

THE IR(RATIONAL) IN THE LOCOMOTION OF FILMOGRAPHY, THEATRE, MUSIC SCENE AND POP CULTURE AS THE CREATION OF THE “NEW CROATIAN CULTURAL MEMORY”

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Abstract: By dealing with the examples of Croatian (pop) culture production, the paper analyzes different strategies of cultural production in relation to the previously existing cultural memory matrix (anti-fascist, fascist, Yugoslavian, nationalist...). Do such practices indeed result in the moral of the film *Total Recall*?

Keywords: memory, obscurity, ideology, former Yugoslavia, war

I. INTRODUCTION

Croatia was admitted to the European Union on July the 1st in 2013, and the following morning, the desks in charge of issuing identity documents throughout the territory of the new member of EU were flooded with queues of people who wanted, from the first day of “being present” in this- perhaps imaginary community- have an ID card with the characteristics of the new national federation in which Croatia entered. The superfluous population in long queues has clearly not taken into consideration the continuous and repeated official and media statements that the old identity cards remain valid

even after Croatia’s admittance to the EU until they reach the expiration date stated on each individual card, on some cards sooner, and on some later.

Only a naive person would have interpreted this episode in the phenomenon of mass psychology as a fervent desire of the Croatian people to formally confirm, from the very first day, a very speculative mantra from the Croatian public and popular discourse that “we have always been European”- a phrase that has been used for twenty years in both an empty and a mystifying way, both manipulative and demagogic, both with ardent conviction and triteness, both poetically and meticulously, academically proven. For two decades it has been used to support and strengthen the Croatian identity in times of an identity crisis: it was used in the nineties as an idealized orientation horizon and as one of the crucial rhetorical motivators in comparison to the alternative exit from Yugoslavia; it was also used since the year 2000, when it was used as a salve (or a placebo?) whenever the people ought to have been “handled” in moments of crisis of Croatian integration path to the EU, that is, whenever the EU hindered or blocked accepting Croatia as a member. The insecurity caused by such repeated “rejection”

has often truly shaken the nation's psyche, making it traumatized by the question *why?* Why does Europe not want us and does that mean that Europe considers us to be a part of the "Balkan trash"?

Today, when the Croatian citizens and angry nationalists are unwilling to "submit once more" to partial loss of sovereignty, or they are at least (over)dosed Euro-sceptics, they rush to get their EU identity card without illusions, with their tongue in their cheek. They do not do it as the enthusiastic Europeans who have returned to their cultural home, but as people who have the Balkan and socialist mentality impregnated to their core.

Their experience of the functioning society was formed in repressive systems, systems that widely practiced constraint through extreme bureaucracy and a rigid administrative apparatus, so much so that even today, on the threshold of the EU, the Croats are willing to patiently fumble in a long queue because of a firm belief that - just like in all their former kingdoms and socialisms, unions and federations - the mere paper is both an existential tool in terms of privileges and a weapon in terms of discrimination.

It is a deep, instinctive feeling that now belongs to the historical experience, to the cultural memory. What kind of a cultural memory experience, what kind of a cultural memory luggage do the Croatian citizens entering the European Union carry?

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND PROBLEMATISATION NOTES

The possibility of a dual, ambiguous reading of the word (ir)rational in the title of this work thanks to the intervention of the parentheses certainly raises the question, and partially because of the effect achieved

through such a graphic decision suggests a response on the (un)disentanglability of the rational and/or the irrational in the cultural memory processes, but also on the policies that have the ambition to control the interest of cultural memory. For, let us recall the words of Paul Connerton. His claim is that social memory is a dimension of political power, and the "social memory control largely determines the hierarchy of power" (Connerton, 2004 : 5).

