

The Independent Culture Scene of Ex-Yugoslavia:

THE STORY OF THE SWAN WHICH THE MAJORITY SUSPECTS TO BE THE UGLY DUCKLING

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INTRODUCTION

The historical path of autonomous cultural and civic initiatives in the South Slavic region over the past thirty years has mainly been tortuous. During that time these initiatives have often been exposed to severe hardships of various kinds; they have been suffering from the ideological backlash against them and being pushed to the edge of the social significance. They were constantly marginalized in the past as they are nowadays, and have always depended only on a handful of the bold and the courageous to save them from the many dangers of vanishing into thin air. Many have grown weary along the way, and eventually gave up on this scene, but all the time new people have been arriving to take their place. The first paradox of the independent culture of this region is that it was precisely this culture, as aesthetically innovative and politically engaged, that drew and kept attention of intellectuals worldwide, while most of the inhabitants of these states and their cultural elites regularly perceived it as bad and incomprehensible. It was, therefore, largely unrecognized by the official local criteria, although it has actually often been the best we have had in our culture during the last three decades.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

The initial attempts at establishing the independent culture scene in this region occurred as early as during Yugoslavia and the time of socialism. As a matter in fact, the independent scene at the time acted "within the institutions of the system", but a closer look shows that for many of the youth groups, music bands and theater companies of the time, the idea of independence and rebellion against the establishment, whatever it means, was the dominant motivational drive. The Belgrade's SKC (Student Cultural Center) , "Kulušić" in Zagreb, the Sarajevo's Open Stage Obala, and the Ljubljana's ŠKUC used to be the recognizable gathering zones for this disheveled subculture in a Yugoslavia which at the time was coming to its end. Then came the war, violence and nationalist homogenization on all sides, leaving thousands of the dead and millions of the displaced. During the hard times of the early 90s, the autonomous culture was as good as forbidden: each refusal to align under the flags of the newly established states was practically considered a treason. Interestingly enough, when the situation was at its worst, while the majority of ordinary citizens was trying to rescue themselves and their families from stray bullets, the Eros of cultural independence among liberal minded individuals in the then already former state was more pronounced than it is today. Why? Everything that came along with nationalism, such as hatred, xenophobia and warmongering hysteria – all of that was completely contrary to the spirit of modernity which had already been conceived during Socialism times, and to the idea of freedom which the independent culture adopted as its credo. On the other hand, there has never been a greater need to show a face of a different civilization, the one that was not as bristling and the one that did not count people's blood cells, as the existing one did. At the time the civil initiatives' members refused to compromise with either the nationalist state, or the mass culture. In an atmosphere of an overwrought solidarity, while death and undisguised hatred raged all around, the independent cultural organizations, functioning like some sort of a quarantine for lepers, sought to protect the nationally

excluded, to link the intellectuals of the 'enemy' nations and states, to attract artists from abroad, and, regardless of obvious difficulties and the general atmosphere of xenophobia, to live the "art that knows no boundaries."

