Virtual Landscapes of Memory

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Abstract

This paper will focus on two World Wide Web projects: the virtual nation of Cyber-Yugoslavia (www.juga.com) and the homepage of former Yugoslav president Tito (www.titoville.com). Both projects problematize our understanding of nationhood and political leadership through skilful manipulation of the structural characteristics of the medium. The virtual, performative and transitory nature of both the nation and the state will be exemplified by Cyber-Yugoslavia – a virtual nation-building endeavour conjured up by Belgrade expatriate playwright Zoran Bacic. The changing character of political leadership will be discussed against the backdrop of Tito's homepage, which archives numerous image and sound files documenting the life of the former Yugoslav president. The two projects share at least three common elements: their genre is parody; their subject matter is repressed collective memory; and they reflect the anxieties of the postmodern condition in their treatment of its most emblematic medium, the Internet.

The repressed collective memory encapsulated in these projects is that of South-Slav unity, as an alternative to the now dominant particularist ethno-nationalisms of the Yugoslav successor states. The idea of unity of the South Slavs, which gained popularity in the nineteenth century under the Habsburg yoke, was institutionally sanctioned in two twentieth-century Yugoslav states: the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918–41), called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes from 1918 to 1929, and the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (1945–91), called People's Federative Republic of Yugoslavia from 1945 to 1963. The first was made possible by the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of World War One. Its nation-building rhetoric, underpinning the politics of centralization and Serbian hegemony, rested on a view of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as 'three tribes' of the same nation. The second Yugoslavia, which grew out of the national liberation movement in World War Two, was founded on federalist principles and a nation-building rhetoric of 'brotherhood and unity', i.e. national equality for all the member nations. During the period of existence of both Yugoslav states, a tendency against political unification and in favour of the formation of independent national states co-existed with the dominant nation-building narratives. Tito's model in particular, which may be interpreted as a compromise between the two opposing tendencies, left a deep cultural legacy of ethnic tolerance and was internalized by segments of the post-World War Two generations in former Yugoslavia as an important part of their national identity.

Linda Hutcheon has explained the popularity of parody in periods of ideological instability as an impulse for challenging the established norms. I would like to suggest that the technological advances and the introduction of the new

mass media also encouraged the proliferation of parody as one of the modes of positive self-reference with a universal appeal akin to Bakhtinian 'carnival laughter'. The Internet in particular seems to foster the more positive, universalizing aspects of what Hutcheon calls 'parodic ethos'.

ETHNICITY, NATIONHOOD AND CYBERSPACE: INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-1980s, critics have questioned, praised and condemned the inherent potential of the new globalizing technologies in reshaping the very foundations of society. The early Luddite fears of the Internet as a powerful panopticon facilitating state control have since been moderated by a number of failed attempts by totalitarian regimes to control the medium. Concerns about the presumed power of global communications technology to escalate ethnic intolerance by rendering it more ubiquitous, frequent and intense (Tambiah 1988), do not seem to strike a chord in the Balkans. The media exposure of the recent Balkan conflicts has indeed expedited their resolution, for better or for worse. By virtue of its own user-defined and non-discriminatory ethics, cyberspace indeed offers 'equal opportunity' to both conflict resolution and conflict escalation through inflammatory language, biased information, and hacking.

Media theorists from a number of competing disciplines have recognized cyberspace as a domain resisting the logic of exclusion and opposition inherent in all discourses of the nation and the state (Negroponte 1995; Zizek 1997). In the context of former Yugoslavia, the strategic importance of computer-mediated communication, as originally envisaged by the US Defense Department's ArpaNet project (1969) combined with the 'equalizing' or 'flattening' agency of cyberspace, consistently challenged the divisive ethno-nationalist rhetoric, prominent especially in the early 1990s.

In the early stages of the wars resulting in the disintegration of former Yugoslavia, computer-mediated communication was instrumental in coordinating conflict resolution and humanitarian aid efforts by anti-war and human rights groups across the ethnic divide. It provided avenues to voice opposition to the hate-inspiring single-mindedness of the state-controlled nationalist press. It was also instrumental in mobilizing the like-minded internal forces, as well as the necessary foreign support.[1] Since the mid-1990s, the collective memory

of ethnic tolerance associated with former socialist Yugoslavia has been denied through the reality of war and the mobilizing ethno-nationalist rhetoric of the early post-Yugoslav regimes. At the same time, cyberspace has provided a relatively accessible *terra nullius* for its 'virtual archives'.

CYBER-YUGOSLAVIA

Unlike the numerous online micro-nations, some of which are hardly more than bizarre cyberspace experiments dreamt up by adolescents play-acting an imaginary 'adult' world of power and war, Cyber-Yugoslavia is designed as a purposeful media-manipulation project and an astute social commentary. Cyberspace has radically redefined the nature of the narrative, with the hyper-textual blurring of the author-reader relationship. Cyberspace voyagers can arguably create their own narratives with every click of the mouse, and authoritarian voices – such as those constructing traditional national narratives – are easily avoided, dismissed or ridiculed.

