of these contributions could, at first glance, also fit in the category of self-representation, but on closer inspection, it is clear that this example belongs in this fourth category. Spreading her arms upwards, replicating the way in which the monument opens up towards the sky, and smiling into the camera, the woman from Sarajevo seems to be following common Instagram self-representations, but in the caption she is excusing her behavior: "Not a funny place at all, but I tend to smile a lot." She goes on to give some key facts about the

object's history and mentions "Yugoslav partisans", which seems to draw a line between her and the past. In most of these representations, reflections on the place itself and shared emotions can be found in the caption, as well as expressed nostalgic feelings about Yugoslavia (for Tjentište, see Dragicević Sesic – Mijatović 2014: 15f.).

6. Labeling and shaping the Spomeniks

The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), a local NGO in Sarajevo that serves regional connectivity, mobility and the Euro-Atlantic integration of SEE¹⁹ has recently developed a cultural route, funded by the European Union. It connects forty monuments in the six West Balkan Economies²⁰ with a pathway that invites tourists to explore the Spomeniks of ex-Yugoslavia and the socialist monuments of Albania on foot. For the monuments to be included in the route, they had to fulfil the requirements of: "cultural significance", "impressiveness", "condition", "remarkable scenic beauty" and "natural splendor of the surroundings" (RCC 2019: 5). The main goal of the project is to foster cooperation between the West Balkan economies and create "greater appreciation, both domestic and foreign, of abstract WW II monuments" (Ibid.: 3). The spokesperson for the project Milena Filipović said that the idea of the project was partly a reaction to the growing popularity of the Spomeniks online and the mediation should mainly address "the fascination for artistic work and modernist design" (Interview with Milena Filipović 2019), both local and foreign. It is interesting to note that for the project development close cooperation with Donald Niebyl was sought, whose mapping project has become one of the most popular sources of online information about Spomeniks (see Niebyl 2019; Filipović 2019).

On 22nd February 2020, the NGO placed an approximately two-minute-long film²¹ for the official opening of the *Balkan Monumental Trail* project on YouTube. In the first sequence of the film, the logo of the new cultural route appears: the stylized initials BMT on a white background, which picks up on the brutalist design of many Spomeniks. Then the camera quickly zooms out from the diminishing logo, moving in a fast backward motion between two feet dressed in hiking boots, before showing a woman in outdoor clothing in a wide shot. The camera then cuts to a low profile shot of the woman

19 See <https://www.rcc.int/home> (viewed 10.06.2020).

20 "WB6": BiH, Kosovo, Serbia, North-Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania.

21 Regional Cooperation Council: Balkan Monumental Trail (BMT), promotes regional tourism routes, Powered by RCC! Youtube video (22.02.2020). Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-L2CYOKE7I> [viewed: 2020-06-08].

as she walks with a serious, almost awestruck expression on her face. In the background, the mountains of the Sutjeska valley can be seen. Finally, the woman is in the center of the Tjentište Monument, looking up at it pensively. She then spreads out her arms and spins around, showing her happiness and excitement. The camera, which seems to be attached to a drone, moves further and further away towards the sky until the entire monument is visible. The monument is shown once again from the hillside at double speed. Through this backward movement, the monument seems to grow in size. In addition, the picture has now switched to black and white. At no time are other visitors present; the woman seems to be completely alone in her experience of the natural landscape and architecture. This atmosphere is intensified by the chirping of birds, which slightly contrasts with the background music of a melancholic or mystical violin melody, accompanied by electronic sounds. Moreover, the black and white film makes the monument appear timeless (see Corsten 2010: 15). This affective image practice is frequently used in *decay photography* as an aesthetic means of symbolizing standstill.

Thus, in just the first ten seconds of the video, all characteristic elements of the first three categories of the content analysis on Instagram are present: the monument is elevated and depicted in the absence of visitors, and the focus is on a personal adventure. How the destination ought to be experienced is presented several times in the video: the woman later positions herself with a selfie stick in front of a monument and the taking of a picture of the Serbian Kosmaj monument with a smartphone is also shown. The entire aesthetic of this image film seems to be building on the popularity of the Spomeniks and their mode of representation on Instagram as picturesque places in the photogenic tourist gaze. The subtitle tells viewers that they will "experience scenic settings and pristine nature" (RCC: 2020). In addition to individual experiences of nature, art and history, as mentioned in the video, the film promises the hikers opportunities to take photos for social media, suggesting that the Spomeniks are an ideal motif for successful online self-dramatization.

