DARKO ŠTRAJN

from walter benjamin
to the end of cinema

dissertationes

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identities, illusion and signification within mass culture, politics and aesthetics

Darko Štrajn

Content

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Foreword

I n the first and second decade of the 21ˢᵗ Century, mass culture strongly expanded thanks to new hardware and software, which make above all the Internet tick. Nonetheless, great improvements such as high definition displays, the accessibility of television programmes and the growing practises of small audio-visual productions made possible by cheap and high quality equipment, have had their own impact. What used to be just the mass reproduction of goods and aesthetic products is currently becoming the mass production of roles and positions of participation in a vast stream of social, scientific, cultural, political and media communication. Virtually everyone can have their part in segmented exchanges on all imaginable levels of interactions of texts, pictures, movies, gestures, music, statements and sometimes even new ideas. How much this expanded and multiplying activity, enabled by technology, which includes the "hidden" software, qualifies as a new leap or revolution with far-reaching effects in the social reality can be established only in retrospect. Still, no matter whether we have to deal here with, just an expanded pre-existent mass culture or some new mode of social relationships, there are many visible consequences for which proper names and notions are on the way to be invented. Moreover, this holds true for a critical analysis, which aims at a vision of emancipation as well as for the analysis, which aims at nothing since the practice of emancipation is reduced to just gestures of subversion, breaks, shocks, discontinuities or strategies of inflating illusions of fragmented realities. Illusionary expecta-

tions and projections of technological changes seem to be a clear effect of a demise or severe weakening of once strong actors in the field of emancipation struggles such as trade unions, left wing political parties and public intellectuals.

Considering various discourses on a different level, we can see that such a phenomena as political populism and an explosion of *false news* as the main and most banal agency of the *post-fact* world causes the mass culture to look almost like a natural disaster. It is interesting that after the shocking American presidential elections results in November 2016, both expressions denominating massive practice of the uncontrolled as well as manipulated communication and perception became "viral" themselves. It looked as if the Epimenides' paradox of the liar had become "operational" in the mode of communicative behaviour; since the world is such that everybody lies, each and every one should join in the game of social networks of unlimited lying. The performative gesture behind acts of "publishing" on Facebook or Twitter is based on the tacit claim by authors: "I am a liar" and then the reading of messages turns into the checking of who is the more "true liar". If I take as a hypothesis that we have to deal with some structural or qualitative change or a quantitative leap within mass culture, then I would claim that we are at the beginning of something new in Deleuzian terms or we are at the brink of the *event* as the eruption of the unpredictable in Badiou's sense of the word. The transformation of mass culture, which contains a multiplicity of changes in the orders of the world, comprising of institutions from factory to education, politics and aesthetic productions, bring about a change in mass participation within a society. Therefore, as much as one can feel pessimistic due to the above mentioned recent phenomena, one should think about Walter Benjamin, who at the time of the dawn of Nazism had not given up his idea of the emancipatory potential of mass culture: "The fact that the new mode of participation first appeared in a disreputable form must not confuse the spectator" (Benjamin, 1969: p. 239). However, his idea was not (as some critics do sometimes surmise it) that the mass culture functioned as an automatic emancipatory mechanism. He well indicated the scary counter-emancipatory potentials within it, which was, in his time, demonstrated by rising Nazism. His appeal to communism to "politicize art" (cf. Ibid: p. 242) clearly points to a dialectics of involvement of so-called masses or multitudes into antagonisms of the social processes.

I first read Benjamin's essays in the early 1970s, when his *oeuvre* – about three decades after his later texts were written – had been increasingly recognised for its insights and style. Whatever I was working on throughout the times of my journalistic and research work in such fields as film theory, education, philosophy and cultural studies, Benjamin's "method" was manifestly or secretly reminding me about the epistemological machinery that unavoidably produces an aestheticized reality. Such reality became visible through Benjamin's inimitable writing, which I would call theoretical or reflexive descriptivism. In the age of new technological "revolutions" Benjamin's intuitions and visions are increasingly relevant. The strongest case in his discussion of *work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*, the film, is being transformed as digitalisation "de-materialized" or rescued it from its dependence on celluloid tape. The film's potential for affecting the sensible capacity of viewers acquired new dimensions. Like in Benjamin's time, few saw any structural relationship (indeed not really correlation) between sound cinemas and rise of fascism nowadays the consequences, for which a technical advancement could be instrumental, are not clearly discernible – in spite of their being visible already to a superficial gaze. The expansion of possibilities for a cultural fulfilment on a massive scale simultaneously enables an eruption of a new kind of barbarism.

I realised that throughout the time of my different activities, I wrote a number of papers for journals, lectures and conferences and so I took time to put these papers together. Since most of them are dealing with artistic, cultural and political phenomena, I could arrange them in different parts, which are focused on some specific theoretical problems or specific fields or phenomena. Although these texts, which were written over a period of almost two decades, are not organised strictly in chronological order, I still tried to indicate a trajectory of my own conceptual evolution.

I am just one of many such writers who finds out a *fil rouge* running through different texts from different periods. Of course, the above-mentioned papers were mostly thoroughly reworked and restructured to somewhat round off what is a relatively fragmentary book. For the texts, which were published already, bibliographical footnote is added. Finally, a possibility to publish this work as a digital book matches the main book's content: mass culture, which would be unthinkable without mass media.

1: Dialectics of Aura

Benjamin's Notion of Mass Culture and the Question of Emancipation

The phenomenon of *mass culture* as such certainly is not a new fact in the realm of social reality, especially within the range of social sciences and particular interdisciplinary theories. At the same time, the notion, which is related to this phenomenon, has been grasped by a multitude of different concepts, many of which were and still are "intentional". That is to say that many concepts, judgements, descriptions and so on, which are confronting the phenomenon of mass culture, try to place it in a context, from which they derive some kind of emphasis, for example, regarding its social meaning or the ethical or aesthetic consequences. A common denominator – the meaning of the term *mass culture* - is related to connotations and notions of (post)industrial or (post)modern society, as opposed to the pre-industrial and traditional society. Apparently, "masses" (of people) have become perceived as such only during the period of urbanisation and the "liberated" labour force. When "cultural goods" became accessible to the masses, the phenomenon that we are talking about came into existence. In a historical context mass culture as an actually established entity is almost entirely situated in the 20$^{\text{th}}$ century. Only from the viewpoint of this century were its earlier manifestations traceable to a time of the development and breakthrough of capitalism, along with the industrial and political revolutions. Speaking in broadly accepted general sociological terms, mass culture is made possible by a range of structurally interdependent components such

as industrial production in series, individual freedom, general education, leisure and, of course, the media.

Figure 1. Walter Benjamin (Wikipedia Commons)

Certainly, at this level of classification as we talk about the very existence of the scope of phenomena, which are marked by the notion of mass culture, these positive attributes are not a matter of controversy. At the same time, it is obvious that the notion of mass culture falls into a class of concepts and categories that designate a complexity, and it is quite difficult, if possible, to speak about "mass culture" without ascribing it to some kind of particular meaning. The complexity of mass culture as a broad social phenomenon has been expanding with the growth of prosperity and consumerism. With the rapid economic growth and due to a number of means of communication, growing cultural production, etc. – especially recently – it turns out to be ever more difficult to decide precisely what the extent of the phenomenon is. Has for example post-modern politics become one of the activities overpowered by mass culture? Is there any elitist or "highbrow" culture left at all? However, very important and involving questions have arisen in the cross section between mass culture, market economy and political democracy considering their structural interdependencies. There is a crucial inherent difficulty in any discourse on mass culture, since the phe-

nomena that happens to be the object of it, is the environment within which we happen to live. Therefore, an "external" position, somehow similar to a position of an anthropologist researching a closed culture of a remote tribe, is practically impossible. "Value-free" judgements are then consequently almost unfeasible since most judgements are expressed in aesthetic, moral or ideological categories. Any attempt to "describe" the phenomena means taking a stand, whether we want it to or not. In addition, no matter how sophisticated it may be, such an attempt is a discursive investment into a vast context of culture, which is in most cases marked by signifiers in a culture's representations. Therefore, all culture of today is mass culture or there is not one culture unaffected by mass culture. Probably the first author, who indicated this fact in a decisive, definite, clear and condensed manner, was Walter Benjamin, whose surprisingly short essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* made a serious and lasting impact more than twenty years after it was first published. "The name of Walter Benjamin, the omnipresent godfather, divided between the mysticism and technology (but very prudent not to mix the first with the other) is imposed by itself: *The Work of Art...* (1936) is one of our classics" (Debray, 1994: p. 130).