AVANT-GUARD (DOES NOT) DIE YOUNG

For instance, in early 90's there was a civilian initiative in Zagreb, called Antiratna Kampanja (Anti-War Campaign) which, as already obvious from its name, focused all its efforts to fight against the war, looking for models of communication different from the howling for war of those who were inviting "into battle, into battle, for our own nation". Many debates took place at the time, many panel discussions, poetry and literary events, and visits of famous intellectuals from Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. Some semi-secret parties were organized which worked – psychologically speaking – as a refuge for the like-minded and the people with similar ethical values. Under the auspices of *Antiratna Kampanja*, a bi-weekly "Arkzin" was born; of all liberal papers on the whole territory from Vardar to Triglav, most probably the second best only to "Feral". The magazine not only fostered the discourse of peace, but on its website also published articles by finest intellectuals of the former Yugoslavia. From Boris Buden to Ivan Čolović and from Dubravka Ugrešić to Lazar Stojanović and back, "Arkzin" presented a small island of intellectual superiority in a sea of primitive hatred. This magazine went through several phases: at first it was a small fanzine about peace initiatives occurring within the former state. In 1993, "Arkzin" entered a stage of a certain acceleration and became a real newspaper, defying the other media in Croatia which were controlled either by tycoons of various strains or by nationalist cliques associated with the state government. According to Vesna Janković, the former Editor-in-Chief, during the mid '90s, in the field of culture and politics "Arkzin" was truly a free media initiative in a Croatia which was at war and overwhelmed by nationalist rhetoric of Franjo Tuđman and his HDZ. At the time "Arkzin" was orientated towards merging the theory and practice of politics, as well as merging the "high" and "low" culture: in each issue they would publish polemical texts by Boris Buden, Obrad Savić, or John Keane, but also reviews of concerts which, for instance, an anarchist musical band had held in front of audience of 150. "Arkzin" was the first newspaper in Croatia to publish articles about gay population, about the Internet activism and cyber culture, but also, alongside "Feral", the first to open up serious issues such as evictions, mostly of Serbs and the former JNA military personnel, from their homes, or such as the denial of certificate of citizenship to persons who – despite the fact that they have spent a lifetime in Croatia – could not prove that their parents are full-blooded Croats.

The most valuable political commentators in Croatia, such as Vesna Kesić, Jelena Lovrić, Igor Mandić, or Boris Rašeta, used to write their columns in "Arkzin", repeatedly denouncing the essence of nationalism of the Croatian political elite and financial wheeling and dealing of the new tycoons. Unlike the other institutions in Croatia at the time, in which, as a rule, the nationalist patriotism dictatorship ruled, and every word was weighed, and where all the fearful employees were goody two-shoes, the "Arkzin" newsroom atmosphere reminded of a student boarding house bursting with lucid ideas and interesting discussions. The visual image of the magazine created by the designer team led by Dejan Kršić was totally alternative, the facilities were brazen and provocative; one could therefore not expect the "Arkzin" readers to be mass consumers of cultural mainstream; the readers were mostly members of different minorities (but not only the national minorities) who were not afraid of stigmatization and contempt that the vast majority has for everything different from itself. The paper lasted for a short time only, until 1999: it was too alternative even for the foreign donors; and the fatigue of its journalists did the rest.

SOME NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

"Attack" – Autonomous factory of culture, appeared in Zagreb almost on the ashes of "Arkzin". Outwardly it looked – once again repeating the pattern of the independent scene exclusion from the field of public importance – as a gathering of the politically suspected, the culturally marginalized and the existentially despicable. However, there in the Zagreb "Unity" abandoned factory, where the normal people did not drop in, and where it was really cold, a sandwich and a cup of tea produced wonders, and some really important cultural concepts were created in that venue. In this dilapidated and unsightly building, a respectable alternative theater festival FAKI was founded, which now celebrates 14 years of existence. A Fantastically Dandy Institution, otherwise known as *Fade In*, was also founded here. It has been producing author's and socially engaged documentaries for 11 years now; their award-winning films focusing on the themes of civil society. And finally, ten years ago Medika was devised in this abandoned factory, meant for promotion and servicing all those who want to deal with the Internet, video, or film, in creative ways.

But as the war trumpets grew silent and the violence subsided, so in many places receded the activities of the veterans of the independent culture formed on the ruins of Yugoslavia. Nowadays, the only things reminding us of some of these cultural activists exist solely in disordered archives in private homes of friends and associates. The irony of fate of the independent culture in the former Yugoslavia lies in the fact that many original works of that culture, now languishing somewhere, could easily form a solid encyclopedia of contemporary art. Many of these performances, short films, photographs, essays, street theater, and music shows were made in the throes of war and in a rush of adrenaline of a postwar period, and are thus underlining a different positioning of culture and art, the one fed by personal conviction and critical stance, and not by the state protection and social approval. The works the Sarajevo artists created during the war, under conditions incomparably worse than elsewhere in the region, have indeed been archived in the *Memory Module* documentation center, but where have the works of Sonja Savić from the time with her "Supernauts" been memorized? What has happened to Pavo Urban's photographs of the Dubrovnik's main street, Stradun, in winter 1991? And where could nowadays be found written traces of the war performances of Tom Gotovac and many other creative individuals in Osijek, Vinkovci, Mostar and Dubrovnik? These works were expressions of that which is best in a human being, as opposed to that which is worst, and which, in each of these cities, was taking place just two streets away.

