STAMPS AND THE POLITICS OF NATIONAL REPRESENTATION

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This paper explores postal stamps as state symbols that participate in the cultural production of (among other cultural discourses) the sovereign nation-state. Specifically, the paper proposes that the production and use of postal stamps reveal how an emerging political power expresses relations to its own political objectives, national culture, past and present political alliances and administrations, and to the world.

The study of postal stamps may seem marginal, if not trivial, for an understanding of a nation. Moreover, from the perspectives of communication studies or cultural studies, nation-state symbols, in general, may be considered marginal elements within a complex culture. After all, stamps are simple, surface manifestations, subjected here to a critical reading, however, which suggests that they make a meaningful contribution to various expressions of political power, including the construction of a nation-state identity. Surface phenomena contain meaningful evidence. In fact, Siegfried Kracauer insists upon the importance of analysing surface manifestations and artefacts of an epoch. According to him, they

> *contribute more to determining its [epoch's] place in the historical process than judgments of the epoch about itself. ... The very unconscious nature of surface manifestations allows for direct access to the underlying meaning of existing conditions. Conversely, the interpretation of such manifestations is tied to an understanding of these conditions* (Kracauer 1989, 145).

Although communication theory rarely addresses national symbols as important actors in the process of constructing, maintaining, and controlling the symbolic space of a nation-state, the new East Central European flags, coats of arms, currencies, and postal stamps in the

early 1990s visually declared that times, ideas, and values had changed. Images and sounds of the new state symbols rejected the socialist ideology and its codes of representation, while the new nation-states drew from their seemingly bottomless cultural arsenal in search of traditions, including historical colours or lyrics, that could offer old identities for a "new" beginning. Thus, new nation-state symbols were (among other discourses) important means to communicate and promote national identity, loyalty, unity, and accentuate differences with recent history.

Specifically, in the Republic of Slovenia (established in 1991), state symbols were important objects of reconsideration, especially concerning the "Sloveneness" of the new state and its distinctions from "Yugoslavness." The process of symbolic changes in Slovenia during the early 1990s effected the entire public space: all publicly visible, ideological residues of Yugoslavia had to be replaced by signs of a "historic" national existence of Slovenia and its "traditional" symbols. The symbolic transition from a Yugoslav national-republic to an independent nation-state occurred largely through public debate which featured important alternatives concerning specific symbolic representations of being Slovene. The role of culture was essential in this process of inventing Sloveneness, because the Republic of Slovenia represented the first independent political state of the Slovene nation in its history. In this sense, the search for new nation-state symbols tested national, historical, and cultural roots, past alliances, and the legitimisation of sovereignty — very much in Stuart Hall's sense of "the world has to be **made** to **mean**," (1982, 67). Incidentally, Karl Marx wrote in ***The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*** that "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please" (1989, 320); the production of Slovene history was a particular production of a particular history.

Thus, the new meanings of the state emblem and flag, the lyrics of the national anthem, the name and image of the currency, and the motifs represented on stamps, became major political issues. This process is reminiscent of Antonio Gramsci's discovery that the symbols and the ideological presence of the Catholic church in Italy resided everywhere, from street names to libraries. He asked, "What resources can an innovative class set against this formidable complex of trenches and fortifications of the dominant class?" (1988, 380-381).

The focus of this paper are the "trenches and fortifications" set by Yugoslav postal stamps, a symbolic universe that had to be discharged of its ideological meaning after Slovene independence in 1991. But removing Yugoslav hegemony from Slovenia's public spaces, in general, proved to be a fight over every single cultural representation, including postal stamps; culture was a fierce battlefield on which the emerging hegemony of a new nation-state often won by imposing Slovene nationalism.

Cultural Theory and Stamps

Stamps represent an interesting interplay between nation-state politics and national culture: their production and official treatment are organised by the state administration, but their meaning, that is, their consideration and actual use in society, rely on their specific social, political, and cultural contexts. Through depiction and widespread exchange of cultural symbols, stamps are capable of relating struggles and negotiations involving public consensus, or the dissemination of a particular political perspective. For instance, the motifs on Yugoslav stamps during the late 1970s and 1980s clearly represented a nationalistic competition among Yugoslav nations.

Stamps were loaded with images celebrating majestic cultural anniversaries, legitimising several hundred years of a particular national existence. The publication of such series of representations can only be explained in the context of openly growing, nationalistic tensions in the country, where "brotherhood and unity of the Yugoslav nations," as Tito's slogan went, were constantly undermined by clashing national interests, including on the symbolic battlefield.

Theoretically, the importance of culture in constructing and maintaining a social system has been stressed by many scholars. For Gramsci (1985, 1988) for instance, a social system can only be held in place, "cemented" as he puts it, because people consent to it. In this sense, culture cannot be separated from ideological structures or hegemony, because culture functions to provide common bonds through a struggle for common meanings. It is through culture that meanings are produced and situated within a social system — to use an up-to-date terminology for Gramsci's work. Raymond Williams (1986), in addition, posits that cultural production and cultural practice are "not simply derived from otherwise constituted social order but are themselves major elements in its constitution" (1986, 13). For Williams, culture is "the **signifying system** through which necessarily (though among other means) a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored" (1986, 13).

Culture defined in such broad terms includes all "signifying practices"— from language through arts and philosophy to journalism, fashion and advertising" (Williams 1986, 13). Ideology itself has to be "seen as among the most remarkable forms of collective cultural production" (29), and consequently, all cultural practice is ideological — in the sense that all practice is signifying. Hence, cultural practices, including the production of postal stamps by a nation-state, are essential to create, reproduce, experience, explore, and communicate a national community and its social order.

Williams provides a number of useful concepts for a cultural understanding of postal stamps as state symbols by distinguishing between the complex of dominant features of hegemony and the organisation of those disparate meanings, values, and practices that hegemony incorporates. According to him, the process of incorporation includes three major aspects of any cultural process: traditions, institutions, and formations (Williams 1988, 115-120).

The incorporation of traditions into hegemony is important for national cultures, because what is appropriated is a selective tradition: an intentionally selective version of shaping the past and a pre-shaped present which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification (Williams 1988, 115).