Contours of Benjamin's Concept of Mass Culture

Walter Benjamin, in his presentation of mass culture, as we can decipher it from the above-mentioned essay, sought to reveal mass culture's mechanisms. He pointed out its economic and historic profile from within the perception of already existing structural transformations, which had decisively modified aesthetic elements contained within it. Before Benjamin's discourse unfolds, he states that his intention was based on Marx's theory of interdependence between the economic substructure and the superstructure, which contains "prognostic requirements" concerning the abolition of capitalism. However, Benjamin's Marxism was quite an unorthodox variance, which later on happened to be named "Gothic Marxism" (Cohen, 1993: p. 18). This is manifested in a nuance of Benjamin's articulation of the interdependence of substructure and superstructure: "The transformation of the superstructure, which takes place far more slowly than that of substructure, has taken more than half a century to manifest in all areas of culture the change in the condition of production. Only today can it be indicated what form this has taken" (Benjamin, 1969: p. 218). Contrary to what an orthodox Marxist outlook of the time would have advocated, the epistemological turn (which becomes ever more apparent through his

elaboration in the essay) is visible in Benjamin's positioning of culture as an explanatory "representational" complex. The culture, which is marked by "mechanical reproduction", represents a society in which the scheme of dependence of the superstructure on the substructure loses its explanatory power – thus the scheme becomes blurred and implicitly obsolete within the subtext of Benjamin's essay. Benjamin did not assume transparent totality of mass culture; he rather determined its particular elements and made an effort to analyse the means of production and distribution, which he selected to demonstrate the emancipatory effect of mass culture on its participants. He makes mass culture legible by imbuing the concept with the notion of the "mass as a matrix" (Benjamin, 1969: p. 239).

If, as Benjamin had written, the very notion of art becomes thoroughly changed by the process of mechanical reproduction, then we should presume that the world, being mirrored, expressed, articulated... in such an art, has somehow been transmuted. Although the Berger and Luckman's notion of "the social construction of reality" (Berger, Luckman,1991) had yet had to be conceived, we can take Benjamin's analysis as basically containing the same meaning. After all, we are talking about a relatively short piece of writing, an insightful glimpse of a genius, and yet, we are talking about quite a schematic hypothesis, which is truly rather open in its meaning. Benjamin has not stated a very clear idea on how the change in the modes of production of art has really affected "the world" of economy, law and politics; his intention seems to be more so the other way around. True, he does not omit the question and he alludes to some clues concerning changes in perception, which is indicated by the "distracted" manner in which mass audiences absorb art.

What Benjamin valued as a potential "emancipatory effect" of the mass culture, meant something quite opposite for Adorno (and Horkheimer): "The cult of celebrities has built-in social mechanisms to level down everyone who stands out in any way" (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972: p. 236). As much as Adorno and Horkheimer especially at the time of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* still adhered to Marxist ideas, they, in a final analysis, actually nevertheless advocated a position of "bourgeois subjectivity". Their ideal of an individual in a sense corresponded to a "highbrow" representation of a sensitive art lover who gets absorbed by the work of art.

Certainly, it can be proven that the essay *The work of art...* occupies a special place within the context of fragmented entirety of Benjamin's work. As much as the essay obviously is not in accordance with Adorno's views,

it is not congruent as well with, to say the least, Benjamin's style and approach in most of the rest of his writings on the aesthetic phenomena of his time. It clearly belongs to historical determinations, which instigated Benjamin's strong criticism of the idea of the so-called autonomous work of art. Such a posture could well be understood within the logic of the text itself, which seeks to define artistic production as a kind of "material force", hence as an agency of emancipation – not only as a product of a solitary intellectual effort (which an autonomous work of art is usually socially expected to be), but as a consciousness and the Freudian unconscious creating force.

Beyond Mechanical Reproduction

Strictly speaking, the emancipation is at first the emancipation of "the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility" (Benjamin, 1969: p. 224). It is this "reproducibility" that makes masses able to participate in culture, and so bringing to them a kind of emancipation, no matter how much of philosophical indignation this "emancipation" provokes as in the case of Adorno. Later on the rapid development of technology transcended Benjamin's imagination at this point. We could say that instead of the "abolition of capitalism", new developments rather brought further expansion of the "reproducibility" still within the framework of capitalism, which ultimately prevailed over the few decades of some contorted attempts to establish communism in a number of countries. The "prognostic requirements" only vaguely project a changed and emancipated society, which has been far from being certain in the wake of fascism. Taking into account that Benjamin's essay is only a fragmentary text, we may not seek definite answers in it. Its huge importance emanates rather from the specific discursive position in which Benjamin stands almost alone against his philosophical foes and friends as well. Therefore, his essay remains a paradigmatic text for all of those who repudiate to succumb to an intellectual pessimism and desperation facing the "disreputable forms" of mass culture, which are as such recognised by Benjamin as well. His analysis actually does not suppose at all that mechanical reproduction brings an all-comprising emancipation automatically. In his dialectical mind Benjamin really only uncovers the ambiguous potential created by mass culture, and the question of whether or not the outcome will be social emancipation, points towards politics. The sentence at the end of the essay, that con-

fronts fascism and communism in regard to mass culture, is more than just a slogan stating that fascism is rendering politics aesthetical and that "communism responds by politicising art". The underlying assumptions, which help a bit to explain this programmatic exclamation, are presented in the endnote 12, where Benjamin claims that a change in the method of exhibition "applies to politics as well". If we read this endnote in view of its anticipatory dimension, we should comprehend it as a description of the televised world, before there was any television:

> *The present crisis of the bourgeois democracies comprises a crisis of the conditions, which determine the public presentations of the rulers. Democracies exhibit a member of government directly and personally before the nation's representatives. Parliament is his public. Since the innovations of camera and recording equipment make it possible for the orator to become audible and visible to an unlimited number of persons, the presentations of the man of politics before camera and recording equipment becomes paramount. Parliaments as much as theatres are deserted. Radio and film not only affect the function of the professional actor but likewise the function of those who also exhibit themselves before this mechanical equipment, those who govern* (Ibid.: p. 247).

This is as far as Benjamin took the analogy between spheres of the aesthetic and the political. It means that, for example, the "category" *aura* cannot be simply applied to the political sphere as though the secluded decision-making political process all of sudden has become transparent and accessible to the wider public. The world of the reproduction of art and political processes are two different orders, which are marked by mediated interference, but they still keep their separate rules.

The media that has technologically transformed greatly from Benjamin's times, has obviously made use and further changed the means of narration. However, television, for example news reporting, uses the same means of narration in images as the earliest film makers: different views, focuses, framing and editing. The electronics instead of "mechanics" speeds up the procedures of completing the narrative and certainly all this makes it possible to visualise the reality in a far wider scope than in the case of concentrated shooting of a film. Systems of broadcasting cater the images to large audiences so that the illusion of "everything" being represented is almost complete. A step across the line of what Benjamin could imagine

is brought about with only the interactive communication technology. The changes of the perception, indicated by Benjamin, have gone much further. I am talking about changes that are bringing us from "grapho-sphere to video-sphere" (Debray, 1994).