Cyber-Yugoslavia's primary target audience are the like-minded former Yugoslavs, 'those who lost their country in 1991 and became citizens of Atlantis', but also those who 'feel Yugoslav, regardless of their current nationality and citizenship' (www.juga.com). Obviously, 'feeling Yugoslav' is a concept open to innumerable interpretations, appealing to both sympathy and empathy at various levels. Sympathy would imply a kind of 'natural bonding' commonly exploited in ethno-nationalist narratives. Empathy explores the possibility of metonymic identification with elements of the collective imaginary of former Yugoslavia, of which hybridity (multi-culturality, collapsing the East/West dichotomy, which informed European identity politics since the early Middle Ages) and displacement (through ethnic cleansing and voluntary exile) are the most likely springboards for 'self-recognition'.

The majority of the Cyber-Yugoslav citizens originate from Serbia and Montenegro,[2] but other states once forming the former Yugoslav federation also figure prominently in the official membership statistics. Significantly, the percentages are higher in the states which experienced a less painful separation from the former federation, such as Slovenia and Macedonia – and lower in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where violent ethnic wars lasted several years.[3] Other citizens come from countries like the United States, Finland, Sweden, England or China. Not all are exiles from former Yugoslavia, dispersed throughout the world after their country's violent disintegration. In some cases, even if they are, they do not reveal it and prefer to go under a constructed, cyberspace identity.

The cathartic capacity of Cyber-Yugoslavia can only be activated by those who choose to see former Yugoslavia as Atlantis, a land of peace and relative stability, lost in a 'cataclysmic eruption' of hatred and violence. Hutcheon has recently claimed that a conjunction of irony and nostalgia – an 'ironized return to the history of the humanly constructed environment' – is a typically post-modern cultural form, a reaction to the disregard of the past typical of earlier periods and culminating in discourses of modernity (Hutcheon 1997). In most breakaway former Yugoslav countries that rushed to erase one collective mem-ory and replace it with another, any signs of 'nostalgia' for the fifty years of common 'Yugoslav' past were considered dangerous. 'Yugo-nostalgia' was a synonym for domestic treason and nemesis of patriotism. In periods of dramatic change, nostalgia assumes political overtones. Its political potential is located precisely in its unruly, unpredictable nature, which appears threatening to the new order striving to establish its own legitimacy. In her book *The Culture of Lies*, Dubravka Ugresic wrote:

> Nostalgia is not subject to control, it is a subversive activity of our brain. Nostalgia works with fragments, scents, touch, sound, melody, colour, its territory is absence, it is the capricious corrective to adaptable memory. The strategies of its activity are deceit, capricious-ness, subversion, suddenness, shock and surprise. Nostalgia knows no hierarchy of values, the 'material' it deals with is not divided into good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable, clever and stupid; on the contrary some 'silliness' is often its favourite choice.
>
> (Ugresic 1998: 230)

Cyber-Yugoslavia's creator and webmaster, Zoran Bacic, a Belgrade playwright and script writer, denies any political motivations of his project. At the same time, he is taking full advantage of the political potential of parody. In Cyber-Yugoslavia, parody works at two levels: at one level, allusions and quotations are extrapolated from former Yugoslavia's discourses of nation-building, para-digms of state organization and models of political leadership; at the other, they evoke these discourses in the context of modernity worldwide. Parodic effect is granted by the medium itself. Discourses inextricably linked with territoriality and exclusion are trans-contextualized to a medium defined by its resistance to regulation and virtualization of physical space.

The country operates on principles of parodic hyper-democracy, whereby each citizen chooses and administers his or her own ministerial portfolio. These portfolios range from Bad Films to Kitsch and Triviality, from Coca-Cola to Pink Floyd. Conventional nation-state identifiers such as the flag, the national anthem, the official language and the constitution are all subject to permanent

mutation, provided that alterations be accepted by a majority vote in which at least two thirds of Cyber-Yugoslavs have participated.

The political potential, as well as the very structural identity of parody depends largely on a coincidence of decoding (recognition and interpretation) and encoding of the allusions and quotations it incorporates (Hutcheon 1985). Cyberspace as a medium paradoxically limits parody's political potential, by making it more accessible to 'uninitiated' audiences lacking the cultural knowledge, experience or skills which would make decoding possible. Therefore, in order to function in cyberspace, parody has to transcend both the discourse it quotes and its own encoding principles by elevating them to a carnivalesque, universal level. According to Bakhtin, the carnivalesque is universal in scope, directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants: 'The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity. [Moreover,] this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives' (Bakhtin 1984: 11–12). The growing citizenry of Cyber-Yugoslavia seems to testify to the project's universal appeal.