Thus, certain revived traditionally national foods, habits, literary writings, or rural folklore, for example, serve the present definition of reality, or of national identity — "to ratify the present and to indicate directions for the future" (Williams 1988, 116). These recovered traditional, cultural practices are more than simply residual (i.e., formed in the past) or marginal. They go through the process of "reinterpretation, dilution, projection, discriminating inclusion and exclusion," the most visible work of selective tradition, according to Williams (1988, 123), who also suggests that they are powerful and vulnerable at the point of their connection with the present. Their power lies in the fact that those traditions that have been excluded from the current national-political interest can be dismissed as "out of date," "nostalgic," "unprecedented," or "alien;" at the same time, the real record is effectively recoverable and alternative or oppositional continuities are still available, which makes them vulnerable.

Nevertheless, Williams stresses that the real foundation of the "hegemonic" is the diffusion and organisation of selective tradition in formal institutions that socialise members of the community. For instance, traditional literary texts are fixed within the national literary canon by their inclusion into a national educational curriculum. As Williams explains, "The true condition of hegemony is effective **self-identification** with the hegemonic forms ... it is at the level of a whole culture that the crucial interrelations, including confusion and conflicts, are really negotiated" (1988, 118).

Drawing from Williams, the selected traditional objects, places, or personalities, for instance, become fixed within a national representational canon that also guides national symbols. The current stamps of the Republic of Slovenia, for example, are representations of prehistoric objects, found on Slovene territory, and of rural material culture; they commemorate various past events that date back to the early Middle Ages. These objects and events were selected to represent the Slovene "tradition" by linking them with the present identity of Slovenes. Thus, the current national-political interest dismissed any representations of the past seventy years, when Slovenia was a part of Yugoslavia, as unproductive for the transition into a sovereign nation-state — much like Benedict Anderson's observation that "if nation states are widely considered to be 'new' and 'historical,' the nation states to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past and ... glide into a limitless future" (1991, 19).

However, not every cultural practice can be reduced to some generalised hegemonic or dominant function, according to Williams (1988, 119). Alternative and oppositional "formations" represent movements with an opposition related to the dominant culture and resist any inclusion into formal institutions. Numerous cases of such movements in East and Central European countries, and in Slovenia, specifically, in the 1980s, are examples of cultural practices that were not included or identified with formal cultural institutions of the time. In Slovenia, even the production of stamps was part of such cultural practice: the first "independent" Slovene stamps emerged in November 1990, when Slovenia was still a part of Yugoslavia. These stamps were issued by a private citizen, Zmago Jelinčič, as an explicit political statement that opposed the (officially still legitimate) Yugoslav politics of symbolic representation. According to their author, they were meant "to raise Slovene national consciousness" (Princič 1991, 3; see Figure 1).

Jelinčič's stamps were condemned as illegal and nationalistic by the Yugoslav as well as the Slovene post office departments and by philatelist institutions that were at the time still part of the Yugoslav state.

According to Williams (1988, 125), "no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention." Outside and against the historic existence of the dominant or hegemonic, he differentiates between "residual" and "emergent" cultures. The "residual" experiences, meanings, and values were effectively formed in the past, but they are still an active alternative or oppositional element in the present cultural process. They are to be distinguished from the residual that has been largely incorporated into the dominant culture. Jelinčič's stamps, for instance, highlight "Slovene" monuments from the early Middle Ages (and situated in today's Austria), and bring to life a controversial 1864 map of the territories inhabited by Slovenes (stretching across current Austrian, Italian, Hungarian, and Croatian territories). With time, such residues of Slovene cultural history had become

marginal in Slovene national memory; nevertheless, in 1990 they influenced the national imagination about historicity and the ability of Slovenes to organise politically in a nation-state of their own. Jelinčič's stamps challenge both, the dominant Yugoslav representation of Sloveneness, and the envisioned European identity of Slovenia, crafted by the opposition movement for political independence — which needed support from neighbouring countries and rejected any future border changes.

Williams underlines that dominant culture cannot allow "too much residual experience and practice outside itself, at least without risk" (1988, 123). Indeed, like Jelinčič, opposition movements in Eastern Europe used a variety of excluded cultural experiences of the past (e.g. medieval coats of arms, flags, and the nineteenth century hymns of nationalists) to undermine the dominant order and stress its transience. The historical necessity of "the nation" conflicts with the contingent and arbitrary signs and symbols that signify the affective life of a national culture. "The cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary historical inventions. Any old shred would have served as well" (Gellner 1983, 56).

"Emergent" cultural processes, however, are new, and have an alternative or oppositional relationship with the dominant culture. They are difficult to follow, because the dominant order has, as Williams puts it, effectively seized "the ruling definition of the social" by penetrating into "the whole social and cultural process" (1988, 124-125) and by defining and changing the definition and social character of cultural processes. The emergent and the alternative can be re-defined into the oppositional, or its elements can be incorporated into the dominant.

Thus, the dominant order that defines the authenticity of stamps as nation-state symbols, either excludes the emergent stamps as illegal signs of opposition or incorporates them as signs of "the nation," if necessary. As a result, many stamps that have appeared as political, cultural, and national assertions of resistance during the past wars, revolutions, or political and social changes, and that have subverted the authority of a state or opposed a military occupation, were incorporated into current, official stamp catalogues. For instance, stamps issued between 1945 and 1947 by the Polish Corps in Italy, or a number of "illegitimate" prisoner-of-war-camp stamps, were issued without state tutelage and yet, their images testify today to strong nationalist feelings in the past (Suhadolnik 1991, 16). Similarly, when the Solidarity Union in Poland issued stamps with its logo in the 1980s, they were properly cancelled most of the time by the "nationally conscious postal authorities in a general anti-Soviet atmosphere," even though they were not officially recognised stamps but were, rather, accepted by the Poles as their symbols of resistance, according to Suhadolnik (1991, 16).

