

The Camp Side of Marshal Josip Broz Tito*

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Introduction

For 35 years Yugoslavia was ruled by one of the most glamorous dictators of the 20th century, Marshal Josip Broz Tito. When in June of 1948 he split with Stalin, the western world compared him to the biblical David, who not only dared to face, but also defy, the Soviet goliath (Beloff 1985:129). The winner developed his own style of dictatorship called *Titoism*, which was the “consequence, not the cause, of the clash with Stalin” (Pavlowitch 1988:41). However, his monopoly on the regime, which was based on the original Soviet model, remained unchanged and could be called autocratic rather than totalitarian. Tito’s main focus was on controlling the Party as well as the armed and security forces, leaving more autonomy to the economy and an illusion of freedom within cultural activities (*Ibid.*:44). As Milovan Djilas – who later on also took the role of David and unfortunately failed – stressed, Tito’s achievements are inseparable from his personality and “when all is said and done, the achievement makes the man, not the man the achievement” (Djilas 1981:179).

In Tito’s case the achievement was the spectacle of mainstream camp culminating in the personality of the communist dictator himself. Yet despite this he was not included in any of the western publications, like, for example, in Philip Core’s encyclopedia of camp called *Camp. The Lie that Tells the Truth*, published in 1984. For Igor Perišić, who reviewed the translation of the above into Serbian in 2003, it was obvious that the book lacked a chapter on Tito (Perišić 2013). It is fascinating to note that Tito’s camp was developing as time passed, reaching its peak in the decade before he died.

Although there were many highly individual and excessive despotic leaders such as Idi Amin, Saddam Hussein and Nicolae Ceaușescu, Tito was arguably the only one who could be interpreted as a camp icon. As a communist, he was known for his glamorous style and for rubbing shoulders with sheiks, queens, kings, princesses and movie stars while at the same time playing the most sophisticated aristocrat. See *Picture #1* below.



Picture #1:

Tito and American actor Kirk Douglas in Slovenia, November 7, 1964
 Courtesy of the Museum of Yugoslavia

As Richard West observed, “unlike these other dictators, who glorified their own egos, Tito preferred to enjoy the pomp and luxury of his life at the top” (West 1996:196). His country became a theatre, where he played whatever role was required of him – “a communist with [a] human face,” a generous king, a fashion dictator, a rebel and a heretic. The scale of his show was unprecedented and even his funeral was the most exaggerated and pompous spectacle of any leader and probably the biggest gathering of statesmen in human history. After his death the longing for the world Tito created was so overpowering that it was called *Yugonostalgia*, while yearning for its leader received the name *Titostalgia*.

Camp and the State of Research

Camp is an “open phenomenon,” therefore it is possible to approach and analyze it from many perspectives in order (or hoping) to understand it. Camp can be at the

same time a subversive strategy of the sexual minorities before the Stonewall Inn uprising or – as Susan Sontag would argue – purely apolitical (Sontag 2001:277), and it can be part of the mainstream or, quite to the contrary, occupy the margins while at the same time cementing or shaking stable norms. In order to grasp, one has to acquire a certain attitude and distance while facing its multi-layered complexity.

In the western world, camp was first associated with marginalized gays, who used it as a strategy for surviving in the oppressive, heterosexual world and also as a way of communicating with each other. The term *camp* entered the mainstream in 1964, when Sontag published her groundbreaking essay *Notes on Camp*, loosening its connection with homosexuality and stressing that camp is a sensibility that glorifies stylization, excess and artificiality. Since the beginning many researchers admitted that defining camp is an almost impossible task, and Sontag compares it to a private code, so talking about camp feels like betrayal (Sontag 2001:275). Mark Booth argued that although the “word is used to describe people, clothes, life styles, paintings, literature, music, architecture and interior design,” even people that are campy are not able to define it and their answer “will not stand up to examination (Booth 1983, note from the dust jacket).

Camp is elusive, mobile and without solid ground, like a flower in a pot; therefore in order to understand it one should place Sontag’s essay in a wider context. The 1960s was a time of change in the paradigm from modernist to postmodernist with growing awareness of social inequality, feminist and sexual minority activities,¹ sexual revolution and students’ strikes, but it was also a time of sentimentalism and nostalgia. Sontag herself became a rebel and affiliated camp not with homosexuals, but heterosexuals (or rather, asexuals). She dedicated her writing to the sexually ambiguous Oscar Wilde, a great poser, dandy and mocker of Victorian morality, which in the end led him to imprisonment. Although Sontag was bisexual and for many years lived in a relationship with Annie Leibovitz, the sexuality of people involved in camp did not seem to be of importance to her. Camp emerged as a product of a particular *habitus* – an embodied culture associated with a group or society. According to Charles Camic, *habitus* refers to a “range of complex and intelligent behavioral dispositions, moral sentiments, acquired competences and forms of practical understanding and reasoning” (Crossley 2005:104). The two different *habitus* – Western and Eastern – created two different versions of camp, thus in Yugoslavia, only traces of camp can be found and consequently there was very little interest in this subject. The essay *Notes on Camp* by Sontag, which was

