

A Troubled Past: Fieldworking in a Contested Place

Jonas Frykman & Kirsti Mathiesen Hjemdahl
Agder Research, Norway

The aim of this study is to demonstrate how political meaning is manifested with the aid of monuments, and to look at how other material objects also become invested with political ideology and are eventually incorporated by citizens and filled with meaning and affective power. For this project, a phenomenological approach was deemed to be the most suitable. The classical hierarchy between visiting researchers and native informants was overcome by the active and equitable participation of local scholars.

The field site in question is the village of Kumrovec in Croatia, the birthplace of the former president, Josip Broz Tito. During the socialist period in Yugoslavia, which stretched from 1945-1991, this very village was turned into a cult site and dominated by a magnificent statue of the leader. Whereas in other East European countries, socialist monuments celebrating the victory over fascism after 1989 could be incorporated into the narrative of the national struggle for independence (Todorov, 2003), here the nation no longer existed and the state carrying its name – Serbia and Montenegro – was identified with the aggressors in the war for independence that had been fought between 1991-1995. Today, the village has become a highly contested place where strong emotions towards the socialist system are played out. It is also a site for nostalgic memories of times gone by. Our intention was to study the present-day celebration of the Day of Youth, *dan mladosti* – Tito's official birthday, on May 25th. It used to be an occasion that attracted huge gatherings at Kumrovec, and was now to be celebrated again – a provocative event in the public eye.

Political monuments are hewn out of very special cultural material and, to borrow Hanna Arendt's (1958) famous formula, serve as "spaces of appearance" where people's dominant ethos of the self is decided, normalised and regulated. In such "spaces of appearance" emotions are supposed to be intense, thus making it possible for a variety of attitudes to be formed. Animated by ceremonies and rituals connected with federal holidays, such places have often been used to legitimise a political system. These characteristics made the socialist monuments extremely vulnerable when things started to change in the period of national liberation after 1989, as the ways in which the monuments are treated tell a story about the cultural reorganisation of the past.¹

We begin this paper by discussing the phenomenological approach and the alternative transnational model of cooperation. We outline the insights gained during our fieldwork in the village of Kumrovec and follow a monument on its slow path from political potency to becoming an integral part of cultural heritage. Our hope is that the interview and observational work we conducted, as well as the way we organised the fieldwork, will lead to a fruitful dialogue with neighbouring scientific disciplines.

Lateral displacement

In ethnology, phenomenological fieldwork is often based on a presupposed intersubjectivity – seeing other people as subjects rather than objects among objects. The intersubjective world is a shared world, rather than one that is only available to oneself. Since "my ego is out in the world, like the ego of another", as Sartre put it (cf. Detmer, 2008:25), it is possible to discover the world of the other simply by observing how it is being shared. In practical terms, this usually means looking from the vantage point of your interview partner, or to use a more colloquial phrase, "stepping into other people's shoes", in which understanding is produced on the terms of the informant. This is what Hanna Arendt refers to as "visiting imagination" and what Merleau-Ponty called "lateral displacement" (cf. Jackson, 2005:32). In this sense, phenomenology tries to equalise the position of outsider

¹ The cultural reorganisation of memorials from this socialist period has been studied in Frykman (2001, 2003a,b, 2004, 2005), Hjemdahl and Alempijevic (2005, 2006a,b,c 2007) and Hjemdahl (2006).

and insider by pointing to a shared common condition of being in the field and exposed to similar experiences.