The fate of *Antiratna Kampanja* and "Arkzin" is a paradigm for all other small independent groups of the ex-Yugoslav cultural scene. There are several paradoxes here. The first paradox lies in the fact that *Antiratna Kampanja* and its famous newspaper, like many others, best performed while, so to speak, a sword of Damocles was hanging over their heads and when the finances were the last thing on their mind. They disappeared from the scene the moment the money became important, and other things ceased to be so important. The second paradox lies in the fact that the basic philosophy of these organizations was based on connecting people, and the connecting worked heroically under the toughest conditions while, on the other hand, the organizations themselves were chronically underpeopled. The pressure of the majority was enormous: there was just a few at the time who were able to withstand the state's bristling face, as well as the objections of their family and friends to her or him frequenting those "rat's nests" of the culturally and politically rejected. Among other things, those *were* the dangerous times. The third paradox lies in the fact that the independent cultural organizations, from the fight for Cvjetni trg in

Zagreb to the efforts of the Belgrade's RECOM, the group advocating the dignity of victims of the war, have always been addressing everyone, according to the universal principals and values, but – as a rule – only a small minority responded to that manifesto. This schizophrenic position of an essentially human and universal discourse which only a handful of the conscientious was ready to hear, created diversification of operating methods among the groups of Independent culture scene, without a clear line of demarcation between them. Some groups have taken on the role of social educators, trying to enlighten the majority and raise its civilization awareness, while others started to function as exclusive islands which attracted the like-minded only, or those catapulted from the mainland of the majority culture; and the third group grew the ambition to affect the creation of public policies, acting from the margins to which they had been pushed, and believing that the communal good belongs to all, and not only to political or financial elites.

AMIDST THE GUNS AND BAYONETS¹

Two institutions, one from Belgrade, and the other from Zagreb, at a distance of the famous 400 kilometers, are the paradigmatic examples of such orientation.

The Belgrade-based independent cultural organization is called the Center for Cultural Decontamination, and it was established in 1995. One of its founders and its today's director is a well known dramaturg Borka Pavićević. According to Ms. Pavićević, the intellectual foundation for the establishment of the Centre was that which initially, at the beginning of the wars in Yugoslavia, used to be called the "Belgrade Circle", an association of independent intellectuals and artists who used to act as a reading and discussion group, regularly organizing meetings at which the core of an anti-nationalistic discourse was devised. Initially, the leader of that circle was a philosopher Radomir Konstantinović. Ms. Borka Pavićević underlines that all that was not only about criticism of the Slobodan Milošević's regime, but it was about a critique of nationalism as such. The books like "The Other Serbia" and "Intellectuals and War" emerged from those meetings. The "Belgrade Circle" was constantly changing locations of their activities, until the need for a recognizable form and place of action became evident. In the words of Ms. Borka Pavićević, "a philosophical thought of the opposition in Belgrade needed a more sensitive discourse, the one which would enable to speak about political matters with more emotion. One had to create a place that would be a combination of artistic and political."

Borka Pavićević and her colleagues thus entered the "Veljković Pavilion", a pretty ruined space of a former museum. Ms. Borka Pavićević remembers those early days of the Center for Cultural Decontamination: "This venue was void of things but full with personalities. At that times of 'weak reality' a range of people was expelled from the universities, institutes or newspapers because they refused to fit into the nationalist euphoria – all of them were our human treasure. The analysis of that landscape was well performed by Ana Miljanić in the play "The Warriors' Brothel" (by the book by Ivan Čolović) which we played at the 25 May Museum. It turned out that that critical discourse of ours would become a discourse of affirmation of some other values, and that at one point the plot would become a theater production. The war in Yugoslavia, Vukovar, Dubrovnik and the siege of Sarajevo were important triggers for the generic potential of people who gathered at the Center for Cultural Decontamination in order to say something critical, choosing either the form of a theater play, or an exhibition, or a conversation, or something which simply might be