Of course, the media only makes up part, important as it may be, of the complex realities of the world approaching the much advertised "information age society". The virtual in this context increasingly becomes "one of the main vectors of a production of reality" (Levy, 1995: p. 17). The influences of it are integrated into the very notion of reality, which becomes all but simplified because of them. Simultaneously we cannot overlook the fact that education is expanding on a mass scale as never before. In spite of the many doubts concerning its real accessibility and its quality, the heated debates on education expose the fact that education is a principal route to life in the media or information society for individuals as well as for whole communities – no matter how they are called: society, nation or network. Little more than simple literacy had been required in Benjamin's times for members of society to participate in the consumption of goods provided by cultural industry. It is impossible to deny that a level of required literacy for the average citizen has risen dramatically. The changes of everyday life in a society determined by mass culture may still be apprehended in a critical manner, thus giving way to doubts of how much emancipation they actually bring. As it has been already discussed, the notion of leisure, for example, is submitted to changes. The idyllic representation of leisure, as represented for instance in Jean Renoir's film *A Day in the Country*, belongs to a world which has ceased to exist. "Today, to mention leisure evokes images of retirement communities or television viewing. Leisure has lost its meaning, succumbing to the general fetish of leisure in a consumer society. In America leisure usually means buying or doing or watching something" (Jacoby, 1994: p. 15). One may agree with such an assumption, but it is obvious that such a change in the notion of leisure is opposed to the changes in the notion of work that happens in these times of cultural transition.

We could go on and on with our coming to terms with the meanings of contemporary mass culture, but where does this leave the question of emancipation? Maybe Benjamin suggested in vague terms that the emancipation comes with the abolition of capitalism, yet, on the other hand his analysis points to a dialectical comprehension of the notion of emancipation. With such a viewpoint, his perfectly articulated difference in the comprehension of mass culture, as compared to the prevailing views of the time, assumes

emancipation as an on-going affair, which changes the context only to be put forward anew. An amount of illusions, concerning the scope of impacts, generated by new technologies, is invested in the changing of complex social relationships, but what is not usually taken into account is that the change in the context, or a change in the means of communication within a (social) relationship, cannot do away with the relationship as such. A suggestion that the means of interactive communication may cause a profound change of democratic decision-making so that an electorate would perpetually take part in electronically mediated "referendums" misses the point entirely. An immediate "reproducibility" of political events cannot do away with the representational – therefore potentially always ideological – factor of any conceivable democracy and the decision-making process that it implies. On the other hand, the scope of media representations such as opposed pluralistic comments, differently biased information with a verbal and visual argumentation – also in its "disreputable forms" – may or may not help civil society to participate and influence the decision-making process. After all, ever more precise and accurate surveys of public opinion are quite interactive.

However, there are many recent cases proving that the media and its effects, function always within a particular culture, and the elements of universal global culture (if it actually exists at all) become transformed through a "translation" within a given "local" culture. This, for example, happened in the Balkan countries, which were according to any criteria in 1990s media societies, gives enough material to study the ambiguity of mass culture of today in view of the slightly changed Benjamin's terms of opposition between the "aesthetisation of politics and politicising the aesthetics".

Benjamin's Aspect[1]

Form in all thinkable senses of the word makes a difference. Saying such a thing seems a truism, seems more or less obvious, quite easily verifiable in the so-called world of objects, not necessarily only the aesthetic ones. In general terms "everything" around us has a certain form, which can be seen or otherwise perceived. Our daily experience is full of semiconscious or even unconscious recognitions of many forms. In an urban surroundings "forms" are standing around us in the shape of more or less architectural erections, "forms" are driving in the streets as Alfa, BMW, VW... cars, people's faces are appearing in oval, long, rectangular forms, etc. Any particular form is perceived as being different, that is to say, as being identifiable among all other forms, which we can recognize in a certain "class of forms". Cars can be identified as the vehicles on four wheels, made of steel, having windows, a steering wheel etc. However, a particular car can be recognized by its particular form and stored in our memory, as a car, which is different in comparison to all other types of cars. This rather simple example (which is only one among many possible empirical examples) reminds us that form in general has a prominent function in the world, so decidedly marked by the production in series. Most certainly, the usage of different forms helps to prevent confusion, although more often than not, it enhances it, because at the same time as meaning a difference, a particular form

means a similarity as well. Nevertheless, when we talk about such practical general aspects concerning rather unproblematic and simple aspects of the question of the form, we should not forget Walter Benjamin and his intervention in the field of the aesthetic discourse.

Change in the Mode of Participation

"The mass is a matrix from which all traditional behaviour toward works of art issues today in a new form. Quantity has been transmuted into quality. The greatly increased mass of participants has produced a change in the mode of participation. The fact that the new mode of participation first appeared in a disreputable form must not confuse the spectator". (Benjamin, 1969: p. 239). Now our simple examples do not look so simple. This much known text by Benjamin, no doubt quite apprehensible within the framework of its argumentation, brings a certain aspect, concerning a border between objects deemed aesthetic and objects we usually just call "things". If, as Benjamin said, the very notion of art is thoroughly changed by the process of the mechanical reproduction, then we should presume that the world, being mirrored, expressed and articulated in such art, was someway changed. Maybe we can risk an assumption that this meaning is understood with Benjamin's insight. Before his discourse unfolds, Benjamin makes it clear that his starting point was Marx's theory containing "prognostic value" concerning the abolition of capitalism. Although Benjamin himself held this starting point as a theoretical bases of his analysis of the changes of the cultural bias, brought by the development of the capitalist mode of production, it has been soon identified by his distinguished reader – namely Adorno – as the "undialectical side" of his approach. As it is precisely reported in Richard Wollin's book on Benjamin, Adorno's criticism has been aimed at all the weakest points in Benjamin's text,[2] which is not to say that Adorno grasped the full meaning of the article which could be comprehended only a few decades later. Alternatively, in another words, Adorno was most probably concerned with the aesthetic problems, on which he shared a common interest with Benjamin. Moreover,

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2   "Dialectical though your essay may be" – writes Adorno to Benjamin – "it is not so in the case of the autonomous work of art itself; it disregards an elementary experience which becomes more evident to me every day in my own musical experience – that precisely the uttermost consistency in the pursuit of the technical laws of autonomous art changes this art and instead of rendering it taboo or fetish, brings it close to the state of freedom, of something that can be consciously produced and made" Cf. cit., Wollin (1982: p. 191).

maybe it can be even proved that the "*The work of art...*" occupies a special place within the context of the completely fragmented work by Benjamin. As much as this paper obviously is not in accordance with Adorno's views, it is not in accordance with, at least, Benjamin's style and approach in most of the rest of his discourse on aesthetic phenomena of his time.

However, taking into account the Adorno's criticism slightly helps our evaluation of those meanings of Benjamin's text, which transcend the boundaries of the age in which it was written. Some political motives, the intellectual revolt against Nazism most visible among them, clearly belong to historical determinations, which caused Benjamin's strong criticism of the idea of the autonomous work of art. Such a stand could be well understood within the logic of the text itself seeking to define artistic production as a kind of a "material force", as an agency of the emancipation – not as a product of a solitary intellectual effort (which an autonomous work of art is usually supposed to be), but as a consciousness creating force. This consciousness is, of course, most decisively related to the mass perception of reality. Benjamin's supposed over-reaction against *l'art pour l'art* is not based on a perception of fascism as only a "brutal totalitarianism". On the contrary, the problem is, that the /.../ "aesthetic concept of culture (*Kulturbegriff*) isn't /.../ exterior to fascism, to his cult of the form as the power claim by the privileged Subject, who in his tendency already encircles the totality of the form-able material into the political sphere" (Hillach, 1985: p. 257). Therefore, the problem is that fascism makes use of the mass culture, made possible by the mechanical reproduction, and Benjamin's intention is to show that *in spite* of it, the dawn of the age of a new mode of production – the aesthetic products included – brings the means of the emancipation through the "transformation of the superstructure".