A lot of romanticism is attached to the possibilities of doing this. Is it not pretentious to even believe that you can fully understand a foreign culture through intersubjective participation? However, the intention is to overcome obstacles produced by academia itself. According to Edmund Husserl (1973), “seeing things as they are” means “bracketing out” how they are already described in science or in a more general discourse. It refers to the all too well-known scientific prejudice that too much theory tends to block out the relevant information you hope to get at. There are numerous examples of how an already established theoretical or ideological categorisation, understanding or scientific discourse has thwarted or concealed the object being studied instead of revealing it on its own terms. Starting out with pre-made models of what reality looks like means coming back from the field with a more detailed, but perhaps unchanged, image. Relying primarily on written sources or overt observations of what goes on in a public space therefore implies a danger of too shallow an understanding of the issue(s) under scrutiny. The effort in all phenomenology is to overcome such scientific prejudice and to try to see the world as it is experienced and intended by the actor.

Secondly, there is the practical problem of really gaining access to the relevant knowledge held by local people. There are many tales about the effects produced by relying on hired assistance or observations done “from the seats (or from the verandah)” (Coleman & Collins, 2006: 12). To what extent are you able to see the world from someone else’s viewpoint when you do not have full command of their language or share their memories or experiences? Vast areas will remain hidden to most ethnologists conducting fieldwork in foreign cultures or in social circumstances where they remain foreigners. The advantage of being an outsider is obvious, however, and relates to the ability to point to the blind spots and to the things that are so self-evident to the informant that they slip by unnoticed. It is often said that you are not aware of what is right under your nose, and the role of the outsider ethnographer is usually to problematise the taken-for-granted. Being a member of a certain culture also means being absorbed in it.

Common ground

Dealing with war-related issues in a Balkan country such as Croatia raises particular issues regarding the role of fieldworkers from afar, in addition to that of local scholars. Domestic ethnologists writing about war issues have (unjustly) been accused of being blinkered by national partiality (Kirin & Povrzanovi, 1996), while locals are also easily exposed to the hierarchical gaze of visiting Western scholars. The Polish anthropologist Michal Buchowski (2007) described what it felt like to meet anthropologists “from elsewhere” who wanted to carry out their fieldwork in Eastern Europe. In that particular context, the local ethnologists were regarded by the visitors as some kind of “retarded anthropologists” who happened to have a good command of English.

In an attempt to benefit from the dual advantages of insider and outsider positions, we tested an equitable model for doing fieldwork using one another’s mutual insights. Of special importance was the creation of a common theoretical ground from which insiders and outsiders could mutually understand the scene to be explored. In this context, the concept of theory should be understood from the point of view of practice, i.e. what theory *does*, not what it *is*. Methods for collecting information in the field are more about finding functioning practices than establishing rules or statements in advance of the project.

In order to acquire an intersubjective understanding, we had to have access to the emotions, memories and embodied history harboured by the local scholars. In the model we tested, students and researchers from the Department of Ethnology at the University

of Zagreb were informed about our intentions of studying *dan mladosti* in Kumrovec. As fellow ethnologists, we immediately met with the objections that the very topic, rather than the methods and theories, did not belong to the discipline of ethnology and was much too politically sensitive.

When we introduced the idea the reaction was that: “We can’t make this research project an obligatory course. Forcing students to go to Kumrovec on the Day of Youth would be like assaulting their family and nation. Participation in this project has to be a totally voluntary choice”. Both teachers and students found the project both provocative and weird. Tito and the socialist era were not yet part of any university curriculum. As a professor of history put it: “This past is too recent, and therefore too problematic and difficult for us to deal with” (Birt, 2006).

As a result, participation in the project was voluntary, although a group of 20 young ethnological scholars eventually signed up. Some of them saw the possibility of connecting the case to their ongoing bachelor’s, masters’ or PhD dissertations. Every researcher could thus choose their own focus and were expected to benefit by allowing their local insights to meet the outsider’s distanced gaze. As the project progressed, word spread and attracted scholars from other fields and disciplines within the university.

The phenomenological method turned out to be an approach through which sensitive issues of private life and experience during socialism became a foundation for analysis and scholarly knowledge. Hence, it evaded the risk of being too personal or too political to be discomforting. Preparations in the shape of reading and discussions took more than two months of intense activity. It should be noted that the academic tradition of which the local scholars were a part was more directed towards the analysis of discourses and representations: what culture is *made up* of, more than how it *happens*. The training in phenomenological fieldwork was something new and exciting, and provided the potential for future scholarly development.