originally published in 1964, was translated into Serbian only in 1999 (Suzan Zontag, 1999, "Beleške o kempu," *Eterna: Časopis za savremenu kulturu*, translated by Branka Robertson, nr. 7),² although her previous books and articles appeared already in the 1970s and *On Photography* even twice – in 1982 and 2009.³ The only book about camp translated into Serbian by Siniša Mitrović's in 2003 was *Kemp: laž koja govori istinu (Camp. The Lie that Tells the Truth)* by Philip Core. The book was originally published in 1984, and although the author did not see camp as an exclusively gay expression, the cover of the book was dedicated to young male bodies. The Serbian version, however, replaced that with the picture of the sex symbol of the 1950s, Marilyn Monroe, taken by Bert Stern in 1962 for *Vogue* magazine. In 1996, Goran Gocić published the book *Andy Warhol i strategije popa (Andy Warhol and the Strategy of Pop)*, but his interest in camp was marginal (two pages: 54-55 and 113-14). In 2008, Miloš Jovanović published an article called *Kemp i seksualnost (Camp and Sexuality)*, in which he briefly referred to the male street prostitute Merlinka, the hero of the movie *Marble Ass* (1995) directed by Želimir Žilnik. In the same year Sanja Muzaferija published her master's thesis *Od kiča do campa: strategije subverzije (From Kitsch to Camp: Strategies of Subversion)*, originally written in English at the University of Sussex, to date the only book about camp in Croatia.

One of the few scholars interested in camp is Vladimir Kolarić, who wrote two articles on camp, yet none of them about camp in Serbia. The first article was a general reflection on snobbism, dandyism and camp and the other about camp in novels of the Russian writer Gajto Gazdanov. When asked about the reason for the lack of camp in Serbian culture, he pointed to the domination of patriarchal ideology and a distrust for this kind of cultural phenomenon, which is considered decadent. Such an attitude was deeply rooted in historical experience, which gave primacy to cultural survival with a certain aesthetics called "high art." The other reason was the collective nature of Yugoslavian (Serbian) politics and society which was usually very suspicious about any signs of individualism and liberalism. There was simply no place for such frivolous and non-serious art such as camp in traditional, national and historical art cementing the society, and it was not well-received by politics on the left or on the right (Kolarić 2014).

Jasmina Čubrilo explained the absence of camp by pointing at the society, which was structured with high puritan revolutionary ideas and based on moral codes. Such an attitude, blended with the old patriarchal – which means homophobic

– system of values and ways of living was not accepted. There was no space for unstable gender and transgender questioning presented in kitsch aesthetics either in the former Yugoslavia or after, and such a situation exists until the present times. Similarly, the liaison between camp and kitsch aesthetics was not allowed because in revolutionary Yugoslavia society was oriented towards the better, communist future and only the best values were allowed. So-called high culture had a mission to fulfil by being the ethical, aesthetical and political guide in the world of high Socialist modernism in fine arts, distinguished music, film and performance festivals like the Belgrade International Theatre Festival (BITEF), the Belgrade Music Festival (BEMUS) and the Belgrade International Film Festival (FEST). Kitsch and camp aesthetics were connected with western decadency and served as a clear sign of class division, which was evidence of a lack of education (Čubrilo 2014).

Zoran Pantelić argued that camp is a reflection of political context and in the field of artistic production and in the media it is being perceived as some kind of pseudo-statement, which is lacking any kind of criticism of social transformation. Such an attitude may suggest that Serbia established itself as a commercial, peripheral place in the capitalist system, where camp became a display for the dominant groups involved in an accumulation of capital, so characteristic for society during the process of transformation. Pantelić concluded that being a very specific phenomenon, camp requires a very specific sensitivity, which at present does not really exist in Serbian art production. He connected camp with the phenomenon of Turbo Folk, which flourished during the Yugoslavian War in the 1990s and is still very popular (Pantelić 2014).

Yet camp is more than just kitsch, a sign of decadency or apolitical folly; it is an attitude and a particular relation between the object (or person) and the observer. In this article, we believe it serves as a bridge between the present and the past, East and West, between Yugoslavia and the rest of the world, fulfilling the role of living, dressing (and posing) for political success in Tito's personality. Last but not least, camp is not only a phenomenon itself, but also a critical tool for analyzing Marshal Broz's political spectacle, which aimed to astonish a worldwide audience.

The World as a Stage

Bruce Rodgers argued that camp was connected with 16th-century English slang, which referred to a male actor wearing a dress, and "whatever its origins, the term

seems to be quite old and related to theater” (Bergman 1995:131). Sontag wrote that “to perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role” (Sontag 2001:280). The famous gay metaphor regarding the world as a stage was probably delivered in Shakespeare’s comedy *As You Like It*:

All the world’s a stage
And all the men and women merely players
(Shakespeare 2005:41).

Tito was no stranger to this concept and turned the metaphor into reality, changing Yugoslavia into a stage on which everyone played life according to the script, just as in the film *Truman Show*, directed by Peter Weir. In the Yugoslavian show, however, Tito was the director as well as the main actor, but contrary to Truman, a very conscious one. Richard Burton, who played Tito in the movie *The Battle of Sutjeska*, once noted that it was very hard to play another actor (Simić 2009:276).