Indeed, in the context of what has previously been stated, who here is rational, and who is irrational in practice, but also in the projects of creating the cultural memory? Are the elites machiavellianly rational or do they illusory overestimate themselves when they use a spectrum of indoctrination strategies to induce the new collective memory for legitimate establishment of an ideological image, a cohesion of the seduced masses and the stability of the installed or yielded social order? Is it possible to perform- modelled after the popular Paul Verhoeven film- a "total recall" on the masses? Under the slogan "bury the past and move forward unburdened", is it possible to "reset" and start from ground zero, without any resistance provided by the cultural memory?

For, again in the words of Paul Connerton, "not only is it very difficult to start over, completely anew, there are simply too many rooted habits of fidelity and customs (...)" (Connerton, 2004 : 11).

Are memory and oblivion manageable or uncontrollable processes? Is nostalgia irrational? Are the masses rational or irrational in their instinctive need to remember something in order to have a sense of coherent continuity and the resulting reflex mechanism of causal thought?

And on the other hand, are the masses rational or irrational when they "forget" in order to

integrate into the system and function effectively, surrendering to (un)willing amnesia not only because the comfort of everyday life depends on it, but also the psychological structure and the existential perspective?

If we were to conclude this rhetorical introduction with a stance that remembrance and forgetfulness are, as the two aspects of cultural memory in its core ambivalent in their (ir)rational character, rationally explicable, but always ready to unpredictably strike common sense or a prudent strategy, as was shown in the attempts of and reactions to realignment of cultural memories in Croatia in the 90s, the phrase “new cultural memory” may seem furthermore controversial. In fact, if the cultural memory is a continuous process, constant work of (collective) consciousness, how can it be interrupted and almost instantly replaced with a new one? Even if we are not talking about a trivial notion of implementing the “new cultural memory”, as an overnight work, but as a long-lasting gradual process that is quietly counting on the vice of amnesia, the entropy in general, the opportunistic tendency to naturalize artificial memories, can the “new” memory rest assured in the belief that it managed to evict, to overwrite the so-called “old” one?

In practice it is, however, shown that this is a nuanced stratification in which- when it appears that the mission is fully carried out- the old cultural memory circulates and peeks out just like a spectre, imaginary, shadowy, real or Real, returning as a failed flush down the toilet and- much like today’s terrorists- you never know where it will explode. Or, if we go back to the toilet comparison- reek.

What kind of examples for these can the Croatian transition lab provide us?

III. BARED PRACTICES

Eric Hobsbawm’s statement that all nations have invented themselves, and only through the centuries they have forgotten the moment of their own design, is renowned. By joining the constitutive myth with the ancient historical moment as a mere formal verification date of the already “ancient” existing entities, the initial historic year or the first episode in the national history becomes by this pairing operation merely a projection towards deeper roots with the goal of enhancing durability and identity, rather than a mere chronological record of an undeniable substance when it officially “inscribed itself” into history.

In former Yugoslavia, on the other hand, we have witnessed the condensed and intense process of inventing nations so that they would not be assimilated by the expansionist neighbours’ policy or the re-invention policies, i.e. reminding certain communities of their “distinctiveness” based on national feelings, identity difference and invigorated cultural memory, which needed some gap-filling with fast, instant myths, iconography and other repertoire of concretization of otherwise fluid categories of identity and belonging.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the beginning of the 90s was a period when the sternness towards expressions of national identity gradually reduced, so that the nations were able to comfortably and without obstructions commit to fulfilling of what was suddenly an emancipated area, after the breakup of Yugoslavia also put an end to the Yugoslavian monitoring policy and the suppression of nationalist feelings seen as a potential sowing of seeds of dissension in the order of the dying country. It was by no means a mere returning to the point

where continuity of the national consciousness was interrupted by a “socialist episode” with the possibility of it continuing as if that episode were casual, easy to overcome, like a short historical excursion after which we have returned to the homeland of the national.

In his concise description of those times, Darko Lukić uses the following keywords: at once, speed... “In the social field the Croatian society of the 90s suddenly achieves several great dreams (...). The old myths of communism are being discarded and overthrown, and in their place rapidly come new ones, mainly extracted from the archive and the holdings of history, tradition and heritage (...)” (Lukić, 2009 : 94).