“Political bracketing”

Broz Tito (1892-1980) was born in Kumrovec in the Krapina-Zagorje area. In 1946, the very house where he was born was turned into a museum, and in the 1960s an open air museum was established, designed to support the myth “about the poor lad who from his early days had felt the weight of exploitation and almost every day suffered from hunger” (Žanić, 2002: 51). Today, it is the national equivalent of Sweden’s Skansen or Norway’s Bygdøy, the difference being that only one particular farming village from one specific epoch is on display. Not surprisingly, a vast parking area was created close by in preparation for the expected tour buses and cars. A larger-than-life statue of Tito, created by the famous Croatian sculptor Augustin Augustincić, was erected beside his birthplace, and copies of the monument can be found in many places in the former federation. The Tito cult is also apparent in the names of streets, squares and even entire towns in former Yugoslavia. Represented by thousands of monuments celebrating the partisan heroes from the Second World War, he is visible in almost every village and town. This personal cult meant a constant presence similar to that of Stalin or Mao in their empires and Enver Hoxha and Nikola Ceausescu in neighbouring Albania and Rumania. Kumrovec was soon turned into an important place of pilgrimage where schoolchildren and devoted citizens could pay their respects to the great leader.

When we did our fieldwork on *dan mladosti* on May 25th, 2004, the place was highly contested. The sculpture alone had been the target of many assaults. Also, when the celebrations were to be held they were regarded by many as an instance of the heinous “Yugo-nostalgia”. After the “Homeland War” of 1991-1995, similar monuments in Croatia were outlawed – either blown

apart or removed.² Those that remained intact were neglected, forgotten and “bracketed out” so that they were no longer part of communal or social life (Frykman 2003, 2005). The once all-powerful Tito had now been turned into a forbidding symbol of an era that the new nation wanted to refute.

“Bracketing out” has a very precise meaning in Kumrovec. The name of the village was literally removed from the maps and the road signs directing visitors were taken down, which effectively signalled no more state-supported celebrations on May 25th. Maintenance of the numerous buildings was neglected and staff budgets were cut. Grass started to grow in the cracks between the cobblestones in the parking areas, while other sculptures and monuments were left to decay. What happened in Kumrovec reflected how the recent socialist past moved underground throughout Croatia in the 1990s and became *terra incognita*. Memories were stored deep down in the freezer of history, as Bet-El (2002:208) formulates it, never to be released in public.³

Nevertheless, in the spring of 2004 preparations for the celebration were again underway. Coaches from all over the country were hired and Tito supporters from nearby Slovenia were expected. The matter was hardly discussed in the media, and communication was by word of mouth and through the organisations of “old combaters” – *stari borci*.

Public and private memories

One of the objectives was to understand the role of this place in the remembrance of the de- or re-politicising of the socialist period. Kumrovec illustrated that coming to grips with the past was not only a process concerning memory or written history, as place and material culture also played a role as instances of negotiation and familiarisation between the past and the present. Kumrovec had certainly been challenged by the changes in the 1990s, although Tito’s birthplace, together with the farms, statue and restaurants, was still there. The difference was that they now had to be redefined as something other than political statements. Would they pass as cultural heritage, and would it be possible to see the continuity with the present? Or would they stand as a warning example of a political cult close to religious obsession? Kumrovec was much more than a place in the guide book. It was saturated with multiple memories.

At the May 25th celebrations, many visitors still could recall the days when banners flew and brass bands played and school buses disgorged hordes of children wanting ice cream and a dose of Tito biography, or when they accompanied their parents on a family outing. Many were old combaters who went on nostalgic trips, paying respect to their old regiment and great leader. Memories such as these were not simply something from family albums or conversations with friends, they were also a part of people’s habitus, incorporated as personal history and thus a part of a particular lifeworld. They were not easily communicated by verbal representation either, but potentially there to be developed like photographic films in a processing laboratory – in this case the location of Kumrovec.

