

## Project Presentation: “MNEMOTOPIAS”

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MNEMOTOPIAS is the overlapping field of work where two AIIR projects meet:

**Mnemosyne – Theatre of Memories** which contests European cultures of remembrance and very often political theatre which acts both in textbooks as in public space (case-study Croatia and Zagreb); and **aRs PUBLICae**, the project that analyses art in public space in Croatia since 1960s.

**Mnemotopias** started with the project **Cybercinematography**, an initiative that emerged out of the long conversations between cultural and urban anthropologist (myself) with deep interest in the field of visual anthropology, and colleague Hrvoje Juvančić, documentary film director. Together we invented a performative concept which is close to the notion of expanded cinema (Youngblood) but also e.g. Josef Svoboda's *Polyecran* which shifted the boundaries of audio-visual experiences in 1967 at EXPO in Montreal, or even further in history of audio-visual experiments to Bourian's and Kouril's *Theatergraph*. **Cybercinematography** comprises primarily archive research in order to establish a media database on one particular place: a square, city area, street, plateau, park. Then, the database is being re-programmed and the chosen material is being edited around specific narrative nodes. So, e.g., while performing the first **Cybercinematography** in Zagreb, where we were focused on Zagreb's main square –Ban Jelačić Square (during socialism epoch it was Square of Republic, and after the last Balkan wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> Ct it was re-named again to Ban Jelačić Square as it was in between two WW, while a huge equestrian monument was debunked out of the depot where it had been hidden for almost 50 years, recycled and placed again in the middle of the square, representing a proud warrior who fought for Croatian independence in 1848.) We viewed kilometers and kilometers of film tape, which was mostly totally useless, and it had to be viewed because, sometimes, visible patches of both film and urban history would appear. So, practically after long weeks of viewing we had a database of film and TV material on Ban Jelačić Sq – Square of Republic – Ban Jelačić Sq, or, in short, we had a collection of material representing visual urban history throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century of one square in Croatia. For **Cybercinematography** in Zagreb we did research in the following archives: Croatian National TV, Croatian State Archive – Croatian Cinematheque and Museum of City of Zagreb. The results were sometimes almost shocking: we realized that the city had been thoroughly documented during the 1940s (the found material connected to the production made under Croatian Independent State, the quisling state aligned to Nazi regime which existed between 1941 and 1944, and had its own *Vernichtungslager* comparable only to those in the Third Reich and Rumania, was vast – the totalitarian system obviously used film here too as a powerful indoctrination weaponry; much of these material had been bunkered during socialism era, never to be seen by public or interpreted by social scientists, and today it still remains unsorted) and 1950s (new socialist Yugoslav state allowed some experts who were active between 1941 and 1945 to continue working with camera, young cineastes joined – the result were numerous series of daily chronicles of the square, showing thousands of details of everydayness of the post IIWW epoch and sometimes invisible urbanisms of social exclusions, too). This opulent trend flourished until the mid-1970s when film started to be replaced by videotape which caused

re-taping and destruction of material. In the mid-1970s the Museum of the City of Zagreb even dismissed its house photographer, so talking about Zagreb's main square, one would find more photo-documentation dating from the 1930's till the late 1960's compared e.g. to the period from the 1970s onwards. In the entire *phototeque* of Museum of the City of Zagreb there is only one photo of the city's main square from the 1990s – the one that represents re-positioning of 19<sup>th</sup> Ct equestrian monument and therefore re-establishing of Croatian national pride and brave warrior history.

The total of material representing the 20th century urban history of one square in Europe is about 3 hours long. It took weeks and weeks of viewing and distilling material only to extract the visible from invisible. I often reach to this un-cut, amazing data base - it is an unbelievable audio-visual urban history resource. Contemplation of the urban space is the aim of this project, as well the art of travel in time. In Zagreb in 2007. we saw edited compilation of 70 years of cinematographic documentary production screened in the same space which once was the object of that production. The **Cybercinematography** continued in Dubrovnik in 2008. and in Rijeka and Belgrade in 2009. This year it is taking place in Korčula. In Dubrovnik the third feature was added to the project: live web stream from the place of projections into a world wide web through a platform built on <http://www.cybercine.org>. The goal is to expand it to a generative hyper-site, so to create both virtual and physical platforms where we could investigate deeper the notions of Place and Space, as well to research further in not just what City was, but also in what it could be. From there on, it was clear that we were searching for new forms also of establishing identity-values in public space, which should be less monumental, and more fluid. Hence the thorough research on spatial practices of solidifying identities on the past was needed.

The case of Yugoslavia, from which many old/new states have emerged, is a very specific one in building memorials which served both public and private need to commemorate, but also mourn after the WWII. The new 1990s Balkan war was followed by waves of similar, but at the same time manifold needs from different cultural groups. However, the new state of Croatia has not had such a strong interest in commemorating the recent wars, as socialist Yugoslavia used to have. The places of commemoration in Croatia of today are mostly the mnemotopias of the WWII. The Croatian state at the end of 1990s produced sporadically monuments which were supposed to solidify the 'new' Croatian identity. Those, as usual, expensive monuments showed more what Robert Musil had written about long ago: 'They are erected in order to be seen, to attract attention. At the same time, however, they possess something that destroys any attentiveness.'

Simultaneously, numerous cultural projects have been produced opposing these obsolete merging identities in one, abstract and imposed national identity. The work of Igor Grubić, Sanja Iveković, Barbara Blasin and Igor Marković, Kristina Leko and many more impregnated the space with contemporaneous actions, showing clearly that today's world is not about monolith identity, but about indicating scopes of complex and diverse individual existential issues.

Nonetheless, even a superficial investigation on mnemotopias in Europe, shows that the very important ones, again dedicated to WWII, were produced in Berlin and Vienna on the verge of the millenium, where politicians claimed that these productions were among the most important in their mandates. Concentration camps of the WWII across Europe are becoming focus of the massive tourist gaze, or in the more dangerous case, as Jasenovac in Croatia, they are becoming the places for commemoration, but also for generating old/new hatred.

Is it possible that 'the past becomes the curtain that shadows the present, instead of revealing it and becomes a justification for inaction', as Tzvetan Todorov puts it?