The well motivated alacrity of production of the new cultural memory and the reconstruction of national consciousness were motivated by two reasons. Other than the formal, administrative abandonment of the Yugoslavian community, this process was to do a mental break with yesterday’s past, to which many were tied with their biographies, memories, accomplishments, creations... Secondly, due to the threat of the increasingly near war machine, the military threat was to be confronted with ideologically, motivationally and identity-wise unflinching flesh, turned into a monolithic image, whereby the cultural memory is just one of the media of integration, homogenization and mobilization.

This swiftness has in turn resulted in obvious mechanisms of construction, clumsiness that stripped the ideological background, confusion in the reinterpretations of historical motifs and - kitsch.

The Croatian author Dubravka Ugrešić in her once criticized collection of essays called *The Culture of Lies* points clearly, directly and openly to the general “milestones” of the “industry”: “The terror

of memory is accompanied by a parallel process: the terror of oblivion (...). The terror of memory is a strategy of establishing continuity of the (apparently discontinued) national identity, while the terror of oblivion is a strategy that obliterates the “Yugoslav” identity and the possibility of its restoration (...). The terror of memory, as a method of establishing the national identity, does not shy away from national megalomania, ascribing heroic features, mythisation, absurd, therefore, lies (...). The terror of memory is also, of course, a war strategy which helps raise boundaries and establish differences (...)” (Ugrešić, 2002 : 103).

Regarding the apparentness of the cultural memory production and its visible background in terms of ideological motivation, it is sufficient to quote Lukić, thanks to his succinctness: “(...) recycling of social mythology uses the proven forms of replacing mythical concepts within the existing systems of discarded mythologies (...)” (Lukić, 2009 : 94), while Ugrešić is even more concise: “Both of these types of kitsch (A/N- socialist and nationalist), use an identical strategy of seduction” (Ugrešić, 2002 : 72)

When talking about the confusion of those quick montages, Ugrešić states: “In a completely disordered, fractured and weathered world of cacophony, fragments of the former and the current regime are mixed, the melodies once already heard, only this time in a different arrangement, symbols already seen, this time in a new design (...). In a crumbled country, the kitsch is crumbled too: each side of the ruins pulled out the appropriate parts and taped them together into new, strategic freaks” (Ugrešić, 2002 : 69).

Such a seemingly transparent practice of the nationalist establishments is still perfectly

understandable and logical: why not use standard and devised mechanisms of the socialist propaganda and indoctrination for your own content?

It works.

Therefore, not surprisingly, there is a flood of kitschy visualisation of what we should remember by the logic of cultural memory, i.e. the instant production of visual materials where the iconic and symbolic elements from the historical repertoire are being retouched and combined into versions that diverge from historical sources and the historical context, but should use almost film- like reification of the blurry historical memories. Perhaps the best example is the uniform design of the so- called historical forces and the honour guard, which should, on one hand, surround the presidential centre as a collection of live figures and thus contribute to the presidential status, and on the other hand, with this supposed historical evocation of the colourful and over-decorated costumes convey the message that the president does not run a country born yesterday. The decorative splendour and grandeur should probably be so fascinating that we forget about the time.

It works because the masses accept the new narratives told through the old matrix as a promise, a guarantee of a better future, and this replacement of content the masses see as development, progress.

As for those who are still not fascinated by the content, but - thanks to the cultural memory and not accepting the amnesia - those who notice that the shape of these conflicting mythologies, narratives and practices of seduction do not differ, but they are equally perfidious, calculated and manipulative - you and those like you will be either marginalized by strategies of exclusion, or you will be driven into the deaf wall of the unison nationalist discourse

that does not allow undermining by relativisation and deconstruction, or accept the ruling schema as undisputable reality, acting in accordance to what Jurica Pavičić described as an “ideologically desirable thematic horizon which was sought to humour” (Pavičić, 2011 : 41).