According to the Latino performance artist and border theorist Guillermo Gómez-Peña, we are now 'witnessing the creation of nations that are not defined by territory, culture, race, or language. They will be defined by the Internet' (Gómez-Peña 1997). A metaphor often used to refer to the members of these new Internet-defined nations – that of a Cyborg, or symbiosis of human and machinic elements – is also, according to Jerry Everard, a helpful tool for postulating the virtuality of the nation-state itself. It carries a sense of the interconnectedness of human beings within a society; of the artificiality of the states as structures and of idealism and forward vision that maintains states as sound identity structures (Everard 2000: 71). A Cyborg is by definition a grotesque body, merging the human element with the sphere of culture. According to Bakhtin, 'the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits' (Bakhtin 1984: 26). It is 'two bodies in one: the one giving birth and dying, the other conceived, generated, and born' (ibid.). In a similar fashion, Cyber-Yugoslavia simultaneously conjures up the passing away of the traditional national discourses and ushers in the new, more fluid concept of cyber-nationhood, which transgresses and at the same time replicates conventional territorial, cultural, ethnic or linguistic national boundaries. Cyber-Yugoslavia's author also perceives himself as a Cyborg, with the machinic element ironically dubbed the 'Algorithm of Social System', this open-source robotic software representing the highest authority in Cyber-Yugoslavia.[4]

Parody in Cyber-Yugoslavia focuses on a number of fundamental building

blocks of any national narrative: its iconography, sites of memory and forgetting, mental calendars and geographies, rationalizations of power mechanisms within the state and eschatological projections for the imagined community. In the not so distant past, the parodied texts were legitimate symbols of former-Yugoslav national lore. Trans-contextualization thus happens from one 'non-entity' (former Yugoslavia – a country which no longer exists) to another (cyberspace – a 'space' which exists only symbolically). The transitory nature of the human constructs we call the 'state' and the 'nation' is underscored by both the 'message' and the 'medium'. To quote Jerry Everard,

> [. . .] states are like software programmed to run in the wetware of the people who subscribe to the identity of the state. Like software, the state exists while it is 'run' and maintained. It is a very complex piece of software written in a number of programming languages, such as economics, military security, environmental discourse and so on. These exist as articulations of a particular mode of defining Self and Other . . . It exists primarily as the result of a set of boundary-making practices that invoke and are invoked by the people subscribing to the idea of the state.

> (Everard 2000: 7)

The coat of arms of former Yugoslavia was designed to embody the principle of 'brotherhood and unity', a variant of 'ex pluribus unum' with a uniquely Yugoslav ideological flavour. In its centre, six torches representing the six republics forming the Yugoslav federation joined together in one flame. The six torches were surrounded by a wreath of wheat intertwined with a blue scroll with the date 23-XI-1943, commemorating the birth of Yugoslavia at the second session of the Anti-Fascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ), and topped with the red communist star. The coat of arms of Cyber-Yugoslavia is remarkably similar in shape and the arrangement of elements. However, the torches are replaced by a starry sky (note that the image has nothing to do with the orderly stylized stars of the EU or US insignia; rather, it evokes the unfathomable shimmering universe resisting any stable signifiers). The wreath of wheat promising affluence and stability is substituted by a life-belt signifying a symbolic rescue of the shipwrecked nation in cyber-space. This example calls attention to the always dual nature of parody: in this case, Cyber-Yugoslavia's coat of arms functions both as a critical comment and a site of mourning for the now supplanted national discourse.

Bacic's handling of state iconography is reminiscent of the strategies used by the Slovene art collective *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (NSK) in the mid-1980s to harness politics into the service of art. The movement brought together visual, media and performance artists, graphic designers, architects, musicians and

cultural theorists and soon gained international recognition. The punk band Laibach – 'Slovenia's prime cultural export since the polka-dot tie' (Thompson 1992: 42) – is part of NSK. The movement adopted the working method of 'retrogarde' – recourse to the signs, images and discursive practices associated with the political, cultural and technological ideologies of salvation of the twentieth century.

In 1986, the NSK graphics group, New Collectivism (NK), submitted a controversial poster to an all-Yugoslav competition which took place every year in anticipation of Tito's birthday, conventionally celebrated on 25 May as Youth Day – *Dan Mladosti*, to symbolize the cyclic renewal of the forward-looking nation. Every year from 1945, Youth Day was celebrated with a grandiose display of choirs and gymnasts in the Yugoslav Army Stadium in Belgrade. The event culminated in a ceremonial presentation of a baton – *stafeta* – containing a birthday message for Tito from the country's youth, which had been carried across the country in a relay organized by the republican Youth Leagues. The ritual was continued for several years after Tito's death in 1980. It was terminated in 1987, following a scandal surrounding NK's poster, which was awarded the first prize in the national competition. It was soon discovered that the submitted work was in fact a remake of an authentic Third Reich propaganda poster, designed by Richard Klein in 1936. It depicted a strongly built bare-chested athlete carrying a torch, which could be interpreted as a baton with the birthday message. The fascist iconography from the original poster was replaced with socialist symbols: the German eagle gave way to a dove of peace and the swastika was replaced with the red star. Nevertheless, it was unmistakably the same poster, with the same muscular Aryan-looking man at its centre. The design thus harnessed parody's innate ambivalence for its own subversive purposes. In awarding the poster the first prize, the state judges unwittingly became accomplices in the de-masquerading project. A year later, celebrations of Youth Day were abolished.[5] Their demise foreshadowed the impending death of the nation, thus underscoring the significance of collective ritual re-enactment and performance in reinforcing cognitive associations within the ideological hub.