Benjamin's "clash with fascism" clearly helped the author to express some views, which could be considered along the lines of Adorno's criticism as a distortion or even as slightly crude reductionism. Nevertheless, a question could be put forward, how important really is this side of the text for its main points? The communication, personal as it may be, between Benjamin and Adorno, reflected two different points of view of the same traumatic problem. Adorno's approach led to problems of "enslaved subjectivity" of the Subject, who "lost his spontaneity" and autonomy in subjection to market forces. Consequentially, Adorno's aesthetic theory became a brilliant illustration of the philosophy, marked by pessimism and even nostalgia. Benjamin's discourse has not been developed in such a wide scope. It

was confined to fragments and more or less unfinished short essays, quite often, as already mentioned above, it treated rather disparate (and desperate) subjects. However, especially the *Work of Art...* – along with some other probes in the same direction – opened some questions, which continue to bother us long time after the author's unfortunate death.

The Mystery of Non-mystery

The manner, in which the set of questions we have in mind was put forward in the *Work of Art...*, is somewhat schematic, but that is precisely the form of theoretical problems, which most often proves to be very productive for further development.[3] The "mystery" of the effectiveness of such a type of discourse is not its depth, much less anything "hidden behind" its obvious meaning. Of course, what could be the "depth" of a "schematic" text, and how could anything be "hidden" under the surface of written words and sentences? Therefore, the "mystery" must be elsewhere. To put it simply: the mystery is that there is no mystery, the genius lies precisely in provoking a *deja vu* effect in the reader. Yes, everybody sees that the print, photography, cinema and so-forth are the result of an intellectual (or the aesthetic) endeavour, but at the same time they are the products of machinery, the products of the process of mechanical reproduction, and everybody feels that the possibility to bring close to public many works of art from secluded places, means a change in a way. But in what way? This is the question, which not "just anybody" could feel important to answer. Copies of the portrait of Mona Lisa[4] suddenly became accessible and could decorate a wall in any home, no matter how humble, great novels of French realism are accessible in cheap editions, etc., so what? This is the point, where Benjamin's intervention proved to be fruitful. Simple as his discov-

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3   The same may be said, for example, about Althusser's concept of the "ideological apparatuses of the state," which caused a lot of controversy in the philosophical and political debate in the 1970s, but it has been also repudiated many times over on the ground of its "schematicism". However, it looks as though, especially those among Althusser's critics, who tried to eradicate the concept itself, its life was prolonged by causing many Althusser advocating answers. Very often they admitted that a dose of schematicism is obvious in the Althusser's theory, but this cannot belittle the fact of "genius" of the scheme.

4   Mona Lisa happens to be the case, which was used for opposing points: "For Adorno, the fact that we might be happy to pin a postcard of the *Mona Lisa* to our wall only goes to show what the culture industry has done to us. It has reduced us to such a level that we are happy to be fobbed off with cheap copies; we feel absolutely no need to see the original because we think that it has nothing to say to us" (Tester, 1994: p. 49).

ery may seem (though in the final analysis it is not so simple at all), it happened as a finally uttered knowledge of the fact, which had been repressed by the dominant "class culture." In addition, probably it is not just a coincidence that Benjamin named this "fact" vaguely the *aura*, which as a notion gets its meaning through the process of disappearing. The *aura* is, by virtue of being something through non-existence, in a full sense of the word, a dialectical notion, which marks a profound change in the symbolic order of things. Aesthetic objects certainly occupy a distinguished place in this order. Nevertheless, as Benjamin found out, their *aura* secured a special sphere of the effectiveness of their symbolic power. They were a part of an order of the especially divided social imaginary, which continues to be active long after the mechanical reproduction has taken place. The disappearing of the *aura* through the intrusion of the reproduction of the classic works of art, and even more significantly, through the development of the new forms of art, made possible by technical devices, brings a turn into the function of the art itself. Characteristically, these "new forms of art" were dismissed by the privileged public as cheap entertainment for the uneducated.

Let me now look at the problem of what happens with the form. The aesthetic views elaborated in the beginning of the early modern age (notably within the German philosophy and the movement of romanticism) in general developed the concept of the form in accordance with a notion of the Subject. To put it briefly, subjectivity has been perceived as being inscribed into the difference, which is brought to existence by the form. Although Benjamin does not say so, subjectivity has been seen as a constituent of the *aura*, participating in the divine and even replacing it. *Aura* at the same time marked the subjectivity's attributes of singularity. In some instances the *aura* (or whichever expression representing it) marked the subjectivity as even the replacement of a divinity. Of course, the problem of the form is much easier explained in the case of classic visual arts, paintings and sculptures than in the case of narrative arts. In confrontation with the problem of the content, the construction of the certain rules created paths for the sensation of beauty. But all the time there was no doubt that the aesthetic creation belongs to so-called nobler human activities, and that it is in possession of the "higher" truth, and there was no doubt that enjoyment of the preciousness of the works of art requires an adequate education, especially for the purpose of perceiving the sublime qualities of different forms. One may object, saying this is an oversimplification, but such an objection

does not rule out the point, which is, that the form "formed" a separate reality of the works of art. With a gradual transformation of the original (and even revolutionary in their age) aesthetic theories into the ideology of art, ideology of an "elite" public, the form "as such" became an object of obsession on both sides: the public and the artists. However, when this point was reached, it was already obvious that all around emerged all sorts of "entertainment," and that "unworthy" forms of decoration invaded the streets in the metropolitan areas.

Orchid in the Land of Technology

Benjamin, using the terms of political economy in defining the superstructure, saw the decisive transformation, crucial in attaining a new form of society. It is not as important as it may seem that he understood this movement as a way to communism, which had been a lively idea of emancipation at the time. His conceptualization of the consequences of the perceived properties of what had been going on is much more significant. "The equipment-free aspect of reality here has become the height of artifice; the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology" (Benjamin, 1969: p. 233). The results of such an assumption may be taken as sociological, but no less, they are significant for the idea of the subjectivity as well. What we may say today is that Benjamin was on the verge of discovering not only the disappearance of the *aura*, but the disappearance of the Subject itself, too. Again, in Benjamin's "sociological" observation the change concerns the art as much as the masses:

> *To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its* aura*, is the mark of a perception whose 'sense of the universal equality of things' has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction. This is nowadays noticeable in the increasing importance of statistics. The adjustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope, as much for thinking as for perception* (Ibid.: p. 223).

What is seen here from the side of object is at the same time reflected by a change in the structure of subjectivity, whose reality must become split in a way as a contradiction of form against form (replacing the old contradiction between the form and the content). The instrument representing the new structure of reality – the cinematographic camera – functions on the level of a new "science," which ruins the idea of the Subject, born to be

autonomous. "The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses" (Ibid.: p. 237).

Entering mass perception, the new forms of aesthetic *praxis* overturn the whole functioning of the arts in the social imaginary. Although discussing the problems of the form of the aesthetic objects, the products of "technological" arts included, may still be a "noble" task of aesthetic theory, there is no doubt that Benjamin's observations assert that the aesthetic production interferes with the reproduction of the society in a much more decisive way than anybody has ever imagined or dreamt before the emergence of the mechanical reproduction. (Maybe today we could widen the number of synonymous adjectives, beside "mechanical," i.e. "electronically", "multimediatically" and so on.) In the industrial age, the recognition of the form became in a broad sense simply functional, and everybody has been trained to recognize forms automatically by being exposed to almost continuous and often unwanted influence of images, sounds, signs and designs. There is no way to sell new "contents" in approved forms. The public – or the consumers – must be shocked into perceiving the difference, which is nothing else but the form.