Due to the times, chunks of place-related memories were now turned into politically sensitive items and recollections of a troubled past. Instead of being part of a personal biography, they became representations of a contested history. Who was eager to share the memories of the

² A 1995 report documented that damage to Croatian property alone amounted to the destruction of 90 archives and libraries, damage to 37 museums and the destruction of four, damage to 500 monuments and the destruction of 107, damage to 223 historic sites and the destruction of 60 (Williams, 2007:185).

³ See for instance Hjemdahl (2006), Hjemdahl and Alempijevic (2006).

family Sunday picnics in Kumrovec when they had become framed as an example of how socialist gatherings manipulated people? Who could talk about the happy years at school when socialist indoctrination stood out as the ultimate subject?

For the local scholars, blending in with other visitors visiting Kumrovec on May 25th, 2004 was a risky business. It could even be interpreted as a statement of sympathy for the adversary in the “Homeland War” – the still existing Serb-dominated republic of Yugoslavia. Rather like Pandora’s Box, it was something best left unopened. When we agreed to document the May 25th celebrations, our Croatian colleagues were exposed to an emotional and political minefield, and faced much more severe consequences at work and in private than we did.

Implicating yourself

As the preparations took shape, the students grew increasingly aware of the many silenced and almost forgotten themes in their own lifeworlds. They reported on the reactions they received outside academia. For some, it was the first time that their academic courses had managed to engage their families back home, and the project was animatedly discussed over many a dinner table. Parents and grandparents were all of a sudden asked to recount their memories of Tito and of everyday life in a socialist society. As one grandmother put it, “I thought I was the only person in Croatia who actually remembered Tito!” Others discovered that they could frame their own past into a scientific discourse and discuss it in public.

All the local scholars had the experience of being enrolled as *pioneers* in the first grade at school, though very few were old enough to have reached the stage of *omladinac* (youth) at the beginning of high school. Many of them had been on obligatory tours to Kumrovec to visit Tito’s birthplace, and had watched the propaganda films shown in the cinema at the *Klub boraca i omladina* (Club of combaters and youth). Hardly any of them had talked about such memories for almost 15 years, and this research project fanned them to life again.

The preparation process involved reflecting on emotions and memories, expectations and fears. The discussions that resulted made us all look closely at private and collective prejudices, as well as ready-made conceptions. “Seeing things as they are” also implies becoming aware of what you “see things as” on an everyday level. Having such insights was a necessary preparation since the topic was either too emotional or too quotidian. Putting names on things that were taken for granted meant a step towards getting a handle on them. In this preparatory work, the views from outside were absolutely crucial.

The design meant blending in with the crowd on the actual day, following the activities, comparing memories with new impressions and finding the meanings the attendees ascribed to the events. To what extent was it a political demonstration, and to what extent was it something else? Obviously, being there opened up for the study of *practice*. Focusing on practice meant being mentally prepared for surprises and for the discovery of something qualitatively new in every situation – instead of finding a reproduction of pre-conceived patterns. It is usually said that the best preparation for fieldwork is *de-learning*, acquiring the naive gaze of the child (cf. Bachelard, 2000). As a more general presupposition, we wanted to capture how culture *happened*, not what *is was*. The celebration was not a script, a text or a play, but rather an open-ended event. Michael Jackson (2003) reminds us that this approach can be a point of departure in every phenomenological analysis. He underscores the fact that culture “is not located *in* the individual or *in* the environment, but a *potentiality* that is realised and experienced variously in the course of our interaction with others, as well as our relationships to the everyday environments and events in which we find ourselves” (ibid. 2003: xiv). What would we achieve, for instance, by taking part in the singing of old partisan songs, dancing the *kolo*, buying souvenirs and dressing up in old uniforms?