According to communist standards Tito provided relative prosperity to his country thanks to loans from the International Monetary Fund, “but unlike other dictators he shared it with his people” (West 1996:332). At that time Yugoslavia was closer to the West than to the East and a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, which separated itself from either of the power blocks (Gibson 1981:52). Tito skillfully balanced among all of them, playing the role of a “communist with [a] human face,” while at the same time keeping his political opponents in prison on the island of Goli Otok and relying on a secret police, the OZNA, which was modelled on the Soviet N.K.V.D. (Gibson 1981:118).⁴ Life was therefore almost comfortable as long as curiosity did not lead the actors to check out what was behind the wall.

Tito, as the protagonist in his own play, enjoyed an enormous popularity, which around 1944 turned into a cult, gripping everybody so intensively that in the 1950s it resembled a religious fanaticism and group hysteria. The biggest spectacle of all was called “Youth Day,” celebrated in Belgrade Stadium on the 25th of May, which was Tito’s official birthday. Although the communist system was based on collectiveness, party leaders were always on the podium and in the center of mass demonstrations.

Their visual images were ubiquitous, dominating the public and private sphere, and institutions, streets, collective farms or industrial units were named after the party leaders in great numbers (Apor 2010:90).

Although Tito has been portrayed countless times in an official style, he was also mocked in Dušan Otašević's installation *Comrade Tito – The White Violet – The Whole World Loves You* (the title was borrowed from the poem about Tito) created in 1969.⁵ The size of this work (488 x 348 cm) makes Tito appear very impressive and important, looking down at everybody who came to see him. In the background there is a white heart with stenciled colorful roses, which, from the camp perspective, are no longer kitsch, but a trendsetter's mark, and no one did it better than Tito, the fashion dictator. Moreover, he actually liked flowers and was buried in a mausoleum called "House of Flowers," thus the artist actually followed Sontag's thought that a good taste is simply not enough and that "there exists, indeed, a good taste of bad taste" (Sontag 2001:291). In his installation, Otašević described the common arrangements of socialist celebrations like May Day parades, congresses or school performances, which could be considered a part of Yugoslavian popular art (Dimitrijević 2003:112). The style of portraying Tito was always realistic thanks to the "grand compromise," where the "quintessential rule was created: a certain degree of critical freedom was possible but only if it did not address the president personally" (Dimitrijević 2001/2002). Here, Sontag's phrase that "camp taste nourishes itself on the love that has gone into certain objects and personal styles" (Sontag 2001:292) helps us to appreciate the eccentric side of Marshal Josip Broz.

The stage on which Tito played his role was larger than Yugoslavia and it would not be too much to say that he made the whole world applaud his acting and admire the elaborate scenography he prepared. As Djilas has noted, "a Communist leader is a national ruler on the international scene" (Djilas 1981:61), and Tito was no exception. Anja Drulović in *Tito's Cookbook* provided an account of the extraordinary meals Tito ate with Hollywood stars and statesmen around the world, including Sir Winston Churchill and U.S. President Richard Nixon (Drulović 2006:216, 228). As a communist he had no objection (and *vice versa*) even to visiting Pope Paul VI in the Vatican in 1971. Marshal Broz was also a collector of medals, and as far as he was concerned, it was an obligatory courtesy to exchange medals with foreign dignitaries (Djilas 1981:111). His collection of impressive distinctions

was captured by Božidar Jakac in the picture *Portrait druga Tita* (1947). The only major gift he never received was the Nobel Peace Prize, for which he was nominated at the end of his life.

In Tito's world, reality was mixed with imagination and the public with actors "and with permission from Tito to blow up a real bridge in order to recreate his historical exploits, fiction had become larger than life." Mila Turajlić's documentary *Cinema Komunisto*, from which we obtain the above quote, reveals the scale of Tito's spectacle, in which soldiers were hired to play partisans in the movies while navy personnel were coming to the Pula Roman amphitheater during the film festival to fill empty seats and to help create a great atmosphere. The cost of this set design was so overwhelming that once the show ended the Yugoslav public was left with an enormous debt, which ultimately led the country to bankruptcy. All of this, however, did not end with the death of the main actor, but with the decision to dismantle the magnificent decoration of Tito's stage. According to Stevan K. Pavlowitch, this happened in the year 1984, when the people noticed that the best-dressed emperor did not have any clothes. His luxurious retreat on the Brijuni Islands became a national park, and the great Peace Yacht "Galeb" was put up for sale (Pavlowitch 1988:33). The lights finally went out, and the theatre was closed for good.

The Dandy

When Sontag wrote that "camp is the answer to the problem: how to be a dandy in the age of mass culture" (Sontag 2001:288), the answer was already at hand in socialist Yugoslavia and embodied in Marshal Josip Broz Tito.