1 A verse from a Yugoslav Partisans' revolutionary song "Bilećanka"

called a personal gesture, and which often could not be expressed by any of the widely accepted aesthetic forms." The Center for Cultural Decontamination, according to Ms. Pavićević, at the time seemed to be a kind of a "para-theater", where some of the meetings were more cathartic than one could have expected to experience in a real theater. Considering the dark atmosphere surrounding them, all the external pressures and the lack of money, the program of the Center was often not easy to design, but it has always been designed in a way which enabled the establishment of that spiritual guerrilla through operational forms reflecting either what was happening at the Center, or the power of ideas of certain individuals. The program has never been judged there, simply because the people were trying to explain something through different forms of creativity, according to the power of their mind and arguments," Borka Pavićević says.

It was a period of a violent confrontation, of constant denunciations of nationalist propaganda, mythomania and hate speech. Albert Camus's stage adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *The Possessed* has been played in the Center, Danilo Kiš's book has been published, and the Sonja Vukićević's dance theater have performed there, several exhibitions have been shown, many author's films screened and various discussions held. The books have been translated, and distributed free of charge, of such critical writers as Jon Aster, Stathis Gourgouris, Mary Kaldor, Nancy Adler, Omer Bart, and others. Sead Fetahagić, Slobodan Šnajder, Jirzi Menzel, Lordan Zafranović, Bibi Anderson, Liv Ulman, Dževad Karahasan, Dunja Rihtman, and many others guested in the Center and we, within the Center, used to call this the "stripping of the freedom" . Projects such as the "Serbian Dossier", the "Transitional Justice", or "A Study of Yugoslavia" indicated that there was a clear division line between violence and civilization, and that from Nuremberg, via South Africa, to the Hague there was a civilization code related to the identification of crimes and the reverence for the victims, for which all human beings are responsible. The purpose of these debates was also to establish the continuity of culture, in the magma of political and social relations that wanted to erase this kind of identity. During these 15-odd years, a total of about 2500 different events was produced, all of which told stories defying the ugly reality, either nationalist or neo-liberal, in which we still live today. The path these Balkans have passed could symbolically be titled "from the war to the brand," but along this path the Center for Cultural Decontamination has always remained a place of critique and dialogue. Or, as in those years Slobodan Šnajder often use to say: "One day it will become clear that the worst traitors were in fact the greatest patriots of all."

"SOROS'S MERCENARIES"

The Zagreb example of an autonomous cultural institution which has survived maintaining its profile to this day, is the Multimedia Institute. Founded in 1999 under the auspices of George Soros Foundation called "Open Society – Croatia" which used to be a constant target of the Croatian right-wing nationalists, right to the very end of the era reflected in the grim face of Franjo Tuđman. It was formed by a group of young and educated individuals who at the time realized that the boisterous parading of sullen patriotism of their elders has beheaded their own generation, which in the post-war Croatian existential tedium found itself deprived of opportunities and smiles on their faces. According to Mr. Tomislav Medak, one of the leaders of the Multimedia Institute, the organization activities had three focal points from the very beginning. The first was a socially critical action against the social events in the Croatian society during the 90s. Another route led to an attempt to preserve the tradition of a cultural activism pattern that through youth clubs and cultural centers had existed during the times of Socialism and which was endangered

after the disintegration of the state. The third program direction was determined by breaking into new forms of media culture, given that as a part of the Open Society, the Multimedia Institute had already made its first steps in the the field of new media activism, the Internet culture, and the network and computer technologies. In strategic terms, this technology base presented a new form of public speech which could not be usurped by the state media and which would become a zone for discussion of uncomfortable topics; human and minority rights, and civil initiatives, and which would give voice to the politically marginalized groups, the anti-globalists, the anarchists and the supporters of direct democracy.