Williams (1988, 30) notices that "practical consciousness is almost always different from official consciousness and this is not merely a matter of relative freedom or control." Rather, since all consciousness is social and is actually being lived, it can never be fully defined or articulated by the dominant order. Thus, conventions of "authenticity," which had been appropriated by the state bureaucracy, create also "a postal universe that hardly ever corresponds to the reality" (Barbatto 1991, 4). For instance, three young Italian architects in 1991 designed their own private stamps to reveal yet another cultural use of stamps as satire to comment on "the enormous quantity of useless stamps celebrating false events that have no meaning for the people who have 'real' problems, different than those that the official 'Poste Italiane' privileges" (Barbatto 1991, 4).

The "real" problems commemorated by these stamps were instances of Italian so-

cial life (i.e., car theft, difficulties to find baby sitters), political events (i. e., protests against the Gulf War, low wages), and various other religious and cultural episodes in Italy. The process of automatic cancellation provided yet another opportunity for ridiculing state control of its communication space, especially, when illegal stamps protesting the Gulf war were cancelled with an official "Solidarity with Italian Soldiers in the Gulf" seal. (Figure 2).

During the Second World War, according to Alberto Bolaffi, falsified stamps were parachuted into enemy territory as a means of political, ideological, and economic propaganda. One such famous incident involved a regular 1942 Italian stamp with the profiles of Hitler and Mussolini and the motto: "Two nations, one war." However, as Bolaffi reports,

> *The falsified stamps, issued by the Allies, were similar, except for the expressions of Hitler, who looked gloomy, and Mussolini, who looked surprised: first the master, second the reprimanded pupil. The motto on the stamp was changed into "Two peoples, one Führer"* (Bolaffi 1991, 38-39)

The stamp incorporated currently by the Republic Slovenia into the official Slovene Post Office stamp catalogue as the first Slovene stamp, is also, in a sense, illegal. The "Enchained man," as the stamp is called, was designed and created by the Slovene painter Ivan Vavpotič in 1918, when the short-lived State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (SHS) was created after the defeat of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy (see Figure 3). This state existed only for one month and remained unrecognised internationally, until it joined the Kingdom of Serbia and became the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes on December 1, 1918. The "Enchained man" conveys an atmosphere of human revolt imbedded in national feelings. This powerful image emanates from real life experiences, a common human predicament, and stands above any specific nation, class, time, or space. Although this experience is human, it is, nevertheless, also depicted as specifically Slovene: the slave is standing over Triglav, a Slovene symbol, while the live model for the "enchained man" was a Slovene gymnast, Stane Derganc, according to the 1995/96 Catalogue of Postal Stamps (Katalog 1995, 7). The name of the illegitimate state is written in both Latin and Cyrillic alphabets, stressing the envisioned coexistence and equality of the three nations — formerly parts of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

Philately

The production of stamps starts with a governmental postal institution, where design proposals are collected and selected. The printing of stamps resembles the printing of money: it is secretive and highly controlled by the government. The number of issued stamps is kept secret, while the original printing plates and any damaged material is destroyed in the presence of government officials to avoid counterfeit stamps or the publication of stamps with mistakes or irregularities, since the latter will gain high prices from collectors.

Stamps keep their nominal value until they are cancelled and eliminated or replaced by new stamps from the postal authority, when, for example, political changes occur. After they have been used, stamps can become objects of pleasure and profit in the world of philately — an economic activity and a widespread hobby that is interestingly intertwined with nation-state politics: one of the "plaisirs" of philatelists is

charting and defining the space of the national playground.

For philatelists, the authenticity of stamps is one of their major concerns and a criterion for inclusion in collections. According to Ivan Turk's elaborate scientific stamp classification, the authentic stamp is the legitimate stamp, i.e., the genuine stamp that has been issued and authorised by the state (1987). All other stamps are considered falsifications, and they rarely gain high prices or are collected as meaningful objects. Nevertheless, while philatelists recognise a dominant definition of authenticity, they simultaneously resist it by bestowing an "aura" of the original also on stamps with mistakes. Thus, the cultural practice of "misprint hunting" is an oppositional and "counter-hegemonic" activity. Although culture cannot be totally defined by the nation-state criteria of "authenticity," even mistakes on stamps have to result from the legitimate and controlled production process: stamps with mistakes are stamps that escape and sabotage this process. For a "mainstream" philatelist then, the final instance, or the highest guardian of authenticity is the legitimate state.

Philatelists categorise stamps according to certain criteria — all of which take part in the larger politics of national representation. Thus, stamps can be classified according to their visual motifs (e.g., places, animals, plants, people, means of work) and themes (e.g., technology, economy, education, science, culture) (Turk 1983). Both, motifs and themes expressed on nation-state symbols, like stamps, visually reveal an ideological and nationalistic intent; consequently, stamp collections are selections that take part in a process of identity formation. To illustrate, Yugoslav stamps between 1945 and 1990 depict people that represented the working class, means of work that celebrated the success of the proletariat, and animals and plants that represented the Yugoslav flora and fauna (some rare exotic samples appeared to beautify a particular event — Tito's birthday, for example). Similarly, the stamps of the Republic of Slovenia issued after independence in 1991, also favour Slovene animals and flowers, and extensively celebrate the longevity of Slovenia's national existence by observing 1,600 year-old events (without counting images of prehistoric fossils found on Slovene territory).

Richard Handler (1985, 192-217) unravels the assumptions and paradoxes involved in "having a culture," selecting and cherishing authentic, collective "property" when he discusses the making of a Quebecois cultural "patrimonie." According to him, the collection and preservation of an authentic domain of identity cannot be natural or innocent, but is tied up with nationalist politics, with restrictive laws, and with contesting the encoding of the past and future. Moreover, from Baudrillard's perspective, stamps belong to the "meaningful objects" that function within a ramified system of symbols and values (Baudrillard 1968, 135). Consequently, the commercial, aesthetic, and scientific worth of stamps presupposes a given system of values in which collecting rare stamps from the past, for example, is more rewarding than collecting regular stamps in everyday use, because rare, old objects are endowed with a sense of "depth" by their historically minded collectors. The fact that temporality can thus be reified and salvaged as origin(al) beauty and knowledge is of extreme importance for collecting as a process of national "identity formation," according to Handler (1985, 210), because it emphasises temporality and the preservation of authenticity of national identity.