We find in the *New Slang Dictionary of Partridge*, that the noun *dandy* dates back to 1784, when it meant "anything first-rate or excellent" (Partridge 2007:551). According to the *Collins English Dictionary*, *dandy* is a "man greatly concerned with smartness of dress" (2014:505) and in the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, we find the definition "an excellent thing of its kind" (2011:362). Yet Marshal Tito was more than well-dressed and sophisticated; he used the dandy appearance for his own political game on both the national and international stage. His costumes allowed him to appear not only younger, but almost immortal, and so the public was largely unaware of the state of his health, especially at the end of his life (Pavlowitch 1992:80). During this time he was particularly careful when checking the design of symbols and uniforms "while his own uniforms, in seasonal versions and in various

colors, with matching shoes, resplendent with gold braid and decorations, were balanced against hardly less showy civilian outfits for every possible occasion” (Pavlowitch 1992:75).

Like a proper dandy, Tito “worked hard to develop a style” (Djilas 1981:110). He played chess, billiards and dominos, was a keen photographer and liked to dance old-fashioned waltzes (*Ibid.*:10). His hallmarks included golden watches, embroidered uniforms, soft, wavy, dyed hair, false suntans and false gleaming white teeth (*op. cit.*). The “communist with style” (Drulović 2006:10) wore white gloves made from very soft leather and a golden ring encrusted with diamonds. In the summer, his uniforms were white, in winter they were field grey (see *Picture #2* below).



Picture #2:

Stevan Kragujevic, Ho Chi Minh, Josip Broz Tito and Edvard Kardelj
Beograd, August 1957. Author Stevan Kragujević.

Source:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Stevan_Kragujevic,_Ho_Chi_Minh,_Josip_Broz_Tito_and_Edvard_Kardelj,_Beograd,_avgust_1957.jpg]

His civilian suits were all beautifully cut, garnering him votes as one of the best-dressed men in the world (Gibson 1981:55). Winston Churchill, however, after meeting Tito for the first time in August of 1944, sarcastically called his new, grey tight-fit uniform, with a scarlet stripe running down the trousers, a “gold-lace strait-jacket” (Auty 1974:280).

Tito’s appearance in countless photos and pictures was always immaculate and he would wear a suit even while mowing the grass, as seen in the photo with Jovanka taken in April of 1957 in the meadow of Ostrvo Vanga in Croatia (Fototeka MIJ, Museum of Yugoslav History in Belgrade). Paja Jovanović in his painting *Josip Broz Tito* (1947, oil on canvas, 150 X 100 cm, National Museum in Belgrade) captured him at the moment of decision-making. See *Picture #3* below.



Picture #3:

Pavle Paja Jovanović, *Marshal Tito*, 1947, oil on canvas, 150 x 100 cm.

Courtesy of the National Museum in Belgrade

He had just gotten up from a comfortable, upholstered and richly carved chair and his fist hit the top of an equally decorated desk. Tito’s face was stubborn and his whole pose suggested determination in a moment of uncertainty. A nicely fit greyish uniform, embroidered with golden ornaments and buttons with various awards, was

worn to convince his people that no matter how dramatic the events of the world appeared, Tito would face them and he would win. Another painting from the same year (Paja Jovanović, 1947, oil on canvas, 121 x 92 cm, Art Collection of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts) presented him in a well-tailored black suit, which was a suitable background for various bars, medals and awards – especially those in red – which clearly stood out. The atmosphere in the picture seemed to be very relaxed, as Tito was sitting comfortably on his carved chair having a moment of pleasure while smoking cigarette.

Peasant Tito, like a bourgeois dandy, dreamed of being an aristocrat, yet at the same time he was aware of his obligations to the “common people.” In the end, however, the dandy inside of him won out, pushing him toward a life of pomp and luxury, the life of the class he rejected. His first move after receiving power was to establish himself at Prince Paul’s White Palace, because “by taking up residence in palaces, by ruling from them, he attached himself to the monarchic tradition and to traditional concepts of power” (Djilas 1981:95). Moreover, he surrounded himself with the aristocracy of the times – princesses, celebrities, movie stars and statesmen. Elizabeth Taylor spent an entire month on the Brijuni Islands, while her husband Richard Burton was playing Tito in the movie *The Battle of Sutjeska* (1973), and Sophia Loren was cooking homemade pasta (Drulovic 2006:140-42). Tito’s approach to equating a high society of kings and queens with their “popular” version of movie stars and celebrities could perhaps garner him an additional title as the first postmodernist communist.

Milovan Djilas, who was once one of Tito’s closest friends, wrote that “even when an underground operative, he dressed like a dandy” (Djilas 1981:9). See *Picture #4* below.



Picture #4:

Marshal Tito during the Second World War in Yugoslavia, May 1944,
Author: Sgt. M.J. Slade, No. 2 Army Film and Photographic Unit

Source:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Marshal_Tito_during_the_Second_World_War_in_Yugoslavia,_May_1944.jpg]

Tito loved traveling and would bring with him on his travels a group of his white poodles, particularly for trips around Yugoslavia, often carrying one of them in his arms. Pedigreed pets were seen as a fashion statement at the time and a sign of good taste, so they were no longer kept for practical reasons, but for pleasure and “through an entirely controlled process of matching the owner, a pet became an image of the lifestyle of its owner” (Čupić 2011:150).

The King of Excess

A.J.P Taylor argued that Tito was the last of the Habsburgs because he managed to establish peace and autonomy for a multiethnic Yugoslavia (Taylor 1981:281). From the camp perspective, however, the obvious choice would be to compare him to the French king Louis XIV, who was called the “Sun King.” Tito would then be the “Sun Dictator,” who in his communist kingdom enjoyed the campy “psychopathology of affluence” (Sontag 2001:289). See Picture #5 below.