Carried away with such a sense of duty to contribute the new order and the wave of mobilization of all the available resources only to meet one goal - show business, filmography, theatre and literature all produced enthralling propaganda and declamatory works that today cause shame, and with some authors the aforementioned feelings of duty and mobilization are so internalized that even today they do not leave the rhetoric of the nineties.

Perhaps the most bizarre example of that perseverance is the case of former Croatian minister of Science and Education, Dragan Primorac, a genetic scientist who specialized in forensics, who even today invests his scientific capacity into DNA analyses of indigenous Croats’ origin. During the nineties, national fantasies, mythologizing and ideological narratives have searched for anesthetization in art, and for authoritative confirmation of authenticity in science, under the guise of rationalism, verifiability and the rationale, constructing such a series of scientific fairytales, among which the most popular might be one of the Iranian origin of Croats. However, the aforementioned former minister apparently thinks that the battle for scientific truth on the field of nonsense is still being led, with the help of a branch of science that currently holds the greatest popularity, propulsion, influence on the everyday life and causes the greatest expectations of the general public when it comes to the applicability of science for the benefit of humanity. The minister has nonetheless missed a direction, turned his back

to the future. However, if the purpose of genetics is health, his discoveries will most certainly cure the psychological complexes of a part of the nation.

To summarize, the entire process may be best demonstrated by the fact that the author of a major part of the Croatian state insignia, that needed to be created as representational symbols in a very short time after the proclamation of state independence, is a designer Miroslav Šutej.

We are talking about a design.

In this case, about an instant production of totems.

On the site Wikipedia, it is stated that the official Croatian coat of arms is a historic emblem, when in fact it is a redesigned combination of different variations of the Croatian coat of arms over the course of history, while the crown above the checkerboard is an absolute innovation and a product of a (playful) nation- building design of the nineties. For the sake of efficiency of the roles that these totems and this iconography should have, it is recommendable to forget that they are manufactured and experience them in an extremely affective way, wrap in them during football games and cover the caskets with them.

IV. CULTURAL MEMORY CONFLICTS

If this brief overview of the speedy replacement of communist myths with nationalist ones indicates the schematicity of techniques and production, moreover, the industrial character of the symbolic defining of reality with systematic campaigns and the discursive engineering to the sphere of cultural memory as well, to achieve cohesion, legitimacy, susceptibility and stability in total, certain reactions in the former Yugoslavia show that a mere

mechanical substitute of one memory with the other by an orchestrated intervention is not that simple to achieve, as some kind of a lobotomy. Certain reactions show that manipulation of memories indeed ends by the rule that is told by the film *Total Recall*, that memories are underground water that does not dry up and regularly finds its way to the surface. In other words, the existing cultural memory is a course that cannot be fully colonized and it is permanently potentially unstable. The more history imposes the cultural memory narratives, the more cracks there are, threatening with an earthquake.

In Croatia during the 90s it was not only about eliminating one memory and returning to the old memory that resisted elimination in Yugoslavia, and was reinstalled so that the national reconstruction could be done in the shortest possible period, but the production of the "new cultural memory" faced three obstacles, the anti-fascist, fascist and Yugoslav.

It has opened the question of how to integrate or suppress them.

A. *Filo-fascism*

Given the historic verdict of the world's public to the status of anti-fascism, this tradition should apparently not be disputable, but the problem is in the attitude towards anti-fascism that also implies the attitude towards fascism and *vice versa*, and in these regions it got further complicated towards these clearly polarized categories due to the fact that the anti-fascists are the founders of what is now the enemy: Yugoslavia. (Which resulted in a wave of devastation of the anti-fascist monuments).

Part of the former establishment really awkwardly and recklessly flirted with symbolism which it tried to exploit through a historical fact - the

existence of the Independent State of Croatia during World War II as a fascist creation that collaborated with Hitler, no matter how much, viewed from a pragmatic perspective, a commitment to such “game tactics” with the taboo theme of a collective memory seemed logical.