In addition to regular and commemorative stamps, the official Post Office stamp catalogues often list other outcomes of philatelist technology, e.g., drafts of printed but not issued stamps, unused stamps, over-printed stamps, and sometimes, stamps

with mistakes (Turk 1987). All of these examples offer insights into the struggle over control of the communication space, national representation and national self-imagination. In this sense, the catalogues represent a rare collection of information about political and cultural history and national identity.

The use of "over-printed stamps", for example, often occurs during wartime, when an occupational force seizes stamps and overprints them to indicate control over the space of societal communication. With additional texts and symbols, over-printed stamps are like prisoners of war; they lose their original symbolic importance while retaining their postal function; they support a fantasy of conquest. For a country like Slovenia, they are important historical documents as political power changed on Slovene territory and cancelled and re-issued its symbolic statements of subjugation and control by stamps.

For example, the Italian administration in 1941 used the Kingdom of Yugoslavia stamps throughout its Ljubljana Province (a region with special status within the occupied Slovene territory, because of its hundred percent Slovene population). "Yugoslavia," the name of the former state, and the nominal value in Yugoslav dinars were stricken out while the image of the Yugoslav king was over-printed with the Italian logo "R. Commissariato Civile Territori Sloveni Occupati Lubiana" [Civil Commissariat of the Occupied Slovene Territories Ljubljana] (Katalog 1995,11). (See Figure 4.)

During the Austro-Hungarian Empire or in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Slovenes remained underrepresented on stamps and invisible as a nation. The reality of past national annihilations had never been as bluntly presented to Slovenes, officially at least, as on these Italian stamps that candidly referred to the occupation of Slovene territory. As much as these stamps represented Italian control over the territory, they also re-shaped and sharpened the national, cultural, and political meanings of this space for Slovenes themselves. Ironically, these were also the first stamps ever to explicitly name this territory Slovene.

The "Laibach Provinz" stamps, i.e., regular Italian stamps overprinted by the German administration after the capitulation of Italy in 1943, offer another culturally important, if rather ambiguous insight into Slovene national history. The German overprint features the regional coat of arms from Kranj with Slovene and German logos " Ljubljanska Pokrajina" and "Laibach Provinz," respectively (Katalog 1995, 12-13).

Thus, the German occupation army recognised the Carniolan coat of arms and the Slovene language and often even eliminated any hierarchical order of the two languages. According to Miroslav Mršol (1983), this practice cannot be found on any other stamps issued by Germany between 1939 to 1945 in occupied Europe. Moreover, a series of six stamps featuring six icons of Slovene literary history was prepared in 1945 during the Nazi occupation in Laibach Provinz. (Figure 5).

Although the end of the war prevented their printing, the stamps are preserved as trial-prints and raise additional questions about the reason for such German tolerance in Laibach Provinz. Mršol thinks that with them "the German occupier recognised ... that the Slovene nation is still alive" (1983, 45). The stamps can also be interpreted as a reward for collaboration and loyalty, or as a sign of containment of Slovene culture, since the depicted men of culture symbolically became an appropriated constitutive part of Nazi Germany.

Finally, there are various events staged by philatelists that "provide an illusion of a coherent reality" (Bolaffi 1991, 42) and in which the symbolic and cathartic features of

stamps are coupled to represent a new cultural or political construction as homogeneous and authentic. For example, philatelists and postal authorities provide the "first day canceler," a special postmark that is prepared in advance and consists of the date, the "first day" logo, and a motto. Stamps with "first day" cancellations create a symbolic unity of elements that are frequently forced together, and they are ranked by philatelists among their most valuable trophies.

A historical Slovene example of such an illusion is a "first day" cancellation of a stamp depicting Bled (an icon of Slovene tourism). The stamp was one in a series issued in 1941 by German authorities and cancelled with the "first day" motto: "Veldes, Deutsch für immer" [Bled, German for ever] (Mršol 1983, 25) — presenting a newly constructed unity of time and space as factual rather than contrived. The occupying power demonstrates its political-cultural control of a Slovene town by naming and claiming it as German forever. These elements provide a fabricated German-ness of the Slovene, or more precisely, Carniolan cultural territory by representing the compatibility of different, irreconcilable components.

Therefore, stamps as nation-state symbols represent national culture and political power at the same time, and with one supporting the other. During times of social-political change, philatelists and government postal institutions redefine and recast the meaning of national space and time; they provide the criteria of authenticity for selected representations of national identity and construct illusions that mystify appropriated cultural and historic traditions. Stamps as state symbols are deeply imbedded in both, the material means of producing national symbols of traditional unity and the great national cultural themes of the day that can sabotage and disrupt this unity.

Nation on Stamps

The Austro-Hungarian monarchy did not issue a single stamp that displayed any sign of Slovene cultural distinctiveness, a fate Slovenes shared with other Slavic nations within the realm (Mršol 1983, 23). Instead, stamps had cancellations and mottos in German or Hungarian and displayed motifs that identified sites and symbols of sovereign power: battle scenes, Habsburg rulers, the state emblem, the crown, or the court.

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia, however, was not much better. Pre-World War II stamps suggest that Slovenes were not an equal political partner in the kingdom, in spite of the fact that they entered the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918 as one of its constituent nations. The politics of representation on Yugoslav stamps were the politics of symbolic annihilation which denied Slovenes legitimate representation, although Slovenes pirouetted from a marginalised "South" of the previous empire into the position of an economically and technically developed "North." When the kingdom was renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the name of Slovenes and their competence in participating in the symbolic control of the communication space vanished altogether. Thus, while Serbian (and occasionally Croatian) histories were repeatedly celebrated by stamps, no stamp observed or commemorated a specific Slovene event.