Bakhtin's notion of the 'chronotope' is useful in analysing national narratives, where manipulations of space and time are of utmost importance. In literature, as well as in discourses of nations, 'spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history' (Bakhtin and Holquist 1981: 85). The 'visible time' of any national narrative is 'made flesh'

through token representations of the nation's glorified past and its anticipated future. The glorified past of the former Yugoslav nation-building rhetoric was related to the national liberation struggles in World War Two. Dates of local uprisings, offensives against the occupying fascist forces, founding assemblies of partisan units and communist party branches were solemnized in street and factory names and ritual celebrations. Zagreb intellectual Rada Ivekovic has reflected on this pervasive anchoring in a mythological past in an interview with *Arkzin*, the magazine of the Croatian Anti-War Campaign:

> We had to be a safeguard [. . .] of happiness, copied from the *ur-zeit*, their time, the time of the Revolution which was the model, and we had to guarantee that this model would survive in the future [. . .] For our generation, time was completely flat – it was only considered valuable if it recited the past, i.e. the Revolution.[6]

(Ivekovic 2000)

The rhetoric of 'brotherhood and unity' rested on a narrative of the birth of Yugoslavism in the communist struggle and the national liberation movement. The cohesion among Yugoslav nationalities was later reinforced by Tito's break from Stalin in 1948 and a policy of tactical balancing between East and West, of which the policy of active nonalignment is a prime example. The rhetoric of 'brotherhood and unity' aimed at eradicating inter-ethnic hostilities and securing equal treatment for individuals regardless of their ethnic background. The early 1950s were characterized by heightened efforts by the authorities to construct a collective memory capable of sustaining the newborn ideology and suppress any memories related to wartime inter-ethnic atrocities. These memories were then resurrected in the ethno-nationalist discourses culminating in the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.

In a reflection on the use of the calendar in disseminating national cultures (Zerubavel 1981; Cressy 1989), Cyber-Yugoslavia's 'date of birth' – strategically displayed as a direct quote from the former Yugoslav heraldic sign – is the ninth day of the ninth month of 1999. When asked in an interview why he chose that particular date, Bacic explained:

> There are five essential metaphysical reasons for that, but I have forgotten the first four. I remember the fifth reason, because it is related to some stone tablets, which were found during excavations of a building site near Tucepi [a town on the Adriatic coast]. One tablet had the inscription '041 [telephone prefix for Zagreb while still in former Yugoslavia] – I am in Zagreb today'; the second one read 'for the one who wants to found Cyber-Yugoslavia, the best date would be 9.9.99, because it is easy to remember and divisible by three'. The third tablet, which completes the triptych, has the following mystical epigraph: 'Regards from Tucepi.'

(Ilic 2000)

Bacic's 'stone tablets' thus ironically postulate his nation's 'mythical roots' and 'divine legitimation', by reference to the Mosaic law. A nation has to be old and god-given, for otherwise it would not be able to demand an almost religious devotion from its constituents. In order to establish ancient roots for their breakaway communities, ethno-nationalist ideologues in all parts of former Yugoslavia resorted to archaeological imaginary in defining, for example, the 'Iranian theory' of Croatian origins (Tanner 1997), or the mythical birth of the Serbian nation in the battle of Kosovo in 1389 (Malcolm 1998).

In the socio-political rhetoric of the former SFRY, the anticipated future to be shared by the members of the national community involved a gradual elimination of social classes and state mechanisms. The chronotopic arrows of socialist national narratives have thrived on 'identifiable' targets, utopian projections and unrealistically orchestrated five-year plans. In this, they differ from neo-liberal discourses, which tend to accommodate a more 'open-ended' interpretation of the future.[7] Cyberspace – as a globalizing medium dominated by affluent neo-liberal nations – takes up the neo-liberal renunciation of future projections and explodes them *ad absurdum*. Cyber-Yugoslavia's Zoran Bacic thus pays his ironic homage to the medium when he declares that the future of his virtual nation depends entirely on the will of its citizens: 'This land will grow as our citizens wish. Neither faster, nor slower. Neither more, nor less. So, this site will always be under construction. For a solid country to grow, even a virtual one, it takes some time' (www.juga.com). In an interview with *Feral Tribune* in 1999, Bacic offers time as the only distinguishing criterion between 'life' and 'film', or 'reality' and 'fiction':