What's in a uniform?

On the day before the celebration of Tito's birthday, a rather uncommon preparation took place in one of the old houses at the *Staro selo* (The Old Village) museum. Parts of a pioneer uniform were pulled out of a trunk and exposed to daylight after having been stored in drawers and cupboards for years: a blue skirt, a white blouse, a red scarf and a little blue forage cap with a red star on the front. Every item produced nervous laughter; sudden surprises created a tense atmosphere. The materiality of a silenced past was released from the box, as two colleagues helped a third to put the uniform on. The "correct way" for a pioneer girl to dress was eagerly discussed. How to arrange the knot on the scarf, should one should put the ring around the scarf or not, what kind of shoes went with the uniform and how was the hair to be arranged? Every little detail in the dressing up became symbolic and was charged with meaning and memories.

The reactions clearly showed that knowing something in your mind is quite different from feeling it on your skin; objects are carriers not only of memory, but also of politics. For some, laughter was an instant reaction to the shock of mixed emotions. "Oh my God, of all people why did she have to put on that uniform?" said one of the students who later shared her thoughts with us. The family of the person dressing up was known to have suffered greatly in the recent war. All of a sudden it was not about the school years at all. "We know where such uniforms led us afterwards", another woman said, thinking of her own war experiences during the 1990s. Even if many uniforms were kept locked up, "some cut them into pieces while the bombers were flying over their homes during the devastating years of the Homeland War, identifying these requisites as symbols belonging to the 'enemy'" (Alempijević, 2006).

The uniform was not put on to pay respect to "the greatest son of our nation and nationalities" who "loved pioneers most of all because the world rests on the shoulders of the youth", as the rhetoric from the past suggested. It was part and parcel of making incorporated memories visible – or recreating them in a new milieu. There are messages carried by objects that cannot be communicated across a seminar table. The pioneer uniform provided a venue for understanding what would otherwise have been hard to reach. It was one of many keys to a feeling of biographical integration that you were not at ease with, and it was a way to fall in with other people parading the streets of Kumrovec the following day. Was it politics, or was it a matter of bringing a youth and childhood to life?

From text to experience

Although the celebration on May 25th was spontaneous, it followed the specific script for parades: flying red banners, carrying portraits of Tito, brass bands playing, speeches given at the foot of the monument and the laying down of wreaths with the socialist red star close by. Many of the old combaters turned up in their uniforms, and enthusiastic youngsters were dressed in pioneer caps and shirts. For a brief moment, those coming to Kumrovec could revive the Good Old Days. It all seemed to follow the script that was so well-known to anyone familiar with the forms of paying homage to great socialist leaders. Here, the classical mix of State and Folk was on display: Sunday best and uniforms, military parades and folklore. There are a multitude of scholarly descriptions about how such tributes have been organised, though even if there was a protocol to follow, the practice and interpretation pointed in a variety of directions that could not be exhausted by the outer characteristics of the celebration.

One of the scholars devoted her time to following the many attributions to the statue of Tito, and to documenting the delegations leaving flowers and banners with their red, white and blue inscriptions. She stood there for hours marvelling at what people were actually doing and discovered practices that were far from what she had expected. People were talking to Tito, whispering about personal matters, giving news from home and putting roses from

their gardens among the wreaths. On his pedestal, Tito is portrayed in a walking position, the victorious marshal in uniform and high boots, his head pensively lowered against his chest and his hands clasped behind his back. The hands were now being rubbed clean to the bronze, polished by the many strokes they had received. “One woman came running into the garden and shouldered her way to the statue, obviously very excited. She stroked his hands several times, and at every stroke she would say: ‘This is for Radenkovi , this is for Majda...’ – and so on. Obviously she was fulfilling her commitment to her friends, as well as their joint commitment to the statue.” This was so much more than a political statement or nostalgia of times past. It was a treatment that was normally bestowed on local patron saints such as the images of St. Francis or Holy Mary; deities that are invested with the power to intervene in personal matters and everyday life (Belaj, 2006).