Namely, ISC has represented one of the rare moments of Croatian independence and should therefore serve as an aspirational motif in regaining independence, and also as a historical argument about the tradition of Croatian statehood. Declarations of filo-fascism should have won over, in the name of homogenization of the ideological fractions in Croatian society, even the part of public who had had a selective view of the context of ISC, the part that did not see ISC as a mourning for fascism, but as an end of an independence. The part that did not see fascists as liberators, but as occupiers. Since the occupation had been proven by revealing the true character of the Yugoslav community, as the “prison of nations”, such population saw the nineties as a validation of their thinking, thinking that was once, in 1945, defeated. On the other hand, those who used the most superficial repertoire of history have simply, in this Manichean situation against the current threats to their own nationalism, reached to empower the most radical, and this is why they chose the clearest historical opposition: ISC. Again we see the banal psychology of masses at work.

Public discourse and the new ideological narrative have experienced a series of seemingly insoluble paradoxes: how does one defame Yugoslavia, and stick to the imperative of not tainting the fascists? How does one judge ISC, and at the same time not betray a part of public that sees this issue as a disappointment of patriotism, opportunistic compromising and an interest readiness to make

sacrifices? Despite the possibilities that all of the issues involved have a historical and scientific nuanced clarification, such detailing would only confuse the nationalist mass and its black- and-white world.

Or rather, black- and- red world.

All the more so because one option excludes the other: you cannot carry out a reconciliation of a society once divided into fascists and anti-fascists, giving the historical credit to both in the name of homogenization, especially considering the fact that the world public is rigorously sensitive to any kind of official tolerance to fascist affinities. Unfortunately, the nationalisms in these areas were ready to make a pact with the devil, not choosing their partners, resources, materials or narratives to use for recruitment and mobilization.

Besides, how is it even possible that the filo-fascist line of the nineties emerged after 45 years of systematic judgment of fascism and educating people about what fascism really is? How did it manage to stay vital?

This filo-fascist stream, more so than the nationalist, in relation to the 45 years of fighting in the Yugoslav community confirms the notorious rule that the historic losers, even if they end up deleted from the official discourse, continue to exist with its inverted perspective through the medium of oral history. Today, it is particularly worth noting that the oral history of the 21st century has a backup, a trace in the web forums, where fascisms freely blossom.

While there was no Internet, there was pop culture as the grey area for testing and listening, even neutralizing the cultural memories knocked out of the underground. Pop culture also serves as an infrastructure’s smooth introduction of the new cultural memory, according to the criterion by which

Zygmunt Bauman interprets the conflicting forces in the media: forces of sociability or spontaneity (of bottom-up actions) and the forces of socialization or control (top-down action, or, in Bauman's words, a controlled process of identity regulation). Unlike the other public spheres, pop culture is particularly intriguing, and perhaps more effective because it is seductive, seemingly benign, and certainly successful in winning the widest range of population, so the periodic mobilization and politicization of showbiz is therefore not surprising.

The results of this process are best shown on the example of a singer Marko Perković Thompson: he appeared as an ordinary, neglected soldier who recorded a song against the aggressor, only to, on the wings of that hit, dawn as a polished, packed, designed and styled pop-star or, more accurately, the medium of political messages. Thompson's status on the scene is deemed controversial, but the real truth is that he is a walking barometer of the (un)allowed ideologies, an equilibrium between moods of the masses and the interests of the establishment. Sometimes he is the spokesman, the demagogue and the opium for people of the right-oriented establishment, sometimes the public model for the anti-fascist pedagogy, and sometimes the media of collective transgression in relation to official norms. No matter how much Thompson's ideological map, just like his ideological image that his audience nurtured was confusing (Thompson declares in an interview: "Croatia was not founded on the foundations of the anti-fascist struggle... The anti-fascists were building another country, a country we have taken apart..."), he is, if needed, understood as a subject of the political scene and, if necessary, he is rejected as an element unbound to the official politics, but he is most definitely a very useful

medium of channelling and detecting the current state of society, while his excess concerts have an equally (de)stabilizing role as carnival rituals do. The situations when it gets out of hand are either the result of his pop-culture power or the political ideological weakness and inconsistency.