> Film is art because it is shorter than life. If film lasted 80 years instead of two hours and life lasted, for example, ten years, then film would be reality and life would be fiction. Fiction is defined only by duration, nothing else. There is no other parameter.
>
> (Bacic 1999)

The notion of time as a productive category for the definition of 'reality' has been exploited by the artists of the *Neue Slowenische Kunst* since 1991, when they formulated the concept of a 'State in Time' (*NSK Drzava v Casu*), not based on a fixed territory or privileged ethnicity, but rather on the notions of 'time' and 'movement'. The NSK State in Time is a conceptual, spiritual state, with constantly shifting borders. The 'territory' of the State is defined by 'time', or the individual buildup of experiences by its members. The 'real' homeland of the individual is limited to the spaces of lived personal experiences. It is a territory of the mind. Similarly, the borders of the NSK State fluctuate along

with its symbolic and physical body, receiving objective coordinates only at the time of its 'materialization' in the form of temporary 'embassies' or 'consulates' all over the globe.

The sagittal time, i.e. the chronotopic arrows of national narratives, cannot be accommodated in cyberspace, which introduces a new conception of time, a 'time of (chronoscopic) exposure of the duration of events at the speed of light' (Virilio and Rose 1997: 3). In national narratives, both the past and the present are significant only inasmuch as they perform a mobilizing function in the present. In cyberspace, this collapse of chronological succession into a universal present moment is a structural characteristic of the medium. The notion of temporality in both Cyber-Yugoslavia and the NSK State in Time is akin to what Manuel Castells has called the 'timeless time' of our 'network society', which 'occurs when the characteristics of a given context, namely, the informational paradigm and the network society, induce systemic perturbation in the sequential order of phenomena performed in that context' (Castells 2000: 464). The 'timeless time' is for Castells part and parcel of globalization, a result of the new 'spatiality of flows' which allows only synchronicity and eternal ephemerality (ibid.). Within this framework, anything – even states – can occur at any time, they can materialize very rapidly, and their 'progression' is independent from what goes on in their physical localities. For the duration of the NSK 'embassy' or 'consulate', the locations of the lectures, discussions, performances and art exhibitions are proclaimed as the state territory of the NSK State in Time. Thus, statehood is asserted through movement and time. Movement refers to a 'space of flows' or, in the case of the NSK State, physical travelling of the members of the collective to the planned location. Time accounts for accumulation of new experiences occasioned by travelling. Similarly, the Yugoslav exiles scattered all over the globe – as immigrants, refugees or temporary residents – affirm their belonging to the symbolic Cyber-Yugoslav nation only through their own displacement and contact with the new cultural spaces to which they have been catapulted through their country's recent demise.

Cyber-Yugoslavia also addresses the new notions of spatiality in the context of globalization, which undermines conventional national borders by allowing free flow of information and capital. In the 'chronotopes' underlying any national narrative, the mythical past is inextricably linked with a number of symbolic locations where the events associated with the 'birth of the nation' took place and where the future of the nation is conceived. National narratives use toponyms performatively, to reinforce adherence to the ideological nucleus. As the recent Balkan conflicts have demonstrated, symbolic geography can be

a particularly effective call to arms and a justification of ethnic cleansing. Cyber-Yugoslavia by definition occupies only a symbolic 'space of flows', its only territorial claim being for twenty square metres of land to house the country's server. It thus skilfully exploits the potential of cyberspace to 'lay bare' the performative temporality and spatiality of traditional national discourses.

TITO'S HOMEPAGE

Tito's World Wide Web homepage boasts a remarkably long lifespan, considering the overall tender age and fluidity of the medium. It was created in July 1994 by two Slovene university students: Matija Marolt, who now teaches computer programming at Ljubljana University; and Martin Srebotnjak, who has since written and directed several prize-winning films.

While Cyber-Yugoslavia deconstructs the substance of national narratives, Tito's homepage poses the problem of charismatic political leadership in the societies dominated by the new globalizing media. Charisma, or the 'gift of grace' – a phenomenon traditionally associated with the religious discourses of salvation – was also a hallmark of twentieth-century politics, the key aspect of the political careers of leaders from Hitler to Kennedy, from Stalin to Gandhi. An essential part of the modernist frame of mind, charisma was of crucial interest to classical sociologists such as Weber (Weber *et al.* 1947) and Durkheim (1915). For Weber, charismatic authority – unlike the rational-legal and traditional varieties – is based on 'devotion to the specific and exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual person' (Weber *et al.* 1947: 328).

