

Epiphany Term Seminar Series

Thursday 19th May

Room TBC 16.00-17.00

MAVIS
Material and Visual Culture Research Group

*Monument to the insurgents in
the Abez forest, Croatia. Zdenko
Kolacio, 1966.*

Materiality and the Question of Authenticity in Yugoslav Memorial Landscapes

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The ways in which the material traces of a certain event are documented, categorized, and interpreted as heritage reflect the power relations that sustain the dominant system of values. In the dynamic political context of socialist Yugoslavia (1945-1990), materiality was of utmost importance in the formation of historical and political narratives on the revolutionary antifascist struggle that occurred during the Second World War. After 1945, the material traces of the war were also mobilized to define and consolidate a common perspective about the civil war that opposed partisans and local Axis collaborators, in an attempt to mitigate tensions and competing narratives in an ethnically diverse region like the Balkans. Heritage policies and practices pertaining WW2-related sites and collections were defined by a certain idea of authenticity, which had a significant effect on commemorative practices and the artistic design of monuments across socialist Yugoslavia and other Eastern European countries. Yet, the production of heritage in socialist countries has been often overlooked in recent scholarship, which tends to focus on the spectacularism of modernist aesthetics. Located at historical sites, the monuments and memorial parks of post-war Yugoslavia mobilized the material traces of an heroic past to shape a landscape in which communities and visitors could envision new social and environmental strategies for national and international 'peaceful coexistence'. While WW2 memorial sites often became stages of new armed conflicts during the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, revealing the paradox of grand monumental projects, some memorial sites and traces of past emancipatory struggles continue to inspire and mobilize ideas of resilience, solidarity, and social justice in the present.