Meanwhile the "subjectivity" turns into a set of "looks," prescribed by the "artists" in the cosmetic make-up and fashion industries. Declining to be "formed" by them, or at the same time not to be affected by images and sounds, now even pouring down from the sky, always neatly packed into an appropriate form, means only acquiring a different form. However, following this path would bring us to another intellectual account from the 1980s of the world foreseen by Benjamin, namely to Christopher Lasch's *Culture of Narcissism* and his deciphering the world of forms as a "form of existence."

Changing the Mind

Meaning and time are two categories that have a lot to do with art and – needless to say – *vice versa*. Quiet frequently, books happen to record cross-sections between these two notions. To illustrate this statement, I shall take the example of the book *Art Without Boundaries*, in which three authors mainly intend to present their view upon what was considered visual art in the period of twenty years between 1950 and 1970. The introduction begins with a moderately bold assertion – considering the point in time in which it was written:

> At one time it was easy to distinguish between the 'fine' artist and the commercial artist. It is now less easy. The qualities, which differentiated the one from the other, are now often common to both. The painter, who once saw the commercial designer as a toady to the financial pressures of industry, may now find that the dealer can impose a tyranny worse than that of any client. During the last twenty years or so, barriers have been broken down; and they are still being broken down (Woods, Thompson and Williams, 1972: p. 9).

Was it not great in such times, when "barriers were still being broken down?" The authors of the *Introduction*, as quoted above, obviously had thought so. Yet the book itself is not so very ambitious after all; it was one of those books, which – by the virtue of its qualified assessment – helps

a lot to make canonized art from what happened to be "breakthrough" works of art relatively soon after they had first appeared. They might have been very controversial, or just interesting, or inventive, or whatever it was that caught the attention of professionals and/or the wider public. In books such as the one from which I took our example, the contentiousness of such works of art gets categorized, explained and catalogued – of course depending on the degree of recognition of the authority of the authors. The book is a kind of an *ersatz* museum or gallery, since it is full of photographic presentations of different images (paintings, film stills, installations etc.) of works of art from the period within Western modernity. Therefore, the book functions much like a thematic exhibition. We cannot be too wrong if we see it as a display that "creates" a subject/object dichotomy. The object is there to substantiate the statement… The discourse surrounding the exposition, or more precisely, the discourse that *is* the exposition, is 'constative': informative and affirmative" (Bal, 1996: p. 3). However, no matter how thoroughly we search their *Introduction* into the rather brief presentations of over seventy artists in the book, we cannot find what is actually meant by the concept of "barriers". Since, admittedly, the term used to be utilized metaphorically repeatedly we should not blame the writers for their "non-explanation" of the term since we can essentially gather what they mean from what is said in their text. In addition, Woods and others claim that a number of key exhibitions in Europe and the United States "helped to disseminate new ideas and techniques". Therefore, they emphasized a number of exhibitions and contributions of some galleries and institutions in Europe and the USA, such as the Venice Biennale, Documenta in Kassel, Tate Gallery, the Whitechapel Gallery, the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Museums of Modern Art in New York and Turin. Furthermore, they highlighted the important roles of artists and artistic movements, starting with John Cage's contribution to the field of theory and multimedia. Among those, whom they find important are film directors such as Godard, Fellini and Antonioni; painters such as Genovés, Fontana and Wesselman as well as numerous designers such as De Harak, Rand and the group Crosby, Fletcher, Forbes. Of course, one cannot argue against the importance and originality of any of the artists, designers, multimedia artists and so on who are "exhibited" in the book, which was one of several such illuminating products at the time when it was published.

Cultural Ideology

Since the text of *Introduction* is such as it is, namely "informative and affirmative", I am not taking it as an object of relevant criticism. It mainly serves its purpose as a representation of a kind of an aesthetically qualified discourse, which displays a power to select, to categorize, to evaluate, to segregate, to judge, and so forth. As it appears, the authors tried to define art in a context, in which they find it difficult to distinguish between "fine" and "commercial" art. However, why is it necessary to distinguish between the two kinds of art? What purpose does the difference that must be the product of the delineation actually serve? Consequently, is not "fine art", which is categorized as such, determined to be of a certain "value", and does not this value express itself as a "market value"? Since commercial art usually happens to be accessible to the public at large and is relatively cheap for an individual consumer, what then is actually the meaning or purpose of the notion of "commercial"? Since the products of fine art that are determined as such by experts usually attain a high price in the art market, *they* should actually be considered as truly commercial. Maybe the distinction between "fine and commercial", which, as we know, acquired a high degree of general recognition and acceptance, was not so correct after all. Or, finally, on the contrary, such a distinction has probably had a role, no matter how well understood or misunderstood, in the "classification struggle", if we may borrow the term from Pierre Bourdieu (1994: p. 27).

It seems that Woods and his co-writers did not recognize any curiosity in the fact that they were recording themselves. They pointed out the role of museums and galleries and they somehow overlooked the determining impact of these institutions on the formation of artists and the production of art itself. How much did they take into account that a web of such institutions already makes up part of the industrial world so that "museums and galleries", (and concert halls, cinemas and the media each with a defined role) form a decisive link in the production and distribution of art? The overwhelming influence of these institutions on the value of works of art is becoming common knowledge in the context of the post-industrial society nowadays, but it seems that somehow we are still confronted with a cultural ideology, which presupposes "true art *vs*. fake art or kitsch". Among many others, John Berger found that

> /…/ *since the French Revolution art has never enjoyed among the bourgeoisie the privileged position it does today. During the second half of the nineteen century, there was also an art of revolt and its*

artists were neglected or condemned until they were dead and their works could be separated from their creators' intentions and treated as impersonal commodities (Berger, 1965: pp. 203/204).

The cultural ideology that probably serves well to what is increasingly labelled as the "tourism industry" – and one cannot really blame it too much for this – can be comprehended as a sanctuary for everything from artists' narcissism to what is considered the "taste". This supposedly distinguishes class from masses, high from lowbrow, the West from the rest, and "us" from "them". This ideology is quite transparently based on a projection into the past, in which a construction of a world, in which "true values" were respected, is the central invented idea. As we know this imaginary world of "true art" is attached to the time of romanticism, which is also the time of the peak of aesthetics as a philosophic discipline. As Berger persuasively argued, such a "world" actually never existed.

Let us then return to the problem of the so-called "falling barriers". The meaning of this term in the text, that we are trying to decipher more closely, consists of two (possible) aspects: the first meaning refers to breaking through barriers by artists and/or their works. We may connect this meaning to Immanuel Kant's rule of genius, which operates outside of specific rules (Kant, 1997, §46). In a different language and a different context of modernity, we are talking here about inventions, about new ideas and things, exhibitions and performances.[1] The other aspect concerns barriers between fine and commercial art. The difficulty, which we found in distinguishing between them, can be taken as an indication that the phrase about the "barriers that have fallen" refers to something like this. No matter what the writers "really meant", we may ask here whether there is an overlapping between both meanings. The answer most definitely is that there is such overlapping, before, within, and after the period, which is the object of the book *Art Without Boundaries*, but in the period between 1950 – 1970 such an intersecting is especially obvious. As much as one could agree or disagree with the authors' selection of over the apparently most representative

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1   "Essentialists" would claim that these inventions and the genius behind it are somehow "god given" and, therefore, they cannot pass un-recognized. However, in the period of modernity inventions in different arts that often break a wide range of rules and defy social and moral conventions, become, in such a view, questionable as products of a "genius". The essentialist approach, therefore, must succumb to the very traditional idea of art and in its normally (but not as a rule) conservative discourse tries to set the cannon as determining the limits of the artistic expression, which qualifies to be recognized as such.