The Multimedia Institute, in collaboration with Labin Art Express, for some time even provided support for an Internet radio which, true to the basic ideas of this group, became a space for deconstruction of the one-sided picture of the Croatian society, daily produced by the state media. While the new technological language was, on the one hand, a medium for an exclusive handful of skilled activists, on the other hand it was a channel on the ex-Yugoslavia cultural scene through which it was attempted to give voice to people the official media excluded because they were ethnic minorities, or groups with a different point of view. By the way, today it is clear that that guerrilla networking of activists, the exchange of information over the Internet, and those cyber games presented, in fact, the beginnings of what the modern culture calls the Facebook Revolution. As it was the case with the Belgrade Center for Cultural Decontamination, the claim of Zagreb independent groups of the late '90s for freedom of speech, critical thinking and creative action, has eventually turned into a battle for space. The reason for that was simple: within authoritarian states there is no room for autonomous social activists. The three guiding principles of Zagreb activists merged into one. The places of independent culture in Zagreb, such as "Močvara" ("Swamp"), the already mentioned "Attack", and the Multimedia Institute are attempts to revitalize venues where the youth of the '80s use to gather, the areas of new communication technologies language and the key spaces for gathering of those whose ideas and attitudes could not be heard in the official media. According to Tomislav Medak, these spaces "were created as a counter project to the state-funded culture whose mission was to feed the newly discovered national identity: these places were the opposition to the warmongering public and its political elite," says Medak. In aesthetic terms, these places would develop a new type of artistic sensibility, presented by performers such as Slaven Tolj or Siniša Labrović, theater makers such as Damir Bartol Indoš and Goran Sergej Pristaš, designers Dejan Dragosavac, Darko Fritz and Damir Gamulin, alongside with many others. That was a sophisticated aesthetics, dark humored and with strong political criticism.

Through that kind of action the scene will see itself as artistically relevant, but humble and impoverished in terms of organization. To this day this scene, treated like an orphan child by its our own city as well as the state, survives exclusively thanks to the volunteer work, or occasionally receiving modest funding from foreign donors. However, this culture, which everyone constantly sees as an ugly duckling in their own backyard, eventually spread its wings. The so far marginalized areas will become the basis for creation of a conscious political struggle of independent culture against those who hold the keys to public spaces management and the city treasury. The demonstrations that have recently swept Zagreb show a picture of the "young, educated and angry" who, sick and tired, have come banging on the door of the political elite, regardless their party colors.

Zagreb will meet the new millennium with creation of several networks of associations of independent culture; Clubture, Policy Forum, and Zagreb - Cultural Capital of Europe 3000. At a later stage, all these networks plan to join into a single focus - *Pravo na grad* (The Right to the City). In fact, the independent culture has eventually recognized that its marginal position is due to the unjust distribution of

power that excludes a wide range of citizens from the decision-making process, favoring small elites. This limited group of cultural avant-garde has thus turned into a peak of political struggle for democratic participation in decisions about public affairs: urban goods, arts programs and public finances. On the one hand, nowadays this scene continuously put pressure on the city administration to include the independent scene representatives in strategic decision making while, on the other hand, it organizes mass actions opposing the urban areas privatization wanted by financial oligarchs. The instances of Cvjetni trg and Varšavska street in Zagreb are already well known to the public: hundreds of protesters manned these areas day and night in order to prevent that these spaces of urban culture be turned into a shopping center and a parking lot for the selected ones, respectively. These are obvious examples of how the independent culture emerged from its circles of the like-minded, and dedicated itself to the street advocacy for the common good.

In the words of Tomislav Medak: "After Varšavska (the Warsaw street), the independent culture's stance is that it does not take care about itself only, but about the common good, on the principles of equality and freedom. That is a struggle against those who, for their private interest, wish to dispossess the public of the common good. The struggle will continue when it comes to water, electricity, universities, media and the public spaces privatization."

TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

In the last 20 years the various independent culture groups from the former Yugoslavia have dedicated themselves to the same goal: struggle against nationalism and violence in politics, and against the decrepitude of the state-directed art. However, within the social mosaic they positioned themselves in different ways. The case of "Metelkova", the former JNA barracks in Ljubljana, which for two decades already have been filled with artistic Bohemia, is an example of a position which is positively self-sufficient rather than marginal, simply because the protagonists of this movement could not care less about what happens within the culture scene of the majority. "With its 200 or so avant-garde art, multimedia and music groups, Metelkova is a prototype of an anti-institution," said Miha Zadnikar, one of the founders of this initiative. Created in a squatted military barracks, today Metelkova presents a "realistic utopia paradigm," says Zadnikar, because Metelkova residents have been living and creating there for years, regardless of whether the city administration would at one point decide to cut the water and electricity supply off, or to put the building down. As a civil movement, Metelkova formally began in the late '80s but in fact it was in full swing in the early '90s, when many of its groups concluded that their task is a clearly shown anti-militarist stance, and solidarity with the "erased" – the minorities which in an independent Slovenia lost their fundamental civil rights. "The disregard between us and the majority culture is mutual," says Zadnikar. Statistically, Metelkova annually produces nearly equal number of cultural programs as Cankarjev Dom does, but "the majority culture nurtures academism that we do not want: the meaning of exhibitions, concerts and performances in Metelkova is satisfaction, fullness, openness and freedom," says Zadnikar. The abandoned barracks "Karlo Rojc" in Pula function following a similar model of a ghetto and total autonomy. About a hundred culture, civil and anarchist organizations operate there today, occasionally organizing noisy alternative theater and of new music festivals, without much desire to go beyond the barracks yard.

Two blocks away from Metelkova, there is another abandoned factory in Ljubljana; in 2006 the "Rog" abandoned factory was occupied by squatters of a different type. According to Andrej Kurnik, one of the founders of this civil initiative, the challenge for the new generation of independent culture was different from the one the hippie commune of the Metelkova had: the "Rog" residents posed themselves a question

on how to enable the break out of the independent culture scene and its participation in the world of their former enemies – the liberal capitalism and the bureaucratic state. For this reason a group of architects and a group of social sciences academics acted together, united in this factory from the very beginning. Their common aim, among everything else they have been doing, was to protect the human activity in urban areas that had been devastated. In brief, the "Rog" factory has become a creative workshop of ideas on how to satisfy the needs of young people who want to emphasize their participation in the society, in whichever form it comes. A similar position has been taken by Rijeka's independent cultural scene, gathered in a colorful community of groups integrated under the „Drugo more“ ("Another Sea") umbrella brand which, on the one hand, insists on promoting its specific programs and the specific value of this scene while, on the other hand, sees the town council as a valid partner in realizing its goals.

The difference between Metelkova and Rog projects, as the difference in general between the independent culture of the first and the second generation, lies in the fact that the former sought asylum, to be able to maintain their own identity, while the latter want to change the society in order to find their identity together with it.

GUARDIANS OF FIRE

After the wars have subsided in this region, the nationalist states have ceased to be their own autonomous culture organizations' number one enemy – but a new one has appeared in the meantime. The enemy now is that which nowadays is everywhere called the global neo-liberal capitalism, here in force in its Balkan and tycoon version, dominated by money and mass culture industry. The most of the population has embraced the joys of consumerism, compensating thus for the existential uncertainty, but they stopped caring about the values of civil society and genuine creativity. In the newly established situation, the autonomous scene had to position itself in a way which would allow it to remain independent without being eaten by predators of new economic power and without being forgotten by the social majority. Some groups in this region are thus fighting for survival, some function as silent guardians of the fire of the independent culture values, some want to enter into a dialogue with society, and some of them want to achieve a respectable position in that society. Groups such as "Abrašević" in Mostar, theater "Dodona" in Priština, "Točka" ("The Point") in Skopje, "Rex" in Belgrade, "Pekarna" ("Bakery") in Maribor, and many others, investing the little money they have and enormous personal effort, try to affirm a young poet or two, and the occasional musical band, or implement projects on socially relevant issues, acting as small chapels of civil society in a sea of cheap entertainment culture. Some valuable groups, such as "Montenegro Mobil Art" and its magazine, unfortunately do not exist any more, but as far as Montenegro is concerned, the banner of intellectual openness there is held high by the Karver bookstore in Podgorica, offering not only titles of the extremely interesting authors but also regional literary festivals and meetings of writers. On the other hand, there are institutions such as East West Center in Sarajevo or Eurokaz, the New Theater Festival held in Zagreb, which have much higher ambitions. East West Center is breaking out on the domestic and international cultural scene, producing theater and multimedia programs under the auspices of international sponsors, while Eurokaz has been functioning, for 25 years, as a small and independent citizens' organization, with significant resources and meaningful impact on domestic cultural conditions.