B. *Yugo-nostalgia*

Thompson continuing his political work through show business would not have endured a more critical and more equipped apparatus, but would have been exposed as hypocritical, even though it is a phenomenon that ought to be listened to and read as a symptom of society.

The deconstruction of Thompson would not mean absolutely anything even to the half-deaf audience ("Thompson (is) now what patriotic poets once were, such as A. G. Matoš, A. B. Šimić and others"), although it should be pointed out that even through the thematic repertoire of invention of quasi-enemies and quasi-perils he performs political maneuvers and turns the focus from the genuine social problems, while the melodic repertoire – despite the advocacy of national purity – seduces the audience with all possible effect note: from hard rock and heavy metal over the winning formula of Bijelo Dugme (cattle rock), the redesigned and modernized folk kitsch and eastern melodies.

It was the eastern melodies and the supposedly despised folk music as a genre of former Yugoslavian culture and the symbolic representatives of the Balkans were just media channels of yugo-nostalgia, a phenomenon to which the national establishment referred as a double threat: as a road of reconstruction of Yugoslavia (which was identify with the great Serbia policy) and as a model of

comparison that would compromise the new order (which really happened in the cases when there were quite obvious parallels in Titoist gestures of the Croatian president Franjo Tuđman). However, as we flocked to the West because - as Slavoj Žižek summarizes it - because of the bananas and pornography, so we returned to Yugoslavia because of the pop-culture garbage.

While the cultural elite complained about the loss of spiritual homeland, the masses have, when it comes to kitsch and trivial hits, still had a reflexive need to pat their foots to simple two-stroke rhythms of folk music. This need for trash was recognized by Tonči Huljić, who then took advantage of a hole caused by a communication block between the republics of former Yugoslavia, paving his way to bad taste, and, paradoxically, overcoming of its surrogates by turning to the source of his arrangements.

Ugrešić astutely notes that the function of Yugoslavia's show business was "reinforcing the unity": "...the still warm ground of common references is the history of pop music! They do not remember the party congresses any longer (...), they do not remember the names of political leaders (...). What they most often and most fondly remember are the years of music festivals, the singers and the songs. Remember, therefore, the history of triviality (...). And it is the culture of everyday life (and not the government or the political system) that is the source of yugo- nostalgia (...)" (Ugrešić, 2002 : 175).

When the fear that yugo-nostalgia is a politically subversive idea of restoration had been overcome, yugo-nostalgia in its primary form, the evocation of the anthology of cultural production, was still condemned as a violation of national ambition towards the cultural superiority, but today yugo-

nostalgia is just a commercially highly lucrative genre in the Croatian culture, politically numb and benign.

How did that happen?

Simply, the market has triumphed over politics.

The paradigmatic genre of Yugoslav culture, the partisan film, has been systematically ignored on the national television until, due to the protocol and anniversary obligations towards some dates important for the anti- fascist struggle, one such film was conveniently aired and in such a way filled its duty to commemorate a historical moment. The record viewing ratings were an indicator to commercial television broadcasters to proceed with such cycles, and in the spirit of market integration into one of the products literature reacted as well. In this context, Ante Tomić's novel *Nothing Can Surprise Us* presents an interesting case, because in it, it aims precisely on the collective memory by thematizing the experience of military service in former Yugoslavia, counting with such a choice of a common denominator on a broader, regional audience. After that, in one of his columns he describes an experience from his tour of the countries of former Yugoslavia, following the path of his already filmed novel, where he is shocked and asks what, in the heaven's name, held such different cultures together?

One should not exaggerate the shock effect of this realization, it is enough to go to the first village next to your city and you can easily ask yourself the same question.

Nevertheless, the power of politics, ideology and the pop culture industry is amazing, and today even the power of market to make the imaginary a reality on which we build identities, lives, memories of the past and the memories of our own self.

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