

Negating the West, Going East. On Socialist Realism in Yugoslavia (1945-50)

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The main goal of this paper is to provide an answer to the question: what is Socialist Realism and how did it present itself in Yugoslav arts and culture in the first years after the Second World War? Socialist Realism in Yugoslavia appeared as a doctrine in the early post-war years (roughly 1945–1950), with Soviet art as a model. This doctrine was never fully adopted and officially accepted – in 1948, Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia ‘stepped out’ of the People’s Democracies bloc, which caused the doctrine to fade in the early 1950s.

The Socialist Realism era was characterised by the negation of Modernist art and the renouncement of everything Western as degenerate, formalist, and not suitable for the development of the state, but if the artistic practices were to create an optimal projection, does that not define Socialist Realism as a project of Modernity? Having this in mind, the poetics of several composers will be analysed (Josip Slavenski, Milan Ristić, Ljubica Marić, Stanojlo Rajčić among others, as examples), with the aim of mapping the majority of the shifts and transitions within them. In other words, how Modern(ist) Socialist Realism is, and how the changes in the society affected certain composers.

Preliminary findings of this paper concern acknowledging all the issues regarding Socialist Realism in Yugoslavia, while trying to find possible traces of continuity within several Belgrade-based composers’ poetics. While discontinuity in both fine arts and individual poetics is obvious, or at least made obvious by critics of the time, it seems that the mentioned traces of continuity are to be found in the composers’ post-war opuses, although hidden. These hidden features might provide an answer to the first question: what is Socialist Realism and how did it present itself in Yugoslav arts and culture in the first years after the Second World War?

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