70 names, one would easily demonstrate a double barrier breaking effect in most of the represented works of art. Artists from Valerio Adami to Edward Wright mostly broke aesthetic codes, defying norms of beauty, truth and value. At the same time, many of them transgressed boundaries between different genres, techniques and artistic fields. And finally, not all, but many of them, reached into the area of designing consumer goods, or they intervened into the system of communication symbols of urban life, or they mimicked in their "visual products" various aspects of life in what was already defined as the consumer society. Such displacements within and outside of the "borders" of the established system of culture were not of course only a phenomena of the period in question, but they have been going on throughout the age of modernity, mostly in artistic movements. Indeed, such movements and changes in the system of stockpiling and presenting the works of art contributed not only to new paradigms in the field of artistic *praxis,* but they also substantiated a radically different new environment and different conditions of the production of works of art. Nevertheless, even in theoretical minds, with very few exceptions, the reasons for these changes and their meaning were not actually fully comprehended for quite some time, and subsequently many obsolete categories from the realm of a "cult of art and spirituality" persist. In this respect, we come across the question of the hegemony, but let us first re-think some basic notions concerning artistic and cultural (re)production.

Perception of Perception

I am, yet again, recalling the essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, which has been debated repeatedly, and still seems to be an inexhaustible source of new interpretations and elaborations. However, Benjamin gives some indirect arguments against some of the main points of his essay in his own earlier work, which is permeated with highly aesthetical articulations on aesthetic matters. Only when he formulated his notion of *aura*, Benjamin found an epistemological tool for a radically new understanding of the world of the "mechanical reproduction" and the role of art within it. In a sense Benjamin happened to be one of the first "deconstructionists", or as it could be assumed, one of those intellectual figures, who may be included into a "tradition" of deconstruction. Although he actually never (not in this essay and maybe only barely in some other writings) brought problems of the reproduction of works of art to that level of abstraction, where these problems would be formulated in terms of the

philosophical subject/object relationship, it is quite obvious that his observations crushed the "binarism" of the traditional aesthetics. Benjamin's essay is also one of the first among those texts that brought forward a productive new approach to the kind of interdisciplinary theory within the social sciences and humanities by deriving decisive concepts from the phenomenon of the "mechanical reproduction". It has been obvious more or less for anybody from what was visible "on the surface" of the industrial reality, but it did take time to be read properly.

However, it looks like the definitely dialectical term of *aura*, contrary to its intention, represented a possibility for some readers to inverse Benjamin's argument against the traditional aesthetics. Naturally, there is a possibility that we have to deal here with a simple misreading of the meaning of the notion.[2] Anyway, this is not of any big importance; it only gives us some evidence that the "hegemonicaly" founded comprehension works somehow like the Freudian defence against recognizing the truth. In any case, a wider comprehension of Benjamin's contribution to the epistemology in the age of the industrial society, and a recognition of his aesthetically informed observation of the displacement of the whole chain of meanings, concerning the "manufacturing" of art, the recognition of works of art in the context of mass culture and the profoundly *changed perception* of works of art, have come rather late. Benjamin's work became much more transparent for scholars and artists only in the late 1960s, when along the political protests in the prosperous Western world, a new artistic practice, which was previously confined to the narrow public interest, succeeded to make itself visible in the streets and, of course, in the media. A change in the way the public perceives works of art had enormous consequences. Due to this change, people were increasingly seeing the reality, and their own positions within it, very differently as compared to the pre-industrial period; if, of course, we take for granted that we can guess what kind of perception art people could have had in the "pre-technological" age. Even neurologists and psychologists later on, to some extent, confirmed the changes in

2   By reading numerous interpretations of Benjamin's "*reproduction essay*", no matter how ingenious or simple they may be, one cannot get rid off of the impression that most authors somehow take the concept of the *aura* for granted; almost as if we have to deal with just another application of a term, almost as if we have to deal with just a classification of works of art, dividing them between "auratic" and "non-auratic". Of course, as soon as the concept of *aura* is uttered, there is no such thing as an "auratic" work of art. Benjamin himself only mentions "traces" of aura in this new age, which is constituted by the disappearance of *aura*, which itself became visible only through its disappearance

perception that Benjamin discovered using his theoretical intuition. [3] The central aspect of this transformed perception of reality is the distracted observing as opposed to concentrated perception.

> *The distracted person, too, can form habits. More, the ability to master certain tasks in a state of distraction proves that their solution has become a matter of habit. Distraction as provided by art presents a covert control of the extent to which new tasks have become soluble by apperception. Since, moreover, individuals are tempted to avoid such tasks, art will tackle the most difficult and most important ones where it is able to mobilize the masses. Today it does so in the film* (Benjamin, 1969: p. 240).

What could be clearly elaborated from Benjamin's "perception of perception" is a fundamentally rearranged constitutive position of any artistic *praxis* and the big impact of this *praxis* on the *praxis* of the social reproduction. Undoubtedly, from Benjamin's time these rearrangements only intensified. The age of the increasing role of technology brought about very complex changes of the functioning of minds on a massive scale. Simultaneously entering the mass perception, new forms of aesthetic *praxis* overturned the whole functioning of the arts in the social imaginary. Of course, it is possible to elaborate extensively on the structure of these interdependent practices, and on their complex transformations especially through the period of the second half of the 20ᵗʰ Century. Such elaborations exist in various fields, such as film and media studies, cultural studies and so on. However, I only want to make the point that Benjamin himself marked a moment, in which the big cumulative restructuring of society and the changes in people's minds became apparent, and he could more or less guess about the "prognostic value" of his discovery:

> *Mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art. The reactionary attitude towards a Picasso painting changes into the progressive reaction towards a Chaplin movie. The progressive reaction is characterized by the direct, intimate fusion*

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3 One of the simple, but very telling examples is the adaptation of the human eye, which happened when the speed of film running in front of the projecting light was accelerated from 16 to 24 frames per second due to certain technical reasons, when sound was introduced in the cinema. Spectators, who got used to 24 frames per second, could not follow 16 frames per second because their eyes could see the dark transitions between frames.

of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert. Such fusion is of great social significance (Ibid.: p. 234).

The semantic field, which is formed by the notion of "social significance" is a vast area, and cannot be easily described. The place of a certain degree of general literacy in Benjamin's times is nowadays taken up by a comparatively high degree of general education, no matter whether this education is formal or informal. Reproduced aesthetic features have become attributes of daily life. The notion of "fine art" therefore lost its full meaning; it became mainly an expression of a certain view not so much upon art, but upon society. As the model of competitive economy in the prosperous Western world (which now culturally includes most of the former socialist world) continues to (re)produce class differences, the mass culture makes symbolic repressions and expressions of them much more a matter of social play, or as we could put it with David Chaney (1993), a matter of "public drama«.