Based on a methodology of deconstruction, exemplified by Jacques Derrida's work (1976), however, one can argue that Slovenes did not disappear from the symbolic space of the Kingdom Yugoslavia despite their symbolic annihilation. Derrida focuses on the political power of rhetorical operations that work within binary oppositions,

like white/black, male/female, machine/ nature, ruler/ruled, or reality/appearance — in which the "first term" in the opposition hierarchically subjugates and devalues the "second term." Derrida reveals that by devaluing the second term in opposition and subsuming it under the first one, hierarchical world views are sustained. In the case of stamps, the "first term" can be interpreted as the occasion for which a stamp was issued so that the occasion itself becomes hierarchically more important than what is represented by the stamp.

Specifically, in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia none of the "first terms" represented Slovenes. Slovene motifs (e.g., national costumes, Lake Bled, an aerial view of Ljubljana) were devalued by a more important, "first term," e.g., the observance of a European rowing championship, or the first Yugoslav philatelist exhibition. Slovenes were denied the ability to represent anything but an unnamed environment of the only named historic nation, Serbia. In contrast, the "first terms" that framed or subsumed the Serbs, for example, were commemorations or fund raising events for Serbian war invalids, war veterans, observances of the historic battles, anniversaries of international agreements by the previous Kingdom of Serbia, and depiction of Serbian royal, historical, and religious sites, political figures, heroes, and men of culture or science.

Croats also appear rarely on stamps between the two wars; one occasion is of particular interest for this inquiry. In 1929 a commemorative stamp was issued to celebrate "thousand years of the Croat Kingdom" on which a medieval Croat King, Tomislav, could not appear alone on a stamp that represented state power. (See Figure 6). Instead, the Yugoslav King was placed on the left side of the stamp thus devaluing the Croat King, while fusing temporal and spatial indicators of the two states that spanned over thousand years. The stamps constructed an illusionary unity in which the Yugoslav king became the main actor, actually granting thousand years of existence by being placed in the privileged left position on the stamp (privileged in civilisations that read from left to right and from the top down).

The politics of representation inherent in stamps of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia surface as a strategy of articulating Serbia as an exclusive historical agency of legitimate political state power and linking it to technical, political, military, and cultural developments. Serbs were the personification of the Yugoslav nation-state in representations of sovereign, political state rule, from which Slovenes and Croats were excluded; they were systematically presented in combination with devalued social segments (such as women and children), and with a nationally unconscious frame of folklore. These strategies of representation sustained a hierarchical world view in which the idea of the nation-state equalled Serbia.

Post-War Stamps

During World War II, Yugoslav partisans organised some postal control over the liberated territories, and in spite of technical difficulties there were attempts to create partisan stamps. Thus, in 1944 a woodcut and hand-printed original partisan stamp was used in Bosnia. It depicted a partisan fighter expressing the heroism and mythical significance of resistance against the most powerful army at the time. (See Figure 7). Aesthetically the stamp was one of the first examples of an emergent socialist realism, which dominated artistic expressions beginning immediately after the war and became an everyday visual part of Yugoslav public life (Čičerov 1983, 10).



Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

Figure 9









Figure 10



Figure 11







Figure 12



Figure 13





Figure 14



Figure 15

While the rest of Yugoslavia overprinted stamps of the former occupation forces after the liberation in 1945 with "FD Jugoslavija" [Federal State Yugoslavia], Slovene overprints curiously emphasised Sloveneness with their "Slovenija-Jugoslavija" inscription. This peculiarity may be an expression of fear of yet another symbolic annihilation, and a confirmation of early tensions between Yugoslav unitarists and Slovene separatists; stamps were one of those rare spaces where these anxieties could be expressed.

During the post-war period, several stamps were issued specifically for Zone B of the Free Trieste Territory, the ethnically mixed region of the Littoral and Istria where the border between Yugoslavia (Slovenia) and Italy were not settled until 1953. These stamps were designed by Slovene artists and were consistent with an emergent politics of representation which targeted and represented the population as socially, culturally, and politically subsumed under socialist ideals, e.g., the power of the working class, as "first term" agents. Nevertheless, the bilingual logo on these stamps, "Istra Slovensko Primorje" in Slovene, and "Istria Littorale Sloveno" in Italian [Istria, Slovene Littoral] reflect a certainty that the region belonged to Slovenes, and, simultaneously, a deeply ingrained sense of traditional coexistence. Another stamp, called the "Triptych," issued to commemorate the First of May, 1948, carried the inscription in Slovene, Italian, and Croatian, printed alternately on each stamp.

In Zone B of the Free Trieste Territory, Istrian workers and farmers, who had never been represented on stamps, constructed a postal universe that mainly celebrated the first of May with regionally specific motifs, indicating a new sensitivity of social forces that selected these events and people of this region, as worthy of stamps. One of the most beautiful examples depicts a handshake of an Istrian farmer and a Trieste worker. The hands, surrounded by regional and communist symbols (a lily for Trieste, a goat for Istria, and a hammer and sickle) are symbolically celebrating the power and friendship between the Trieste working class and Istrian peasants (see Figure 8).

Nevertheless, while Zone B stamps legitimised the working social strata and acknowledged their linguistic specificity, they excluded the cultural and social heterogeneity of this ethnically mixed region of Istria. For example, the stamps disregarded an urban Italian middle-class, excluded its strong attachment to the Catholic church, and, particularly, its tragic post-war exodus, when, in an attempt of ethnic cleansing, Italians were more or less forced to leave their traditional homes in Istria and emigrate to Italy.

Stamps in Socialist Yugoslavia

Stamps of socialist Yugoslavia, issued between 1945 and 1991, tell a 46-year story with appropriated and selected images that ratifies socialism and indicates that Tito's slogan about "brotherhood and unity of Yugoslav nations" described the future. The number of stamps celebrating partisans, war, and liberation, suggests that Yugoslav history began during and after the Second World War (Katalog 1991). However, this intentionally selective version of the past cannot disguise an obvious discrepancy between images of a successful socialist vision and an economic reality that is disclosed by fluctuations in the nominal values of these stamps. For example, the value of a regular 1,000-dinar stamp in 1960 was 0.20 dinar in 1966 and rose to 10,000 dinars early in 1990, only to drop to 0.30 dinar later that year, exposing a variety of visually suppressed economic problems.