The heyday of former Yugoslavia's ephemeral nation-building and political project coincided roughly with the period from Tito's rise to power after World War Two to his death in 1980. In many ways, the career of the former Yugoslav leader appears to be a test case for a study of charismatic political leadership. Characteristically, his charismatic authority was established in a period of social unrest and radical social change, set in motion by a growing disenchantment with the social institutions prevailing in the pre-war Yugoslav Kingdom and culminating in the full-scale suspension of order during the war itself. The nation-building rhetoric which relied so strongly on Tito's charismatic authority and his personality cult proved to be inherently unstable. In the early 1980s, the symbols and rituals once energized by his vision gradually ossified and – as the NSK poster scandal clearly demonstrates – paradoxically came to embody the very impotence of the old value system.

In a rather apocalyptic version of the well-known Freudian anthropological

scenario outlined in *Totem and Taboo* (Freud 1950), the passing away of the 'father' of the former Yugoslav nation was followed by an interregnum of 'sons' incapable of carrying forward the foundations of former ideology. To quote Tomislav Longinovic, the 'society of "Boys" in post-Tito Yugoslavia was unable to sustain the Yugoslav idea, since most of the population expected the solution to come from the realm of institutionalized power, from the world of 'Fathers', who have either succumbed to the virus of nationalism or perished with the communist dogma' (Longinovic 1994: 125). This theme was explored in a media-manipulation project by a group of artists and theorists associated with the Belgrade journal *Vidici*. The project, inaugurated in 1980, featured three Belgrade 'Boys'[8] in a series of provocative photographs which appeared in the press throughout the early 1980s. The photographs showed the 'Boys' dressed as successful businessmen and engaging in a series of controversial activities, with captions 'explaining' the circumstances. In an explicit reference to Freud's scenario, for example, the 'Boys' were shown undressing a woman in a series of photographs accompanied by a subtitle which read: 'Boys emancipate woman'. Thus, a slogan which may have had a visionary and ethical dimension in the society of fathers was now functioning purely as a device of its own grotesque degradation.

The building of Tito's personality cult after World War Two was an authentic hagiographic endeavour to postulate the leader's exceptional virtue, heroism and devotion to the national cause. The nation was repeatedly told stories of their president's difficult childhood, his dedicated revolutionary work, his heroic actions as partisan leader and his determination in forging an independent 'Yugoslav path' in the face of the Cold War East-West divide. Anecdotes from Tito's life were gathered in a book by the Slovene novelist France Bevk (1955), which soon became compulsory reading material for school children. The stories of his childhood, which emphasized the young 'Joza's' generosity, altruism, courage and thirst for knowledge, were particularly appealing to the young audiences. Tito was supposed to be not only the most admirable representative of the nation: he had to embody the nation itself. The cry 'Mi smo Titovi, Tito je nas' ('We are Tito's, Tito is ours') was resounding at official gatherings in schools, factories and town squares, emphasizing this symbolic identification of the nation with its 'father'.

The narrative of Tito's homepage is written in English only, in an attempt to override the political overtones of giving precedence to one former-Yugoslav idiom over any other. It is written in the first person, with the deceased leader announcing his symbolic 'revival' in cyberspace and promising to offer a 'thorough insight into the building of a personality cult with the full help of

the media'. The page also carries Tito's famous photographic portrait which once decorated the walls of all public places, from coffee shops and hairdressing salons, to university halls and party headquarters. It also displays Tito's recognizable 'signature', a commodified trademark of his rule once extensively exploited in a wide range of propagandistic merchandise, from the omnipresent gold and silver badges to T-shirts and stationery.

In the selection of speeches in MP3 format, cyberspace voyagers can listen to the once only-too-familiar accent mixing Slovene vowel qualities with a blend of Serbian and Croatian lexical and syntactic choices, warning foreign politicians that the 'Yugoslav people are ready to defend their hard earned freedom and independence', explaining the concepts of active non-alignment and self-management and proclaiming that 'we have spilt an ocean of blood to achieve brotherhood and unity of our nations' and that therefore 'we shall not allow anyone to undermine it from within, to demolish this brotherhood and unity'. These speeches need no authorial commentary: in a world still dumbfounded by the violent reality of the recent fratricidal war, they speak deafeningly about the hollowness and transience of any ideology, while perhaps bemoaning a loss of innocence and optimism associated with a wide range of modernist promises of salvation.

In the impressive collection of celebratory songs, performed by individual artists, partisan choirs and philharmonic ensembles, former-Yugoslav cybernauts are transported to a recent past when public ceremonies inevitably culminated in sung re-enactments of partisan units moving through the mountainous landscapes from Slovenia to Macedonia, and in oaths and pledges to Tito that 'he can count on us' and that 'we will never stray from his path'.

