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TOWARDS THE BOOK “MEMORY AND MANIPULATION BY NENAD MAKULJEVIĆ”

The publication “Memory and Manipulation” by Nenad Makuljević, professor of art history at the University of Belgrade, is a dive into the politics of monuments between 1989 and 2021 in Serbia. Through a detailed review of the various monuments built during the 30 and more years in Serbia, Makuljević makes significant parallels between different periods, reflecting the general attitudes of the political authorities at the times, and especially in contemporary Serbia, describes the phenomenon of overproduction of public monuments - so-called Monumentomania.

Approaching the 30-year period through three specific phases, Makuljević points to implicit patterns that run throughout these political periods and dynamic changes - the use of monuments primarily as a means of “manipulation and expression of political ambitions,” while the function of memory is provided secondary importance. Thus, starting with the socialist period, Makuljević provides an overview of the erected monuments and other memorial policies present in the period of Slobodan Milošević’s rule (1989-2000), the period of the Democratic Opposition of Serbia coalition (2000-2012), and the period of rule of Serbian Progressive Party and Aleksandar Vučić (2012-2021). Throughout these three periods, different approaches to the use of the past in the construction of contemporary understanding and public narratives are present.

As an introduction to the first period, between 1989 and 2000, Makuljević presents the existing Yugoslav culture of monuments at the time - as places important for remembrance and party rituals. A major element that prevailed during the period of Milošević’s rule is the growth and penetration of nationalism in public policies, a process that has also manifested itself on existing monuments and places of remembrance related to the socialist heritage. In this period, widespread de-ideologization and de-Titoization are observed through active change of street names and the fading of the original ideological background of existing monuments.

Through the three periods, Makuljević presents the attitudes towards specific periods in the history of Serbia, i.e. the importance ascribed to and the ways of interpreting the different periods by the given authorities. Thus, the book describes the dynamics of commemoration and interpretation of the First World War, the cult of the Middle Ages, and war monuments for the period of 1991-1999, especially the role of Serbia in the

given period. In the first phase, apart from clear nationalization, there are processes of memory erasure as well as renewal, *renovatio memoriae*, in relation to former Yugoslav authorities. Great attention is paid to heroes - commanders and politicians, while there is also a revision of historical memories - shown through the example of Draža Mihajlović. In this period, Makuljević also emphasizes the government's approach to the commemoration of the wars of the 1990s in relation to the dominant narrative of victory over NATO and self-victimization.

In the second phase, Makuljević examines the ideological changes that have taken over the Serbian public space after the change of Milošević. Here, the dominant anti-communist attitude and continuation of nationalist processes, as well as rehabilitation of Četnik-ism, are emphasized. On the other hand, the attitude towards wars in the 1990s changed so that in this period, attention was paid to the victims in military events, while the narrative of eternal victims continued. A vivid example of the broader government approaches to remembrance and commemoration in this period is the Central Memorial - where the lack of clear messages or condemnations is most pronounced. At this stage, Makuljević also considers the policies of gift monuments, generally related to expressions of international friendship and political propaganda.

Finally, Makuljević provides a broad overview of the Monumentomania that characterizes the third phase. Dominant political processes that he identifies in this period are the increase of autocracy and political power regarding monuments. Makuljević notices the direct investment and role of Aleksandar Vučić in the broader memorial developments - drawing parallels with the Skopje 2014 project and the Macedonian prime minister at the time, Nikola Gruevski - noting the influence and autocratic approach of the decisions related to the construction of the monuments. This period is characterized as the embodiment of populist kitsch, and Makuljević repeatedly emphasizes the neglect of planning and aesthetic arrangement of public spaces at the expense of political interests. In this period, in addition to the continuation of processes of nationalization and mythologizing of the Serbian Middle Ages, there was also an intensified celebration of jubilees, pseudo-historical narratives, and revision of the past.

The intense memorial culture across three decades of Serbian society is a phenomenon elaborated in-depth in Makuljević's study. The topic is particularly relevant for Macedonian society, in which similar changes and political manipulations of memory have taken place over the years, of course, apexing in the monument explosion within the Skopje 2014 project. What is notable in this archeology of the Serbian monumental culture is the threading of certain motifs and narratives - especially the intense nationalization that does not stop at any stage. Thus, the book represents an important resource for detailed insight into the political narratives and interpretations of different historical periods in Serbia and elsewhere. Additionally, focusing primarily on governmental policies and narrative constructions, the study represents a possible starting point for a broader exploration of public perceptions toward governmental self-

manifestation and usurpation of public spaces—processes that Makuljević foreshadows through interpretations of contemporary memorial practices.