Yugoslavia's multinational reality was among the most important, more general circumstances that determined the symbolic production and reproduction of Yugo-

slavia, while numerous conflicts between specific interests among nations had to find special forms of expression and employ specific strategies in order to be represented. Postage stamps were among the few public spaces, where growing nationalistic tensions were visually exposed — colliding with numerous visual quests for unity. These contradictory signs of unity and nationalism on Yugoslav stamps are also indicators of negotiations between the realities of a specific, national experience of Yugoslav nations and the preferred political representation of their "brotherhood and unity."

Until the early 1980s, there were numerous calls for unity on Yugoslav stamps that were oblivious to national distinctions. Instead, they stressed a common past with images of revolutionaries, partisans and heroes, AVNOJ meetings, Yugoslav National Army's anniversaries, Communist Party congresses, and Tito's portraits. By honouring anniversaries of common interests (international organisations, international treaties and agreements, conferences of the non-alignment movement, rituals of self-management and socialist internationalism), stamps affirmed the legitimacy and the policies of a socialist Yugoslavia. There was also an abundance of images of post-war reconstruction, like factories, large public works, and many realistic images of working people and their environment.

Thus, Yugoslav stamps symbolically constructed a successful, bright, and optimistic image of the federation. Heroism, political statism, and symbolic personifications of constantly improving conditions in the nation were strategic postal constructions of Yugoslav unity that displaced the political, economic, national and cultural conditions of reality. Disturbing moments of public and private life, like social, national, or political unrest (among them, student movements of the 1960s, labour strikes of the 1970s, mass economic emigration of Yugoslav "Gastarbeiter") were displaced by an aestheticised, adjusted, and unproblematic image of unity.

Over the years, the aesthetics of this constructed reality visually changed — following a changing focus of the political and cultural context. During the 1960s, images of "unity" abandoned the socialist-realist style of the day and became indirect representations of the represented: they turned into representations of representations of unity, subsumed under a more powerful frame of reference that placed a distance between the user (of the stamp) and its topic. Thus, representations of party congresses changed into reproductions of posters designed for these congresses, and the National Liberation War developed into representations of war monuments. One of the most illuminating examples of such distancing was a series of stamps, "The Women — national Heroes of Yugoslavia," issued on March 8, 1984. The heroines are reproduced on medals which turned their recognition into a confirmation of society that granted them this status (Figure 9). Thus, representations of liberation, optimism, and ideals of communality and socialism slowly turned into reproductions of distance and alienation.

Until 1960, people and groups had been represented realistically as nationally unspecified real and vital people with excessive heroic gestures and optimistic, recognisable human faces. In the 1960s, socialist realism developed more abstract representations of individuals, who were later further reduced to pure symbolism. By the 1980s, groups of people as nationally unidentified signs of Yugoslav unity disappeared from Yugoslav stamps. Moreover, they received national names or were represented by named individuals. A series of four stamps, issued in 1984, for example, exhibited four cradles from Bosnia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Serbia, indicating

how slim chances had become to represent the unity of Yugoslavs by ignoring their nationality (Figure 10).

The most prominent institutional symbols of Yugoslav unity were the Yugoslav League of Communists (YLC), the Yugoslav National Army (YNA), and President Tito. Thus, stamps that symbolically represented the unity of Yugoslav nations, on various occasions used the iconography typical of these three symbolic trademarks: the Communist symbols (the red star, hammer and sickle), partisans, rifles and other weaponry, and Tito's pictures or his signatures.

Stamps issued for the fourteen Communist Party congresses and for Tito's birthdays were more numerous and underwent more visible aesthetic and substantial changes through the course of the years than stamps celebrating the Yugoslav Army. The "party stamps" used representational strategies that were related to the concerns of each meeting. Unity and equality among Yugoslav nations were represented by multilingual logos (usually excluding the languages of Italian, Hungarian and Albanian minorities). As soon as national problems became one of the main focuses of the party congresses (from 1955 on), realistic images of working people on stamps were replaced by selected, symbolic representations of robust hands, white doves, stylised red stars, hammers and sickles, or Tito portraits and his signatures, rendered in different techniques. For instance, the stamp for the 1969 congress was a reproduction of a poster depicting Tito's name sprayed in black paint on a wall. hence, the stamp presented the idea of "unity" as a problematic issue that could only be expressed through a marginalised popular strategy of opposition — graffiti, the language of the street (Figure 11).

With time, signs of unity on stamps became graphically altered: sickles were partly cut, stars barely indicated, hammers had only handles or appeared as shadows that made them disappear into the background — indicating a sense of redundancy among symbols of unity. In 1986, for instance, the militant colours of stamps indicated the determination of the party to use its constitutional leadership role to deal with the difficulties in the country, but the shapes of the distorted and fragmented communist symbols told a tale of failures (Figure 12).

The Fourteenth YLC Congress in 1990, also called the "Congress of Salvation," ended in a fiasco; it was celebrated by stamps that were appropriate representations of the national, political, and economic chaos. One of them, for example, featured a hammer and sickle on a computer screen. This confluence of the coming electronic age and the communist revolution with its symbols of manual work expressed the party's will to modernise, but it appeared at a time and place when computers were foreign-made luxury items with import duties reaching over 100 per cent. While the nominal values of stamps revealed a rate of inflation that topped 2,000 per cent (Figure 13).

Tito's image surfaced several times a year on regular and commemorative stamps during (and after) his life, confirming his visual monopolisation of the public space and contributing to his personality cult, while simultaneously exploiting a public, romantic fascination with revolutionaries, rebels, and the devotion of the nation to a leader. These stamps were usually issued for the May 25 celebration of Youth Day — also considered Tito's birthday. His age never appeared on stamps; until his death he was a timeless figure, represented in his forties and fifties by images from photos, sculptures, and paintings seen in public spaces. His public image was fixed and could be easily recognised, even by children. On stamps issued between 1972 and 1989, Tito

never looked straight ahead or made eye contact; instead, his profiles and half-profiles direct the reader's gaze beyond the stamp, mainly into a bright future on the left. His portraits reveal his stately and reliable leadership; he appears dressed in various military uniforms or military coats, his head proudly lifted, asserting control over civilians and the military alike.