Since the turbulent and often contradictory processes have continually superseded each other in this region during the last 20 years, nowadays the autonomous scene wonders what the bottom line of that great history is, and how does it look in the reflections of us all.

The latest attempts by various groups to participate in the artistic and theoretical programs of some kind of "community memory" present therefore a very interesting fact, in the aesthetic, cultural and political terms, given that through aesthetic means they want to mediate the quite disorderly recent past, troubled by war and transition. The exhibition held in Zagreb and Belgrade a few years ago, entitled the Political Practices of the (Post) Yugoslav Art, intended to show the very potential of creative possibilities in a time when ideologies, war, transition, and money have all become mixed up. For this purpose, four arts organizations from the newly established countries have joined together; the Centre for Contemporary Art from Sarajevo, New Media Center from Novi Sad, Prelom Kolektiv from Belgrade, and WHW from Zagreb. They joined their efforts to articulate the effects the huge geopolitical changes had on the arts of the region and creativity in general. Further-on, a project called „Izložnosti“ ("Exposures"), realized in Banja Luka in the autumn of 2010, and participated by artists and independent associations such as the ex-Yugoslav group „Spomenik“ ("Monument"), "Hartefakt" from Belgrade and the Institute for the Duration, Place and Variables from Zagreb, who all dealt with various aspects of the recent past. For example, the exhibition called "Four Faces of Omarska," realized within this project, treated the fact that first, at the time of Socialism, Omarska used to be a mine; then, during the war, it used to be a concentration camp for captured Bosniaks; and after the war a concession of a multinational company, and a place where big-budget movies are shot. The case was used to diagnose the almost schizophrenic historical facts which average citizens have difficulties to cope with. Looking at the biographies of the people who participated in these artistic actions, it can be concluded that the success of the autonomous cultural scene during its 20-year existence, lies in the fact that it gave rise to a group of highly educated and sensible people, ready for the emancipatory mission for values which have not acquired the right of citizenship yet.

Finally, the increased number of connectivity projects implemented by the autonomous cultural groups from the region, projects with issues facing the past, suggests that the new generation of independent culture not only tries to bring more clarity into the complex events of the past, but also wants to sensibly heal the wounds that continue to burden all of us.

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

In completely non-ideological terms, over the past 20 years the the autonomous culture groups of ex-Yugoslavia have succeeded to build a system in which the values of openness, creativity and spontaneity were more important than money, power and authority. They have thus remained the legitimate areas for all the "misfits", enabling them to freely express their humanity and creativity. Secondly, the autonomous culture groups have remained the guardians of pacifism and cosmopolitanism during the worst times of war as well as today, opposing any political aggression and expressing solidarity with all victims of violence.

Thirdly, these organizations have created a distinctive and lucid aesthetic writing, devoid of desire for social approval and the protection of the state, which was – fresh and innovative – often superior to the so-called midstream art.

Further on, although pushed to the margins, these organizations assumed social responsibility boldly and confidently, and through a host of civic initiatives they have requested participation in public affairs, according to the criteria of democracy and freedom.

Finally, these organizations represent a glimpse of the romantic fantasy and the playful folly that usually only children have, but this is a glimpse which makes the life of adults seem more human, more exciting and – better.