

Lev Kreft

Art in War: Target, Comfort and Weapon - Abstract

1. There are different kinds of war, but they all want to "make sense", as Bernard-Henri Lévy mentions in his *Avant-propos* to "Les damnés de la guerre": "Longtemps, les guerres ont eu un sens." But the sense of war introduced by von Clausewitz, namely, that the war is politics with different means, is questioned today, together with Carl Schmitt's nation-state sovereign which decides upon the introduction of these "different means". In *The Transformation of War*, quite a prophetic book from 1991, Martin van Creveld claims the use of violence as a privilege of nation-state ceased to exist, and that we "are entering an era... of warfare between ethnic and religious groups." In such circumstances, the main target of any war are civilians and their cultural identities.
2. While in the 1st World War art and artists were at first quite militant nationalists, and at last quite militant revolutionaries, in the 2nd World War art has been involved in the war itself as target, comfort and weapon. Eradication of whole groups and their cultures was a goal of war, especially in the case of Nazi Germany, and so art and culture became not just commentators of events with a pro-war or anti-war attitude, but actors of war, members of its strategic and tactic headquarters, and means of war. They had a therapeutic function of giving comfort, building and strengthening identities, but they were also used as a weapon. The case of Slovenian art in war of liberation 1941-45 is a typical example.
3. The wars of ex-Yugoslavia prove van Creveld's description. They were wars against civilians, their civilisation and culture. The slogan of a fight between civilisation and barbarity has been used already in Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia. Artists and their arts were deeply involved in these wars.

If a war used to be politics with different means, now it seems to be a global cultural spectacle – with different means.

Biography

Prof. Lev KREFT, born 1951 in Ljubljana (Slovenia), studied philosophy and sociology, M.B. 1981 ("Herbert Marcuse. Art between reconciliation and revolt"); -Ph.D. 1988 ("Struggle on the artistic left"). Professor of aesthetics on the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia) and Head of the Department of Philosophy (2000-).

His university career started in 1976 at the University of Ljubljana. After 1992 full-time member of the Department of Philosophy, and from 2001 Professor of Aesthetics.

On first multiparty elections elected M.P. of Slovenia (1990-1992), re-elected in 1994. Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Slovenia (1993-1996).

Published books and articles on avant-garde and artistic left, postmodernism and philosophy of culture, postcommunist transition and national culture, history of aesthetics. In foreign languages: "Crisis of Enlightenment and the scare of difference" (Interculturality versus Racism and Xenophobia, Belgrade 1998), "History and Everyday Life" (XIV. International Congress of Aesthetics, Ljubljana 1999), "Proletcult and Poetism - the Case of Karel Teige" (Łódź 1998), "Thesen zum jugoslawischen Nationalismus" (Neues Europa - alte Nationalismen, Klagenfurt 1993), "Kultur, Nationalismus, Nation - oder das gespenst misslingender Modernisierung in Slowenien" (Utopie kreativ No. 106/ 1999, Berlin), "Ljubljana - the City Which Renounced Its Avant-Garde" (catalogue of the exhibition of the Central European Avant-Gardes, Los Angeles 2002). Also published articles in respective languages in Poland, Hungary, Turkey, South Korea, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo and Serbia.

Founding member of the Slovenian Society of Aesthetics (1984), now its president (1999-) and member of Executive Committee of International Association for Aesthetics (1999-). President of board of Peace Institute of Ljubljana from 2000 on.