7. Conclusion

Through the examples and the short sequence analysis of the circulating content on Instagram, and also the discussions about the Tjentište Monument on a small scale, I wanted to stress my thesis that the aesthetics of decay and the picturesque view have become affect loaded "hot images", which ultimately become part of the economy of self-representations online. As seen in the object's history, the whole memorial complex was designed to affect emotion. Paying attention to this fact and the current condition that directly opens up connections to traditional picturesque image practices and romantic

ruins, the place itself might afford visual statements in a picturesque manner. In accordance with the capitalistic logic of circulation (Lee – Lipuma 2002), these picturesque representations of the Tjentište Monument have become determining aesthetics and have also migrated into local receptions, as the large number of local contributions in the given sample on Instagram has revealed. Representations performed online are focusing on the aesthetics of decay as well as the architecture and its highly imaginative character. These aesthetic choices are now also being used by the official, institutionalized promotion of the Spomeniks, in order to present the monuments as tourist destinations with the new Balkan Monumental Trail. The Israeli sociologist Motti Regev developed the idea of a social production of *aesthetic cosmopolitanism* that is useful to understand this process. Following the centuries-old concepts of cosmopolitanism (e.g. Beck 2000 and Hannerz 1990, as shown in Moser – Egger 2015: 180–183) as a cultural disposition involving an intellectual and aesthetic stance of “openness” towards other people, places and experiences (see Regev 2007: 124; Urry – Szerszynski 2002: 468), Regev sees a fluid conception in the arts and cultural practices: it “is constantly and consciously willing to implement stylistic innovations in art and culture from different parts of the world” (Regev 2007: 125). What at first might appear banal in a globalized world with digital communication has, in fact, a traceable structure that “comes into being with the institutionalization of contemporary forms of art [...] as legitimate expressions of such uniqueness” (Regev 2007: 127). Therefore, when cultural producers are transposing creative patterns from one artistic field (e.g. Bourdieu 1993) to another, positioning themselves within the global, dominant aesthetic forms, “it serves their interest to be active, updated and relevant actors in the global field” (Regev 2007: 130). Finally, this transfer of aesthetics is motivated by social forces and claims recognition and status attainment as equal participants in contemporary world culture (Bauman 2001: 141). Nevertheless, Regev’s concept of cultural cosmopolitanism is not a model of “copy and paste”, but a way of describing how dominant aesthetics and elements of “otherness” are weaved into local representations of heritage, as has been demonstrated with the case of Tjentište. Acknowledging this development, art historian Vladimir Kulić later added that the image practices, which he criticized as Orientalism, contributed to the international popularity of the Spomeniks and Yugoslavian architecture. This process of visualization has provided the basis for the cultural recognition and institutionalization of the architectural heritage of Yugoslavia under Tito’s regime (Kulić 2018: 6). Whether the Balkan Monumental Trail project is a conscious attempt to provide meaning detached from its past, or whether it can “heal” the

traumatic wounds that caused the Spomeniks to become dissonant heritage sites is yet to be examined.

The valorization process through online image practices is multi-layered and relational, and can also be traced in other fields of commemoration. As Christoph Bareither concludes in his observations on the *Memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe* in Berlin, personal connections to the past through selfies and social media postings can be a sign of a "performative culture of remembrance" (see Thiemeyer 2018) and, in the case of the Spomeniks, it can be valued as a way of dealing with the past that seems to transcend divisive historical narratives. Presenting the past through social media is far more than a subjective emotional immersion into the past. It is an emotional practice that attempts to make the past a meaningful part of one's own present (see Assmann – Bauer 2011: 80, in: Bareither 2020: 13) Under these circumstances, the Spomeniks have become tourist destinations once again and open up new spaces to deal with a difficult past.

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