The Politics of Differences

There are no indications that Benjamin and Gramsci were very much aware of each other's existence, yet some similar theoretical and political motives in the writings of both are easily discernible. Gramsci writes in his *Quaderni del carcere* about the "old intellectual and moral leaders," who are increasingly discovering that their "preachments are only preachments", which have nothing to do with reality, since "the special form of civilization, culture, morality which they have represented is now dissipating" (Gramsci, 1974: p. 255). Such observations could easily be compared to Benjamin's criticism of Duhamel and of his views about film as a "diversion for uneducated". What Gramsci added to this non-existent dialogue is the notion of *hegemony*, which acquires quite diverse meanings within his work, but basically his use of the notion functions as an articulation of the "fundamental displacements" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: p. 67). Laclau and Mouffe outlined the meaning of the notion, which originates in the Russian social democracy: "/…/ it became necessary to characterize the new type of relationship between the working class and the alien tasks it had to assume at a given moment. This anomalous relation was called 'hegemony'" (p. 50). Gramsci's displacements, which include the concept of the "materiality of ideology," which "takes us away from the old base/superstructure distinction", finally result in the concept of "political subjects". For Gramsci they are "not – strictly speaking – classes, but complex 'collective wills';

similarly, the ideological elements articulated by a hegemonic class do not have a necessary class belonging" (p. 67). It would take much more than this brief paper to confirm this assertion, especially if are talking about signifiers from the cultural domain. Throughout the post-war period, when the Western world was a social space for great achievements, frivolities and symbolic turns in the arts, but also the space for a fascinating growth of the popular culture, we had to deal with the hegemonic pressures due to the imposing influence of the ideological as well as political difference between the "two worlds". The rule of "ideology" was of course superficial as far as culture and at least a part of social sciences were concerned. The characteristics of the above-mentioned Gramscian meaning of the term of hegemony were perceptible in the views on culture and art exactly in that period. From this perspective, I can fully agree with the following account:

> As the higher culture of the West was largely a product of a pretechnological age, it is scarcely any wonder that those who wish to sustain the one should find themselves in the position of advocating the other. Hence, from Mathew Arnold to F. R. Leavis, from Raymond Williams to Richard Hoggart, from Theodor Roszak to Charles Reich we are confronted with men whose commitment to cultural values seems ineluctably welded to a nostalgic regard for an organic community, whose work and culture are two aspects of a unified life. And since both left and right wing critics have been so deceived in their belief that a shorter working week would be the key to a new and fuller existence, the right has turned to the past, ignoring all too often the social cost of pretechnological culture, and the left to some distant future in which temporary restrictions would give way to a fully realized classless culture, unguided by rationalistic strictures (Bigsby. 1976: p. 16).

Such insights accumulated in the 1970s, especially after the demise of tumultuous political activities that left no artistic field in the Western world untouched. It became visible that cultural and political hegemony in their interdependency disrupt any clear meanings of such ideological notions as progressive and conservative, beautiful and ugly, political left and right, etc. Although we may find certain differentiating signifiers within the cultural and artistic fields that undoubtedly set apart different politics, which again reflect some hegemonic "values," we usually cannot be certain to which political tendency some social effects of any breakthrough artistic praxis will appeal to. The post-modern plurality, no matter how we grasp it in theoret-

ical apprehensions, is also characterised by a differentiating play that sets apart not just any "big Subjects" but little "subjectivities" with, if I may say so, a low rate of hegemonic impact. No matter how much passion, organization and genius, is invested into the creation of an event, the hegemonic effect can be measured one way or another by the market response.

Maybe this was a basic "discovery" of the 1960s and 19070s, when some artists in different areas of aesthetic *praxis*, reacted to such reality, bearing in mind that the result of their reaction to a particular work of art would be judged by the market as well. Andy Warhol "described" the reality of the modern industrial world by eclectic compositions, which mainly exposed the process of massive reproduction. In his images of multiplied icons of the star system (Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley etc.), he persuasively demonstrated that in such a world a category of uniqueness is a matter of a process of multiplication of certain icons. Taking into account that he established a level of comparison between Campbell Soup and movie icons, Warhol preceded the post-modern usage of the category of reification. Michelangelo Antonioni, whose movies were seen as a bit enigmatic and hermetic at the time that they were first shown, contributed to his specific gaze upon urban subjectivity and especially upon the reality, which such subjectivity unintentionally produced. After the film *Blow up* (1966), based on the Julio Cortázar's story, Antonioni actually became very transparent since he identified perceived reality as the very same one as that, which is produced – in the given case – by the machinery of representation in both possible senses (as a camera and as a social field of signification). Besides, it seems that quite a large audience accepted Antonioni's cinema, at least in Europe. At the same time, the 1960s brought about a massive participation of the urban youth in the communication of multiple meanings. The main motive of the fashion designer Mary Quant was "… to extend the meaning of fashion beyond the classical couture designs of the affluent" (Bernard, 1978: p. 8). "Ordinary people" expressed their answers to the question about their identity with their own bodies by "animating" creations of Mary Quant and other designers from Carnaby Street. Since then the fashion designers became comparable to what philosophers have ceased to be: a kind of oracle of the reality of the society, which is defined by sociologist like Giddens and Bourdieu as the "reflexive society". Listen carefully to what people like Karl Lagerfeld or Viviane Westwood are saying, and how their descriptions of sewing dresses and of what their designs represent correspond to attributes of the constitutively "unstable" reality.

As opposed to printed materials of previous centuries, the representations of global culture are devising a visual field where, above all, the moving images are decidedly determining a range of modes of perception. Today's media, the digital interactive ones included, are representing a changed and changing reality marked by an expansion of culture, which is driven by the strong artistic production. Museums and galleries, among other "traditional" institutions, are turning into laboratories of a continuous production of variations of meanings and interpretations, sometimes broadening the public's view on culture and sometimes confining it to some mystified canonical signification of whatever they are presenting. However, these institutions are no more (if they ever were) "neutral" places of exhibitions of works of art, but they are, as Mieke Bal would say, agents of exposures, not so much of artists and their work as such; much more however, of how they expose someone's conceptualised view of art or cultural goods. Artists "outside" these institutions became an extinct species. In the view of this institutionalised world, culture is actually the reality. Of course, there are many sophisticated and critical reflections upon this culture, such as Jameson's theory of reification or explanatory attempts by many authors, who make use of the notion of the *simulacrum*. All these reflections help us to come to terms with the complexities of social reality, which is highly saturated with multiple images, representations, and all kinds of other messages. Moreover, this is happening on a level that is comprehended as "global". Never before has the international exchange of goods been so "culturalised". This includes not only material goods, but also the nomadism of so-called "spiritual" ones in a very broad spectrum of cultures, spaces and times. In a phantasmal universe icons are produced to feed any individual imagination almost anywhere in the world. These icons support a stream of individual identifications with celebrities, with their patterns of behaviour and their performances of life-styles on a global level. The Freudian unconscious has never before been turned "inside out" to such an extent. The Babylon of the 21st century is a global stage, where an immense plurality comes forth. What is perceived in many texts in the field of cultural analysis as the colonial look is being increasingly dislocated, although far from being erased. However, inevitably the plurality comes forth only to be reduced in its scope. Abstractions and common denominators are absorbing it, as different particular representations in unity with interpretations are being selected and deselected, according to a self-generating rule of "recognisability". Still, one may observe that the global market

lives on an exchange, which comprises of everything from food and drinks to the educational services, and of course, the flow of capital, which with its first looming crisis of the global economy is becoming somewhat problematic. The signifying elements within these global exchanges are precisely different identities, which could be illustrated in an immense number of culturally marked items. It looks as if the notion of identity deprived of its elusiveness, and fixed as the supposedly most basic cultural category, is increasingly used as a counter-concept for a mobilisation against the plurality of the global intercultural influences. The politics of identity represents the potential of post-modern hegemony, which may become dangerous in some political profiles such as the simulacrum of fascist politics. Luckily, it appears that the stressing of such fixed identities tending to exclude anybody who refuses to be "included" brings forth the dispersing tendency of the politics of difference. Hegemony as a tool of democracy in a Gramscian sense, served well to open the minds of modernity.

2: Transitions: Ways of Politics

Defining the Ideology of Extremism

The very term of the political extremism is a matter of usage in ordinary language today. The meaning of the term seems to be rather transparent. As such, any kind of extremism seems to be definable in the typical oppositions: extremism vs. moderateness, extremism vs. normalcy, extremism vs. common sense, extremism vs. reality, extremism vs. civilized behaviour, and so on. Not much is left to explain about extremism, since it seems as though we have to deal with a phenomenon that no matter on which grounds represents a kind of transgression of rules dominating the order of politics.