Picture #5:

Brijuni Islands, Croatia, summer 1949

Courtesy of the Museum of Yugoslavia

In fact, the word *camp* is connected with the French slang phrase *se camper*, which means to present or to pose in an exaggerated way, as well as to live a posing life style, which was the style of the French king’s court. Louis XIV was well-known for his extravagant life style, his love for women and, most of all, for building his glamorous palace in Versailles, where he created a world dedicated to artificiality and excess. Tito did not build anything spectacular, but he owned a state summer residence on the Brijuni Islands and over twenty other residences, villas, castles and palaces. A private safari, thousands of hectares of hunting grounds, three zoological gardens, a special blue train, yachts, ships, planes and thousands of people were at his beckon call every day. His cellars were full of the best wine, and he would make a flamboyant gesture toward his guests when they visited by presenting them with

wine from the year they were born (Simić 2009:14,270). Just like the absolute French monarch, Tito held indisputable power in his kingdom, being declared as the President of both the Party and the state for life. He also attracted to his communist Versailles the aristocracy of the time – princesses, celebrities, movie stars and statesmen – working his magic with generous gifts and splendid feasts.

While some people see Louis XIV's Versailles as a camp Eden – “a self-enclosed world devoted to *divertissements*, to dressing-up, showing off, and scandal” (Booth 1983:33), Tito's Yugoslavia was a stage designed for the glamorous Tito aimed at astonishing a worldwide audience. When Louis XIV went on maneuvers, courtiers would use the battlefield as a catwalk for displaying and advertising themselves in the finest clothes (Booth 1983:40). Tito's court was, like that of the French king, a camp parade, where he enjoyed the status of a cult persona cultivated by a swift propaganda. Songs and poems were written to glorify the leader and various postal stamps with his face on them were issued every year, even after his death. The enormous collection of batons, which he received from young people, and various objects given to him by his people as well as by rulers from around the world are still held in the Kuća cveća in Belgrade. This collection includes hand-embroidered bath and kitchen towels, table clothes, handmade socks and bottles of water, horse saddles and various musical instruments such as the traditional *gusle* crafted in stone, countless shovels, knives and swords encrusted with precious stones, traditional costumes and dresses (including female ones) and much more. On top of all that, the celebrated performer received other generous gifts such as a Rolls-Royce and villas, which were a tribute and an homage from the city of Zagreb (Djilas 1981:104). He not only received a myriad of awards, but also various diplomas and keys to city gates. The capital of Montenegro, Podgorica, became *Titograd* during his lifetime (it changed its name back in the 1990s).

In contrast to other dictators Tito did not seal himself up in his residences, but appeared frequently on his homeland stage, where he clearly enjoyed large audiences. At every brief stop of his train there was a lavish greeting from the crowd, which was prepared for in advance. Wherever he went, he was welcomed by “applause, streets thick with flowers, and city squares thronged with people captivated by him for the moment” (Djilas 1981:57).

Tito was certainly one of the most expensive leaders of his time (Pavlowitch 1992:80). According to Djilas, he was an absolute monarch, greater than King Alexander of Yugoslavia (Djilas 1981:31), while Pavlowitch called him the “old

pharaoh,” saying that the last decade of his reign exhibited “a surreal air to it” (Pavlowitch 1992:80). The more his health deteriorated, the more pompous the camp spectacle became, and it would not be incorrect to say that the 1970s were definitely the time of his life. He was globetrotting again, the regime and the country were connected tighter than ever to his person, new biographies of Tito appeared at home and abroad, children learned his life achievements by heart and “confectioners sold cakes in the shape of his head” (*Ibid.*:75).

In 2007, Todor Kuljić re-examined Taylor’s evaluation of Tito and proposed that Tito’s rule was a “complex dialectical representation of modernized authoritarianism.” Depending on the status of the observer, Tito was seen as either a friend or as an enemy: a godless tyrant for the conservatives, an enemy of the nation state for the nationalists, a totalitarian ruler for liberals and a fighter for class justice for communists (Todor 2007:86). This malleable approach to Tito resembles the attitude towards camp, which undertook a journey from the political to apolitical and back again (pre-Stonewall Inn gay strategy, Sontag’s proposition and feminists’ adaptation); from adjective through noun to verb; from homosexual behavior through admiration for all things so bad that they became good and ending up as a tool for gender deconstruction. Depending on the observer’s eye, camp can be pointless, important or dangerous, beautiful or ugly and the property of homosexuals or straights.

When it comes to Tito, his performance was a one-off, and he certainly did not want anyone after him to be as powerful as he was. Moreover, he would not allow anyone to dislodge the statue that he had been turned into (Pavlowitch 1988:45). Nobody was worthy of taking his throne, so everything would disappear after his death, even the rank of Marshal and the role of President (Beloff 1985:29). Yet Tito’s last camp performance, in which he appeared only as a ghost, was his funeral. The political actor Marshal Broz, who was born a peasant, had the most extravagant, exaggerated and pompous funeral the leader of any country ever had had and which was arguably the biggest gathering of statesmen in human history.