The images on Tito's homepage range from the earliest known photographs of Tito as a young locksmith with his work comrades; as a soldier in the trenches in World War One and a political prisoner in the Lepoglava prison in 1930; to those taken at various stages of his later political career, depicting him in the company of world leaders from Gaddafi to Nehru, from Stalin to Kennedy. Images of historical documents – forged passports, police files, arrest warrants and court statements – are also offered to the more inquisitive cybernauts, together with the images of Tito's numerous medals, decorations and artistic portraits. Other sets of images depict the leader meeting 'his people' across former Yugoslavia, shaking hands with his pioneers and chatting with miners and factory workers; or indulging in leisure activities, such as playing the piano, swimming, horse-riding and hunting. In the category of 'other interesting photos', the former leader is posing with the likes of Kirk Douglas and Sophia Loren, as well as the famous Apollo Eleven trio – Neil Armstrong, Edwin

Aldrin and Michael Collins. A separate area is devoted to images documenting Tito's 'last battle' at the Ljubljana University Clinical Centre, the mourning of the nation and the majestic funeral ceremony attended by a large number of contemporary world leaders. To top all this, and to satisfy the expectations of the digital generation surfing the World Wide Web, the authors have included a 'Tito screensaver' and a puzzle game with an image of the ironic superhero of the former Yugoslav virtual landscapes.

A comprehensive chronology of Tito's life on Tito's homepage goes hand in hand with a chronology of Tito's love-life, taken from a banned book of dubious credibility, written by Montenegrin novelist Filip Radulovic, which attributes to the former 'father of the nation' an extremely profligate romantic life crowned with no-more-no-less than seventeen children from his two marriages and numerous extramarital affairs. The inclusion of 'spicy' stories about the former leader 'playing the field' evokes Freud's (1950) story of the 'primal father' whose undisputed authority rested – among other things – on his power over the women of the horde.

A list of more than 200 films about Tito is also remarkable, the best-known being Stipe Delic's *The Battle of the Sutjeska River* (1973), with Richard Burton in the role of Tito. In the 1970s, compulsory group viewings of this film were organized by primary and secondary schools, as part of the history curricula focusing on the period of the National Liberation Movement and the mythical birth of the nation. While the films about Tito during his lifetime were mostly heroic dramas and documentaries, those produced in the 1990s all belong to the genre of comedy.

Tito's homepage does not list two of the most recent productions – Zelimir Zilnik's pseudo-documentary *Tito Again Among the Serbs* (1995) and Vinko Bresan's *Marshal Tito's Spirit* (1999), both of which deconstruct the former leader's personality cult through strategies similar to those employed by the creators of Tito's cyberspace 'home'. Bresan's production tells a story of Marshal Tito's ghost haunting the locals of a small Adriatic island town. The mayor – who also happens to own the local hotel – plans to use the presumed apparitions to create a communist Disneyland for the old-time leftists and Yugo-nostalgics worldwide. The eventual resolution of the mystery – when the 'ghost' is finally identified as a run-away patient of a nearby mental asylum – shifts the paradigm from a parody of the dominance of the globalized capital over political discourse to a Deleuzean argument of the 'disaggregation' of the postmodern subject (Deleuze and Guattari 1977). In Zilnik's film, an actor, Dragoljub Ljubicic, roams the streets of Belgrade dressed as the former Marshal and solicits passers-by to comment on the social upheavals which swept the

country since 'his' death. People readily share their feelings with this 'reincarnated' Tito, some decrying him as the main culprit for the present chaos and some lamenting the passing away of his 'clear vision' and 'firm rule'.

A similar mixture of positive and negative judgments is encountered in Tito's homepage, which includes a collection of unedited e-mails sent to 'Tito' by visitors to that site since its creation. This self-regulating collection, for which the webmasters do not take any responsibility, exhibits the usual cacophony of voices, from history students fishing for information to use in their research projects to retired allied soldiers seeking to refresh their memories; from former Yugoslav expatriates worldwide bemoaning the passing of a 'golden age' to political opponents to Tito's regime firing accusations for past transgressions and present calamities. Under a single heading, we can read that Tito was a 'serious player, who understood the rules of the game better than anyone else', the 'most incredible pop-icon of the twentieth century', the 'greatest statesman of all times', and 'father of the nation'; but also a 'great master of manipulation', 'criminal', 'traitor' and 'fraud'. The discordant views in a majority of cases revolve around the issue of nationality, with contributors subscribing either to the nation-building, civic discourse of 'brotherhood and unity', fostered in socialist Yugoslavia, or to one of the competing ethno-nationalist discourses flourishing in post-Yugoslav states.

Tito's homepage reflects ethnic tensions despite (or because of ?) its deliberate grounding in the pre-1990s rhetoric of the peaceful coexistence of former Yugoslav national and ethnic groups. Cyberspace also hosts numerous hate-forums which celebrate the various ethno-nationalist discourses of former Yugoslavia. These range from the official sites hosted by the nationalist parliamentary parties, to those dreamt up by various diasporic organizations; from newsletters aimed at the paramilitary troops in the latest conflict, to skinhead mailing lists, e-zines and multimedia archives.

