

*"The beast of the present turns so easily to the deadly machine, turns also to poetry in order to glorify it."  
(Karl Kraus)*

At the peak of Mount Lovćen, far beyond the timber line, there lie the ruins of a mausoleum. Designed by a Croat and conceived by a Serbian king as a symbol of Yugoslavian unity, it was realised in 1972 under Tito as a homage to the Montenegrin prince-bishop and writer, Petar Petrović Njegoš. Njegoš' "The Mountain Wreath" – the story of an Orthodox village community who, one Christmas Day, set off to massacre their Moslem neighbours – was written in 1847 as a nationalist epic, only to be celebrated under Tito as a Romantic anthem to the spirit of resistance among partisans.

In January, 1986 a manifesto was published in Belgrade: "The question of integration", stating, "The question of the integration of the Serbian people and their culture within Yugoslavia as a whole is a deciding issue for the survival of the people and their development." Two hundred Belgrade intellectuals followed the appeal of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and conjured the "Albanian aggression in Kosovo" and the "genocide" perpetrated against the Serbs as a result of a "decades-long underhand political tribunal against the Serb nation and its history". Heading the signatories was the writer Dobrica Ćosić, to whom the honour was granted of observing the fall of Yugoslavia five years later at the head of the state committee.

Njegoš and Ćosić. From nationalism to socialism and back. "Wherever society has been active in producing hatred, the intellectuals were always particularly good at it", comments Hans Magnus Enzensberger in the down-to-earth tradition of Kraus. Njegoš and Ćosić cover the area of culture in the Balkans that became a mediator of the political programme – whether as a call to arms or as a socialist statement. They both retain the totalitarian claim, in spite of the centuries separating them.

Politics and art – a dilemma. Both can only approach each other with scepticism and a careful distrust. In the sense that politics has only too often interpreted art as a means of propaganda, and that the artist has all too often made himself the accomplice of political ideals.

What conclusions does this dilemma allow for a country like Bosnia and Herzegovina? Should art be of help in overcoming the traumas of war? Should it bind people together? Should it be the voice of reason in a cacophony of fears? Should it defend the mutual against the dividing elements?

As much as we might like the thought of art as a binding factor and as tempting as it might be, particularly in a country of divisions, to answer with a resounding "Yes!", the dilemma – politics and art – does not allow such easy answers.

So instead of the answer we have a warning. Because politics does not find it easy to talk about art. The temptation to give political agendas an aesthetic veneer, to call on art to bear testament to one's own legitimacy, has dominated the Balkans for decades. It would however not do justice to history only to focus on the Balkans. Politics has always kept art for its own homage, it is, as Boris Groys puts it, dependent on aesthetics – whether in literature, painting or architecture. To list them, however, would not be appropriate. It would be a never-ending list, even if it had a beginning.

The dilemma between social ideals and their artistic translation cannot be resolved within the political arena. Every attempt to do so begins with an anticipation of the result. To make the bridge connecting Njegoš' mausoleum and Ćosić's partisan tales: the programme was decided at the beginning.

So what remains, other than the warning? A plea for non-political art? Which itself becomes just another form of political programming, finding its analogy in the celebration of the totalitarian penchant for realism. Art can only define its own place, select its own themes, be they in opposition or agreement with politics. The place for art is wherever it chooses to see itself, and that is no banality. Opposition can be found wherever its occupation is recognised as the real goal, or, to call on Boris Groys once again, wherever art mutates to "totalitarianism behind the bright surface". Because what restriction of freedom could be more fatal than the one which anticipates the result of freedom?

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