Two of the native researchers focused on the music and texts of the partisan songs performed during the celebration in an attempt to make a sophisticated analysis of how the lyrics were charged with socialist rhetoric and ideology. But when they started to focus on the singing itself – how the songs *happened* – the outcome was rather different. Much of the singing took place in front of the *Kod Starog* pub - The Old Man’s Inn. Old and young alike had gathered to sing at the tops of their voices. The scholars soon joined in with the old combaters and sung the well-known tune “*Računajte na nas*” (You can count on us). They also began to remember when they had sung that very song before, as well as many others like it. One memory followed another and it became obvious that the singing revealed situations of togetherness, the feeling of belonging and of sharing. The political aspect was there too and was equally strong, although the sense of community could have been produced by other, similar songs. Like singing in a choir, it created an instantaneous unity of individuals who were joined together by a common melody. As with many staged performances, they knew that they were in front of an audience and were being seen as one body.

Walking around and documenting did not resemble the classic “fly on the wall” situation. Questions often caused emotional rage – if you found people willing to talk at all. Capturing stories and finding points of view could require turning the tape recorder off and pocketing the camera. It took a lot of courage and careful consideration for people to open up. Celebrating Tito “at his home and on his day” was not an uncomplicated undertaking.⁴ In a context in which history was supposed to be deep-frozen, the initiative of posing questions that had political implications was risky business indeed.

De-trivialising

The role of the insider scholars was to reveal how culture on the Day of Youth took place and was filled with a wide array of meaning. What benefits might then be gained from the outsider’s point of view? Without it, there would have been serious problems in separating the task of the researcher from that of a political participant. The view from afar worked almost magically as a reassurance that the dangerous game of participating – dressing up as a pioneer, getting emotional when hearing old communist songs, purchasing Tito statues, standing in front of the statue together with old supporters, singing along with the veterans and letting oneself loose in a *kolo* dance – was a necessary involvement in order to acquire more profound insights. When Hanna Arendt used the term “visiting imagination” to describe this, it seemed a bit too mental. Merleau-Ponty’s term “lateral displacement” is more corporeal. The presence of the outsiders helped the native scholars to return from a visit that in the long run might have

⁴ “Receiving death threats is a regular thing”, was the experience of one of the researchers describing her project in advance. But that was not the worst; even family members and several of her colleagues had been threatened as well.

dangerously engulfed the subject (Hjemdahl & Alempijevi, 2006). After all, distancing is the prerequisite of any scientific analysis, and here it also helped the local colleagues to break the strong spell cast over their bodies and souls by the celebrations.

For the outsiders, a practical way of distancing and using the perspective from afar was to sit on the sidelines and constantly ask questions about the cultural importance of what their colleagues were doing, e.g. when uniforms were dragged out or when laughter broke out. Stepping outside was also helpful in the important task of *de-trivialising* the all too familiar. When asked to add elements of private conversations or memories to the analysis, the response was often: “But isn’t this somewhat too much an everyday common knowledge?” This might have been the case for those who had incorporated the history and the culture, but to the outside it was not. What is made part of one’s habitus is often silenced because it is supposed to be self-evident.

Testing out tacit knowledge became a common method in the project, something that could not really have been accomplished without the intervention of the outsiders. Oscillating between distant and close gazes was the necessary method for allowing the all too well-known to be formulated in representations, in a discourse. This of course is at the very heart of all ethnographic work, but what was new here was the possibility for local scholars to have contact with the view from afar – on the spot.