Six stamps, using various techniques and reproductional frames, were dedicated to Tito's death in 1980. The more interesting stamp carried a reproduction of his portrait on a silver coin, not unlike the representation of emperors on Roman coins. This mummification of Tito emphasised "control over time" on one of the "time-binding" media, as Harold Innis (1964, 34) would say. Faces on coins keep their illustriousness and protect their value throughout centuries, because "durable commodities emphasise time and continuity" (33) and can serve as propaganda devices (114). This stamp marked the future of Yugoslavia and specifically stressed the indisputable slogan of that year, "After Tito, Tito," immortalising the late president and his idea of Yugoslav unity.

The post-mortem commemorative stamps issued on May 25 between 1981 and 1990, widened the paradigm of representations from which Tito's portraits were selected. His previously constructed image of agelessness was replaced by images from unfamiliar photographs and paintings showing "new" faces of Tito. In 1987, for example, a stamp reproduced a 1930s painting of a younger Tito with a hard thin face and round glasses; a year later, he resurfaced as an even younger man. While disputes among young Yugoslavs about the form and need for posthumous celebrations of Tito's birthday became louder, Tito's well known images were forced out of the postal universe by unknown representations, which also conveyed an unfamiliar conception of unity. Old representations and the ideas behind them were losing their representational power.

The last Yugoslav stamp with Tito's image was issued on May 25, 1990. It was a well known image of Tito in his partisan coat, a reproduction of a sculpture by Antun Augustinčić. The stamp, in brown sepia, creates the impression of an old document on which Tito looks sad and pensive, regretting, perhaps, that his idea of "brotherhood and unity" had lost its appeal.

Yugoslav stamps also played the role of a public, strategic mediator of national particularities — selecting opportunities for commemorating national anniversaries and opposing the more frequent, annual stamps that celebrated the recent past, considered to hold the origins of Yugoslav unity. This mediating process is especially noticeable on stamps of the 1970s and 1980s, when a large number of stamps celebrating anniversaries of particular nations started to accumulate. "Unity" stamps that could only rely on forty-some years of shared experience competed against thousand-year old events. They rivalled images of material evidence from the political and cultural past of Croats, Serbs, Montenegrins, or Slovenes, which were represented as part of a European past, while the Macedonians and other national minorities were excluded from this postal battle for exclusivity, longevity, and immortality.

The political commemorative stamps in Yugoslavia repeat an earlier pattern in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia: the historical "core" nation in Yugoslavia was Serbia, according to the commemorated, nationally-specific, political struggles, battles, and wars — whose numbers and age increased towards the end of the 1980s. For instance, stamps like, "Hundred Years of the Serbian Turkish War," "Six Hundred Years of the Kosovo

Battle", or "Three Hundred Years of the Karposa Insurrection," were issued in 1989, followed by "Three Hundred Years of the Great Migration of Serbs" in 1990. Serbian nationalism displayed on stamps in the 1980s honoured events that represented national harm and defeat and became the showcases of suffering and resistance. For instance, "Six Hundred Years of the Kosovo Battle" coincided with riots of the Albanian minority against Serbs in Kosovo and with changes in the Serbian republican constitution, promoted by Slobodan Milošević, which denied the Albanian minority in Serbia some political rights. Thus, stamps matched the public discourse in Serbia that addressed Serbs as victims in their own land and the repression of Albanians as a just fight for Serbian national rights and the salvation of Western civilisation against Islam.

This historical Serbian position was challenged by stamps that displayed pictures as documentary evidence of the past political or cultural glory of other nations. The very fact that a search for the political origins and the primacy of a particular Yugoslav nation was expressed by stamps seems more important than the actual content of the stamps. It suggests that by recovering their primacy, Yugoslav nations were also looking for special political rights that could not be served by the officially recognised equality of nations or by the idea of "brotherhood and unity."

For instance, one series of 1989 stamps, the "Ancient Codes of Law," features ancient legal documents and became a competition among nations for primacy in the federation by bringing to light the most remote legal proof of their political importance. Stamps depicted original "Serbian," "Croatian," and "Montenegrin" documents commemorating "Eight Hundred Years of the Kulin Ban Law," or "Five Hundred Years of Crnojević's ruling." Although few Yugoslav citizens probably knew what these images represented, the stamps helped reshape perceptions of the unity of the federation and its past. Slovenes participated on this battlefield with a stamp that observed 45 years of the first "Monetary institution of Slovenia," having been the only republic with its own partisan currency and original Slovene monetary institutions during the occupation.

Since Slovenes could not compete with proofs of their ancient existence, they found their niche in the competition for cultural supremacy; between the late 1970s and 1991 the universe of Yugoslav stamps exploded into majestic jubilees. Stamps celebrated many centennial anniversaries of "national" artefacts located in museums along with a host of reproductions of old paintings and frescoes created by important national artists. Among them were, for example, stamps recognising 700 and 800 years of various Serbian monasteries in Kosovo, Bosnia, and Montenegro, 400 years of the work of the Croatian dramatist Gundulić, 400 years since the publication of the first Slovene book, or 300 years since the appearance of the first comprehensive Slovene book describing Carniola.

Even the economy, technology, and sports were recognised for their longevity and provided with national identities. For instance, a stamp commemorating 500 years of the Slovene mercury mine in Idrija, and 200 years of Slovene Alpine sports, competed against 450 years of the "Post in Croatia," 120 years of the "First Issued Stamp in Serbia," or 200 years of "Tourism in Croatia." While regular stamps issued in 1950 would depict various Yugoslav industries, similar stamps in the 1980s carried explicitly national trademarks.