The Queer in the Red Family

Before the rebellion at the Stonewall Inn Pub in New York in 1969, which began the fight of sexual minorities for their equal rights, camp was a strategy of surviving in an oppressive heterosexual environment and a code of communication between the

“initiated.” Although the word *queer* was first used in the early 20th century to describe homosexual, it also meant “strange” or “odd” (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary* 2011:1177). A camp person will always be queer and will always be perceived as “different” regardless of his or her sexuality, so in this sense, Tito was indeed a queer.

The story regarding his origin goes that he was born in the village of Kumrovec in northern Croatia on May 25, 1892 into a mixed Croatian and Slovenian family. However, Tito was also born on May 7 of the same year and on at least 15 other days, months and years, with his name changing over time – Josip Broz, Jozef, Josif Brozovic – while acquiring various other names and aliases such as Rudi, Spiridon Mekas, John Alexander Carlson, Oto, Viktor, Timo, Georgević, Jiricek, Slavko Babic, Tomanek, Ivan Kostajnssek and Valter in Moscow (Auty 1974:111). He also used documents which described him as Jewish, German from Russia, Hungarian, Czech, Austrian (Franz Broz) and Italian (Simić 2009:25). The historical novel *The Balkans Conspiracy* by Vladimir Orsag strongly suggests that Tito was actually a Russian spy who came from a noble Polish family, and that his real name was Tadeusz Lubitzky (Orsag 2002:149).⁶ Even his name, Josip Broz, if real, was not used after he acquired the nickname Tito, and this transformation could be compared to the performance of a drag queen on stage, where performing in disguise under a changed name and identity was part of the show. In fact, one of many theories suggested that Tito was actually a woman (Simić 2009:26). This idea came from the diaries of Evelyn Waugh, who called Tito a “lesbian” (Waugh 1979:572). Tito was well aware of that, and when he met Waugh for the first time (after swimming in the sea and wearing exiguous bathing trunks), he asked point blank: “Captain Waugh, why do you think I am a woman?” (West 1996:183).

Moreover, Tito is not a common name, contrary to one of his own statements, and it does not exist as a surname in Croatia (Simić 2009:26), but Stoyan Pribichevich had his own theory:

All kinds of nonsense swarms around the name of Tito: that it means a woman, that it stands for the initials of four separate Partisan commanders, that the letters are cabalistic signs for the Italian Tajne Internacionalna Terroristicka Organizacija (Secret International Terrorist Organization), that in English they represent the “Third International Terrorist Organization,” that

in Serbo-Croatian the word means “You there.” “Tito” means none of these. Tito is merely the Serbo-Croatian variation of the name of the Roman Emperor Titus (Pribichevich 1944:96-97).

Tito did not have a good relationship with his parents or with his siblings (Simić 2009:27, 28), perhaps because he spent part of his childhood with his maternal grandparents in Slovenia. Moreover, the accent which he developed there made him suspect even among people from Zagorje, where he was born. They accused him of being a Russian spy and thinking intellectuals whispered that he did not make any effort to learn Serbo-Croatian (Djilas 1981:10). He was not only an oddity in his family and village, but also in Yugoslavia. He fought on the Austro-Hungarian side in World War I, then spent seven years in the Soviet Union and – most important of all – he was a foreigner by origin. “The people of Zagorje are emotionally and historically the most Croatian of Croatians. Linguistically and psychologically, Croatia is a world unto itself. It is an island apart in the Yugoslav sea (...)” (Djilas 1981:62).

However, what did make Tito a queer on a larger scale was his split with Stalin in June of 1948, which garnered him additional nicknames such as the “Red Rebel,” the “Black sheep from Red Russia” (Archer 1968:113) and “a most uncommunistic communist” (Pribichevich 1944:96). Although he was now called a heretic in the communist brotherhood, this unprecedented move secured him a place among such biblical and historical figures as David, Martin Luther and Henry VIII (Armstrong 1951:15). The atheist communist leader was referred to as a “high priest embittered by heresy” (Djilas 1981:43), and this idea could be pushed even further, getting him the title of contemporary pharaoh, perhaps someone like Akhenaten, not only because of his lavish life, his cult of personality and his adoption of a new name, but mostly because of his rebellion and later the effort to erase him from the history. Akhenaten departed from traditional religion and established his own, monotheist cult, which in the end did not survive. Tito split with communism and established Titoism, which was also vigorously opposed after he died. The difference between them is that Akhenaten is portrayed as a visionary, eccentric and queer leader while Tito tried very hard to be seen like that. Yet the queerest act possible which the communist leader could commit was to ask Roman Catholic nuns to nurse him in his final days (West 1996:330).

Pawlovitch called Tito the “Wizard of Oz,” who fooled everyone and will never be discovered (1992:71).⁷ Indeed, he was so well hidden in his “wardrobe” that his artificial identity remained shielded and questionable until the end, just like marginalized gays passing as hetero in an oppressive heterosexual environment. However, this comparison is only metaphorical for the reason that while gays had to “dress” to match the mainstream, Tito was its creator. Yet, contrary to drag queens performing on the stage, he refused to take his wig off or wipe off the lipstick at the end of the show in order to reveal his true identity and admit that it was all an illusion, because he never truly came out. Instead, he died on the stage.