De-politicising the past

Kumrovec turned out to be an excellent example of how place can be used in the transmission of ideology, the evocation of memories and the activation of emotions. The multitude of impressions conveyed here reflects the words of the philosopher Edward Casey (1996), that place is the most fundamental form of bodily experiences; it is from place that culture arises. Given that culture exists, it must exist somewhere, and it exists in more concrete and complex ways in places than in thoughts and signs (*ibid.*). Messages and affects are also to be found in everyday things and in monuments, from the pioneer’s cap and scarf to statues of the great leader, but now invested with new meanings.

During socialism, places such as Kumrovec were used to communicate a complex yet very direct message. Tito, the leader, was committed to his people and here they paid allegiance to him and to the system he represented. This was the very place where people living in Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia and other republics in Yugoslavia could be *interpellated* as citizens of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia. Together with many other locations and events this was the “space of appearance”, where one could literally feel that one was not only part of a state, but also of its countryside, buildings, cattle, streams full of ducklings and geese – and genuine folk. The magic from those years still lingered in the village of Kumrovec and was transmitted through material objects loaded with a similar magic.

Our fieldwork was carried out many years after the collapse of the old political order. The multitude of meanings that the native scholars could trace and document showed that something very different from interpellation was now taking place. People turned up on May 25th, the Day of Youth, because they wanted to use this event to manifest themselves and give contours to their memories, lives, home village – and even their ideology. The initiative was now in the hands of old combaters coming to meet friends from different parts of the old Yugoslavia whom they had not met for years, in the hands of young Slovenes who were starting to profile themselves by adhering to a modern Tito pop cult, and in the hands of tourists from abroad who were eager to look at the exotic remnants of socialist rituals. Although the past had not lost its political edge, it was now something that was all about memories and private usage and *not* about the future, a state or a common task. De-politicising meant that places and objects had moved from politics to memories, but not yet reached the eternal rest of heritage.

What was happening here in Kumrovec was the emergence of something quite complex. The place liberated from political messages started to display its slumbering *poetic* qualities as an arena for actions, dreams and practices (Frykman, 2003:183). The way it was still charged with meaning from a political past made it fascinating, though this process of change was by no means uncomplicated. The strong reactions of the ethnologists from the University of Zagreb illustrated the difficulties of coming to grips with a troubled past.

The methodological part of the project turned out to be the most rewarding, particularly for the fieldworkers coming from the outside who managed to engage local scholars in a common project on an equal basis, transgressing the usual divide. This gave access to insights, memories and emotions that would otherwise be time-consuming and difficult to achieve. The phenomenological approach was necessary in this process, making the otherwise subjective or private a relevant area to explore, but also for creating a common ground from which a scholarly discussion between insiders and outsiders could take place. People otherwise used as informants could now take part on an equal footing with the researchers. This presupposed (and perhaps this is the final methodological point to make) the presence of the distant gaze, giving the self-evident a rich analytical importance. Thus, the model turned out to be rewarding for both parties.

Epilogue

Six months after our fieldwork, on December 27th 2004, the statue of Tito in Kumrovec was blasted away in a bomb explosion. Researchers and their family members expressed concern for the safety of their loved ones. The outcome of the common project was to be a book in Croatian called *Tito kao mit* (The Myth of Tito), which was then still in the making. Would the participants be faced with new threats after its publication? Should they write under pseudonyms? They decided against it. The event and the place should neither be considered deviant nor an inappropriate object of research. It might have been dangerous, but it did not deserve silence. And when the anthology containing the many essays on different aspects of the celebration of May 25th in Kumrovec was published two years after, it was listed on the curriculum at the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology at the University in Zagreb. The course now offered to students is called "Recent Social Memory".

On the very same day as the statue of Tito was attacked, the Croatian President Stjepan Mesić strongly condemned the assault: "Josip Broz Tito was a part of Croatian history and this should not be concealed." This is "also an attack on Croatian culture because the monument to Tito was designed by the great Croatian sculptor, August Augustinčić" (Hina, December 27th 2004). The statue was restored and once again looks out over Kumrovec from its pedestal beside the house where Josip Broz Tito was born, this time as a symbol of national pride.

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