Observers and critics mostly agree that the new technologies have increased the global visibility of hate-groups, but opinions differ regarding the effects of this new visibility on the popularity and power of hate-instigating rhetoric. The varieties of ethno-nationalist rhetoric, which – as is the case in former Yugoslav states – operate by explicit reference to clearly 'bordered' and ethnically 'clean' real-life territories, seem to be particularly ineffective in the borderless and 'un-clean' medium of cyberspace.

Signification in cyberspace thus resembles Derrida's 'pharmakon' (Derrida 1981) – both medicine and poison, a concurrence of opposites which has to be erased in translation. The result is a blurring of identity and difference among overlapping terms. Not surprisingly, many visitors to Titoville express

their frustration at the impossibility of attributing a particular *Weltanschauung* to the authors/webmasters, which would thus explain their motivation in setting up the site: are they 'glorifying' or 'vilifying' the deceased statesman; are they 'ridiculing' him or offering a public space for life-affirming mourning? The authors' Sloveneness is often brought into the equation, to tilt the scales towards one possible answer or the other. Slovenes are either blamed for the disintegration of Yugoslavia, since they were the first to declare independence in June 1991, or accused of buying into the former Yugoslav rhetoric of 'brotherhood and unity', which was conceived by the Slovene Edvard Kardelj, Tito's leading ideologist.

LANDSCAPES OF LAUGHTER, LANDSCAPES OF MEMORY

In this paper, I have sought to demonstrate how Cyber-Yugoslavia and Tito's homepage have used cyberspace to create a distance and liberate themselves from the recent traumatic experiences of violence and loss. Their purpose is not corrective or satirical, but therapeutic and critical. Like all parodic texts, they are empowered by their own hybridity, or pluritextuality. The conventions they resolve to re-contextualize and rework – the popular myth of a unified nation, defined by its claimed territory, evolving in a natural and more or less uninterrupted progressive movement from its mythical 'birth' to a better future – persist as extremely resilient fallacies of the popular imagination, despite contemporary theory's emphatic grounding of nationhood in the realm of the imaginary and the constructed.

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NOTES

1. The communication infrastructure for these activities was provided by the ZaMir transnational network (ZTN). From 1993 onwards, the network received substantial funding from international finance tycoon George Soros' Open Society Institute. Soros, it is well known, sees the Internet as a prototype of his own vision of Karl Popper's 'open society' – self-organizing, dominated by users and not confined by borders. It comes as no surprise that a great deal of his funding in Eastern Europe was directed at building computer communications networks and making them freely and widely available to potential users. The declared aims of ZTN

included the prevention of warfare, elimination of militarism, the advancement of human rights and the rights of peoples regardless of race, ethnic background, sex, religion or political convictions and the advancement of participatory democracy. Peace groups and other NGOs used ZTN to coordinate their activities and disseminate independent media reports. A special service was launched to facilitate contact between refugees and their friends and relatives in the war zones (Herron and Bachman 2000).

2. 3,720 out of 16,066 citizens (23.15%) on 12 December 2002, http://www.juga.com/list/countrystat.asp.

3. Slovenia 818 (5.09 per cent), Macedonia 517 (3.22 per cent), Croatia 404 (2.51 per cent) and Bosnia and Herzegovina 251 (1.56 per cent).

4. In an interview with *Feral Tribune*, Bacic emphatically stated that he only wrote the initial Constitution, which is changeable. He described his current involvement in Cyber-Yugoslavia as 'cooperating with the Algorithm, as his [or her?] butler' (Bacic 1999).

5. The relay ritual was resurrected in 1998 by the young Slovene social democrats, with a number of modifications reflecting the social reality of post-Yugoslav independent Slovenia. The marathon runners of the old ritual have been replaced by modern-day bicyclists, and the baton has been substituted by a 'solidarity box' for donations to a detoxification unit in Sopotnica near Skofja Loka.

6. 'Mi smo trebali biti garancija [. . .] srece, preslikana iz ur-vremena, njihovog vremena, vremena Revolucije koje je bilo model, a mi smo trebali na osnovu toga biti jamstvo da ce se to prenijeti u nekakvu buducnost [. . .] Za nasu generaciju je vrijeme bilo potpuno spljosteno – nase je vrijeme vrijedilo samo toliko koliko je skandiralo proslo vrijeme, tj. Revoluciju' (Ivekovic 2000).

7. Probably the most influential argument against the notion of communities having any kind of single destiny has been Karl Popper's *Open Society and Its Enemies* (1947), which dissects the philosophers of universal progress from Plato to Hegel.

8. Srdjan Saper, Vlada Divljan and Nebojsa Krstic. They later founded a very popular rock band, *Idoli*.

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