*Titostalgia*⁸

The Tito show ended on May 4, 1980. He was the only actor who managed to escape from the scene at the right moment to avoid the outrage of the audience, leaving others to deal with the Yugoslavian credit crunch, among other issues. Although for several years after his death any criticism was taboo, the myths finally crumbled at the end of 1980s, and Tito was turned into the villain, blamed for everything (*Ibid.*:viii-ix). Marshal Broz was erased from history and from public spaces, yet after the waves of “Tito-hateism” in the late 1980s and 1990s passed, a more balanced cultural approach allowed for a rethinking and rewriting of his history once again.

Although Tito’s excesses were not exceptional compared to those of other dictators, as seen for example in the book by Peter York, *Dictators’ Homes*, the nostalgia for him is an extraordinary phenomenon that no other dictator enjoys and that evokes longing on a large scale. Sontag has pointed out the magical way in which time changes our perspective, because “we are better able to enjoy a fantasy as fantasy when it is not our own” (Sontag 2001:285). The relationship between camp and the past is “extremely sentimental” (*Ibid.*:280), and Sontag herself indulged in the graveyards of culture while writing her essay on camp (Sontag 1975/1976:40).

Nostalgia was considered a medical problem by Johannes Hofer in 1688. At the time, Hofer was analyzing the case of a student from Basel who was pining for his home in Bern. It soon became clear that this “disease” was incurable and therefore it came to be perceived as a sign of sensibility and an expression of patriotic feelings (Boym 2001:11). In the 20th century, nostalgia became a psychological concern, and it is currently regarded both as a part of postmodern culture as well as

a part of camp due to their mutual love for the past. Sontag argued that “it is not a love of the old as such. It’s simply that the process of ageing or deterioration provides the necessary detachment – or arouses a necessary sympathy” (Sontag 2001:285). Nostalgia relies on a memory, which separates and elevates particular moments from the past and turns them into a legend. Modern nostalgia therefore refers to the “impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values (...)” (Boym 2001:8) and if “the story of Eastern Europe’s democratic revolt is most often that of ordinary citizens, banding together to reject the forces that violently ruled their lives” (Engel 2009:4), post-communist nostalgia is the story of those disappointed hopes, painful emotions and celebrated memories.

The magic of nostalgia reframed Tito from a communist tyrant to a provider of dreams, and although he is long dead, he still possesses the capability of seducing his own people and turning their life into an illusion. The village of Kumrovec, where he was born, and the mausoleum in Belgrade, where he is buried, became shrines and places of pilgrimage. In Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, an exhibition called *Tito – A Yugoslav Icon* was held at Gospodarsko Razstavišče (Ljubljana Exhibition and Convention Centre) from November 2013 until February 2014, while *Živeo život (Long Live Life)* – a sentimental view on a good life from the 1950s until the 1990s – was exhibited in Belgrade, Ljubljana, Podgorica and finally in Novi Sad in July of 2014. When it comes to Titostalgia,

some ignore it, others think that it is ephemeral, and still others that it is enduring. Some perhaps do not even recognize him. Some would like to erase him from their own and collective memory. For some he is a distant benefactor, for others a dangerous reappearance. Some see him as just another important historical figure who marked the previous century in one way or another. For foreigners, he is a superb tourist attraction (Velikonja 2008:10).

Tito is thus resurrected as a commodity that feeds all of these hopes, emotions and memories and once again appears, just as during the communist time, on towels, cups, dresses and jewelry. This time, however, he is not the recipient of votive gifts, but rather an object ready for consumption. “Tito sells well, no doubt” (*Ibid.*:

2008:101), and one could ask what went wrong with the present that it needs the past in order to look into the future. One might say that there was no “Tito after Tito,” but only Titostalgia.

Conclusion

Yugoslavia under Josip Broz Tito’s rule resembled a grand illusion similar to the one created by Peter Weir in the movie *Truman Show*. It was an artificial world ruled by one of the most spectacular camp figures of the 20th century, who held absolute power in his excessive communist camp Eden. Everyone had a role to play according to his script and whoever dared to question it was thrown off the show. Yet when the “Lion of Yugoslavia” (Gibson 1981:11) died, the façade of his world collapsed, and eleven years later, the Tito show turned into a horror movie.

Communist ideology produced a leader who was the embodiment of camp excess and thus simply too big for just one country. He was flamboyant, exaggerated, glamorous, eccentric, stylish, stylized, theatrical and contained, as Sontag would say, a “large element of artifice” (Sontag 2001:279). Tito was one of those people who Sontag would probably describe as so ambitious that it would take a “generation, a whole culture to accomplish” (*Ibid.*:2001:284).⁹ According to Sontag’s criteria his show on the Yugoslavian stage could be called naïve camp¹⁰ because of the “seriousness that fails. Of course, not all seriousness that fails can be redeemed as Camp. Only that which has the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naïve” (*Ibid.*:283).