Yugoslav stamps also recount a story of national estrangement and rising aversions in a particular language and alphabet — another site for expressions of national

deference in a multi-lingual state. In spite of three official different languages, two alphabets, and the languages of minorities, the supremacy of the Serbo-Croatian language on stamps was nearly total. One exception was the second Yugoslav stamp issued in 1945, which depicted the new federal constitution with inscriptions in all Yugoslav languages and both alphabets (Figure 14). Later, stamps recognised various Yugoslav languages; for instance when unity had to be expressed for fund raising exercises (for the Red Cross, the Olympic Games in Sarajevo, or the victims of an earthquake in Montenegro), or when linguistic equality was legitimising the party and its political rituals. In fact, these examples prove that the use of language was a strategically important decision and that the use the Serbo-Croatian language, as a rule, had been incorporated into the dominant definition of Yugoslav cultural identity. Regular stamps in the 1950s alternately showed "Yugoslavia" in Latin and Cyrillic; in the 1960s, however, the Cyrillic alphabet was abolished, only to be re-instituted in 1983, when it again started to alternate with Latin — at a time when a fierce open struggle between Serbs and Croats ensued over the recognition of Serbo-Croatian as two separate languages.

In Slovenia, the use of the Cyrillic alphabet on stamps started to be publicly perceived as offensive in 1991, especially on "stamps with explicitly Slovene themes," according to a journalist; it was considered "the last challenge," and involved "a stamp issued on 1 June 1991 depicting the new Karavanke tunnel, built with Slovene money" (***Slovenske Novice*** 1991, 6). (See Figure 15.)

The general Yugoslav nationalisation of stamps in the 1980s went along with Slovene philatelist efforts to explore and locate signs of a Slovene nation on stamps. For instance, Janko Štampfl looked for Triglav, the highest Yugoslav mountain and a national symbol, as representational of Slovenia (Štampfl 1988). Similarly, in 1983 Mršol found images of Slovene landscapes, fauna and flora, Slovene historical events, and Slovene language on 20 Yugoslav stamps, and on seven stamps issued abroad between 1918 and 1983. Among the latter, Mršol found signs of Sloveneness on stamps issued in 1980 by the Central African Republic and by Paraguay, for example, where a champion of the winter Olympics was depicted with made-in- Slovenia skies. He also thought Slovenes were represented on the 1945 "Iwo Jima" stamp issued by the United States of America featuring a group of soldiers mounting American flag. According to Mršol (1983, 51), "A son of Slovene parents was among them, John Hribar, who was wounded on Iwo Jima."

The national perspective on stamps through which, according to Homi Bhabha (1990, 297), "the scraps, patches, and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of national culture," demonstrates that none of the civil or political institutions of a dominant culture can possibly satisfy the desires of a national minority that perceives itself culturally different and symbolically annihilated, because it is represented indirectly, i.e., through the dominant culture of the "other." Thus, the ambiguous position of Slovenes as an invisible minority obliged Slovene philatelists to interpret the same occurrences in contradictory ways: the same signs of Sloveneness were interpreted as negative appropriations as well as positive (but long overdue) affirmations and recognition — depending on the cultural and political context.

Thus, Austrian stamps with signs of Sloveneness were more often interpreted as appropriations of the Slovene past, although sometimes they may have represented a "long overdue recognition" of Slovene specificity. An Austrian stamp, issued in 1979, depicting the Karantanian throne (which lies on Austrian territory) was deciphered

as "showing the monument as if it belonged to them" (Mršol 1983, 52). A Yugoslav stamp of 1976 featured the same throne on a reproduction of a painting, the "Enthroning of the Slovene duke" by the Slovene painter Anton Gojmir Kos and raised, according to Mršol (1983, 49), "a wild and furious rage among Carinthian Nazis, as if they had any right to interfere with our lives; they simply cannot understand that our past, three hundred years older that theirs, is our own business." When Austria observed 400 years of a famous stud farm in Lipica with a stamp depicting a white horse, "they finally understood what our 'Lipicanec' meant for the Court and their riding school in Vienna" (52). Several other nations issued stamps with the Lipicanec, raised in Slovenia, which were either proudly accepted or considered offensive, because Slovenia or Lipica were not explicitly named. When Yugoslavia issued a commemorative stamp for a horse-racing event, without a Lipicanec on it, this was understood as purposely repressing Slovenia. But when the Lipicanec was depicted on a stamp commemorating an anniversary of the Croatian Veterinary Department of Zagreb University, this was "an obscure opportunity to depict our horse" (33). Two inter-war German Reich stamps displaying this horse and issued in 1942 implicitly impersonated the "occupation of everything that is Slovene" (30), while a planned series of German occupation stamps with Slovene historical cultural figures recognised that the "Slovene nation is still alive" (Mršol 1983, 45).

Conclusion

Stamps participate in changing the national, cultural, and political contexts. Both, the creators and users of stamps are constituted by their referential framework, i.e., by a variety of discourses, some of which are congruent and affirm the state's symbolic hegemony, while others compete against it. Thus, stamps play an important role as carriers of various social and political concerns, as, for example, quests for unity or nationalistic tensions.

Over the course of the years, stamps undergo significant visual and aesthetic changes which, in an important way, regulate the understanding of their meaning. These shifts happen because stamps constitute a "signifying practice," and partake in their national, cultural, and political environment. The role of stamps is, therefore, not so much determined by general conventions or by a "dominant" ideology. Rather, the subjects of the process of stamp production and consumption are caught up in actively lived and felt meanings and values or, in the "structures of feeling," as Williams would say.

Williams's cultural perspective is useful for an analysis of stamps; his dynamic and generative account of forming and dissolving hegemonies, in which national cultural production represents a continual process of incorporation, exclusion, recombination, and appropriation, also pertains to interpreting postal stamps.

Nevertheless, this perspective also problematises the ambiguity of the representation of a cultural minority. The case of stamps used in Slovenia's past, suggests that when a national minority is represented only through the dominant culture, the critique of its representation oscillates between calls for more representation, complaints about trivialising its presentation, and an awareness of national recognition or annihilation. However, this oscillation could also be interpreted as one of the strategies of survival for a national minority. In this sense, the "minority" status of symbolic annihilation represents a vital condition for the existence of a national minority as different from the "dominant" culture which it opposes.

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