Camp is not only about posing and pretending, but also about a “new, more complex relation to ‘the serious.’ One can be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious” (*op. cit.*:283). Camp perspective allows people with a certain sensibility to appreciate and enjoy things rather than judge them (*Ibid.*:291) or, as Christopher Isherwood would say, “expressing what’s basically serious to you in terms of fun and artifice and elegance” (Isherwood 1999:51). Sontag’s phrase that “camp taste nourishes itself on the love that has gone into certain objects and personal styles” (Sontag 2001:292) helps us appreciate the complex side of Marshal Josip Broz, who was much more than just the leader of communist Yugoslavia. Yet contrary to the most famous dandies such as George “Beau” Brummell or Marchesa Luisa Casati, he did not die penniless. He left all his debts to the country he created.

If Vladimir Orsag’s spy theory were true, Tito could be the perfect hero for popular stories, perhaps a communist version of James Bond. He could be the

materialized answers to all of the questions that begin with “what if?”: What if James Bond was a Russian spy? What if he settled down and married? What if he rebelled against M, his MI6 boss? What if he gained power over the countries he saved? If the handsome macho womanizer had lived in the real world, he would obviously not change his habits. He would still be obsessed with gadgets and all things “high,” including the best cars and residences and the most beautiful women, which he will leave in the end. A communist James Bond would be passionate about traveling, having adventures and meeting extraordinary people. As he gets older he would gain weight due to a lack of exercise, a passion for good food, good drinks and other pleasures. Arrogant and vain, he would preserve his extraordinary life by sponsoring the movie industry, and he would obviously choose the most handsome actor to play himself, because “the greatest achievement of Tito was Tito” (Simić 2009:291).

Branislav Dimitrijević called Tito a camp figure because of the “nostalgic interest in his flamboyant image” (2010), but his influences go far beyond a yearning for the glamorous good times. One such influence is the unusual number of white pedigree poodles which today can be found on the streets of Belgrade proudly walking next to their owners. As they were much loved by Tito, this could indicate that his ghost has indeed returned, not as the communist leader, but as the stylish camp conductor of a collective unconsciousness.

Notes

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1. On June 27, 1969, just after the funeral of the gay icon Judy Garland, the LGBT community started a rebellion at New York’s gay pub, the Stonewall Inn, demanding equal rights and treatment.

Balkanistica 31 (2018)

2. This translation is rare and available only in the library of the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade.
3. Translations of Susan Sontag's books and articles into Serbian, Croatian or Serbo-Croat are as follows: 1971, *Stilovi radikalne volje (Styles of Radical Will)*, translated by Mario Suško, Zagreb; 1976, *Stilovi radikalne volje*, translated by Filip Višnjić, Belgrade; 1982 and reprinted in 2009, *O fotografiji (On Photography)*, translated by Filip Filipović, Belgrade; 1983 and reprinted in 1985, *Bolest kao metafora (Illness as a Metaphor)*, translated by Zoran Minderović, Belgrade; 1985 and reprinted in 2004; *Ja, i tako dalje (I, Etcetera)*, translated by Mladen Jovanović, Niš; 1990, *SIDA i njene metafore (AIDS and Its Metaphor)*, translated by Jadrana Veličković, Belgrade; 1992, *Izuzetno komični lament pirama i tizbe (The Very Comical Lament of Pyramus and Thisbe)*, "Polja: časopis za kulturu, umetnost i društvena Pitanja," translated by Vladislav Gordić, nr. 38, 395/396; 1997, *Protiv tumačenja (Against Interpretation)*, "Pro femina: časopis za žensku književnost i kulturu," translated by Branka Robertson, nr. 9-10; 2011, *Protiv Tumačenja (Against Interpretation)*, "Sveske: časopis za književnost, umetnost i kulturu," translated by Viktor Radun Teon, nr. 100; 1999, *Zašto smo na Kosovu? (Why Are We in Kosovo?)*, translated by Tomić Đorđe, "Reč: časopis za književnost i kulturu," nr. 55; and 2004, *U Americi (In America)*, translated by Lazar Macura, Belgrade.
4. OZNA existed between 1944 and 1946 and was replaced by UDBA (The State Security Service), which was dissolved in 1991.
5. The picture belongs to the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade. Due to a renovation, which has been ongoing since 2007, as of 2014, the Museum was closed and the picture was not available for viewing.
6. Orsag's theory is interesting and explains much of Tito's mysterious behavior, but it cannot be treated seriously due to a lack of valuable sources. It can only be read as a historical novel with an emphasis on "novel," although some of his theories seem like a prophecy, especially in the present state of crisis, in which the former West has found itself.
7. Pawlovitch followed the thinking of Professor Žarko Puhovski, whom he met at a conference held at the Centre for the Study of the Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe at the London School of Economics on January 25, 1992 (Pavlowitch 1992:71).
8. *Titostalgia* is also the name of a book by Mitja Velikonja published in 2008 in Ljubljana.
9. She used this phrase to describe the basilica Sagrada Familia, designed by Spanish architect Antoni Gaudi.
10. Naïve and deliberate camp is the way Sontag distinguished "real" camp from the false one. "One must distinguish between naïve and deliberate Camp. Pure Camp is always naïve. Camp which knows itself to be Camp ('camping') is usually less satisfying" (Sontag 2001:282).

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