A Kind of Aliens

This very broad and superficial meaning of the political extremism is accurate; however, to the extent to which it is correct, it describes not only the phenomenon itself, but – in a different sense – affects the social, cultural and symbolic context within which it is acquired. The political extremism is only possible in a context, where moderateness, normalcy, common sense, some dominant representations of reality, civilization, etc., constitute a core of set of values and common ideas within a given political culture. Summarily, we might say that such attributes of political culture by and large may be ascribed to the so-called Western world, and increasingly to some countries, which in recent history have entered into the universe of democracy. Although very significant differences between the features

of specific political cultures in different regions and countries could be cited, it seems that a general apprehension of the term of extremism does not differ across the boundaries. Therefore, it appears that the political extremism represents a breach of a consensus on a broad combined definition of democracy and civilization.

Such an assumption is obviously mirrored by the local as well as global media. However these reflections and representations of extremism, which make it omnipresent, and at the same time shown so as to be more or less on the same level as natural and other disasters, may raise doubts about the simple distinction between "normal society", politics as usual and a political extremism. The manifestations of especially some kinds of extremism – more than others less recognisable as such – are usually amongst the more prominent news that attracts the media interest worldwide. We can remember some advice about a necessary and needed reduction of the scope and emphasis of news on events attributed to the work of political extremism. Nonetheless, so far the media, especially television, have not resisted the opportunities to add dramatic features to an attractiveness of their news programmes. According to the distinction elaborated by Richard Rorty (1989: p. XVI) in a context of the question of how the media might contribute to the building of solidarity, the violent manifestations of political extremism are more or less strictly treated as a doing of "them", a kind of *aliens*. The drastic representations of the manifestations of political extremism, i.e. terrorism, are simultaneously objects of a mass voyeurism and the demarcations within the established society. The very term "extremism" therefore functions as the demarcating discriminatory gesture: not only neutrally marking the difference between "normal and insane", but also inducing a sense of radically total "otherness" of those who commit extremist acts. Hence, extremism is re-produced into a mystically self-generated threat to the entire society. Almost day after day in the media representations of the extremist manifestations, the established society is acquitted from its complicity in the causes of the phenomenon.

Far from asserting that the media are masterminds behind extremism, they certainly at least present the state of affairs, expressing and propagating the dominant views and attitudes, in other words, the ideology. As such, the functioning of the media importantly reflects a collective historical experience of which the media as agents and mediators of "truth" themselves play a part.

Patterns of the Past

Of course, the media stuns today's global audiences by showing the effects of the extremist activity, and immensely much less by spending their precious time to analyse the phenomenon itself, its extent and its causes. The extremism, as shown by the media, is caught in more or less simple and simplifying perception schemes, which makes extremism not only omnipresent, but, what is more, an ever present phenomenon: the same substance in different forms. As it were, such functioning of the media not only excludes the political extremism from the realm of a "normal" political universe, but it also tends to obscure its general features that tie it to the broader ideological systems, with an exception, when the origin of certain kinds of extremism are deemed to originate in an "alien" culture, i.e. some Islamic country. Whatever the case may be, my point, derived from this observation, is a presumption that the extremism more properly defined, makes up part of the world in which there are reasons for a sort of (media) presentations, which conform to the dominant "sense of reality". Only very rarely is the general audiences confronted with the roots and causes of a particular extremist idea and behaviour.[1] Furthermore, since the media tend to reduce the extent of extremism to its most manifest appearances and aspects, such as terrorism, they serve a self-propelled purpose of a curtailing especially the ideological contexts that enable any rise of political extremism. I have no intention here to analyse the functioning of the media, but only to make a note of their importance in creating a public space for the contemporary extremism, as well as means and sometimes objects of extremist activity. As much as the media uncover extremism in their reports, they as well obscure the view on "non-manifest extremism" that could be found within any given cultural and political system.

Although it is possible to argue that each epoch in history has known one or the other form of extremism, we should not succumb to a notion of a preordained evil, which remains only to be an object of proper handling. On the contrary, the forms and the extent of extremism we are confronted with in our times may be defined as historically unique. A broad range of contemporary extremism historically descends from the ultimate

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1   In the autumn of 1995, an instructive case appeared in the French media. In a police action against supposedly Algerian extremists, who planted explosive devices in dustbins in urban centres, a young man of the Algerian decent was killed. Soon after the event, some of the boy's own writings were disclosed in the media that showed clearly his anxiety amid the racist environment.

extremes that took shape in fascism and bolshevism.[2] In both cases we may find extremism, which did not remain a marginal phenomenon, but developed into a political system, starting from usurping the apparatus of the state and, further on, secured a high degree of mass loyalty. Therefore, fascism and bolshevism, each in its own way, gave a historical example of the ultimate possibility for an extremist ideology to become constitutive for a whole society. Although based on different particular ideas, so-called religious extremism – as a sectarian Christian and Islamic terrorism – is structurally very similar to the secular kinds of extremism. Both extreme ideologies remain to be paradigms of a materialisation of both main currents within political ideologies: particularism and universalism, reflecting the binary logic of Western thought – and Eastern too for that matter. Since these extreme ideologies took shape – for not just a short while – of a "normal society", their "being-a-fact-of-history" represents an instance for any critical reflection on the potential of supposedly marginal extremist ideologies and movements of today. I do not speak of a fear concerning the possibility of their simple re-emergence, but about a fear that we might be(come) unable to recognize and define the distinctive attributes of a *process,* which is already at work; or, even more frightening, that we might recognize them, but we are unable to influence the process itself. Once extremism takes over the society, its institutions, and the public life and so on, there is very little that can be done against it. Speaking in global terms that is what already happened in at least some former socialist countries, notably in Serbia, as an example of a prolonged bolshevism, stripped off of its universalized shape, modified and adapted to new realities and supported by populism and nationalism.[3]

The long essay by the French historian François Furet exposed the above-mentioned liabilities, derived from a retrospective of the gruesome historical experience of this century. As Furet points out "bolshevism and fascism entered almost jointly the theatre of history as the latest items on the European political repertoire" (Furet, 1995: p. 38). In Furet's view of history, it seems difficult to imagine that these ideologies, now looking "absurd,

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2   I find the use of term "bolshevism" here more appropriate then "communism" since it may be argued that communism represents a number of different forms of ideology and organisations, like movements, ideas, views, parties as well as some political systems, that could not be simply defined as extremist.

3   The most recent phenomena in 21st Century in Europe, such as a number of extremist parties in "new democracies" of Hungary and Poland, where they even ascended to power, demonstrate that the extremism in power can co-exist and extend its influence within the EU, which was supposed to be based on pluralism and democracy.

deplorable or criminal", were in fact so recent. What brings us to our point is the fact that "in spite of it, they replenished the century; one against the other, sustaining each other, they fabricated their material. Simultaneously very powerful, very ephemeral and very ominous, how could they mobilise so much hope, or so much passion in so many individuals?" (Ibid.). Furet's analysis brought forward an interpretation that in quite clear terms reveals the mechanisms of interdependence between fascism and bolshevism. Being adversaries, both ideologies and for some time also political systems needed each other. Still more, they were in a relation of complicity regarding their common enemy: "The heftiest secret of complicity between bolshevism and fascism remains however the existence of their common adversary, which the both hostile doctrines reduced or exorcised with an idea that it had been in agony, and which therefore constituted their soil: very simply, democracy" (Ibid.: p. 39). Maybe it is not so important that this interpretation, which in its minute scrutiny of both historical occurrences maintains a constant awareness of their irreducible differences, makes possible to comprehend the turning points of history such as Hitler's and Stalin's temporary alliance. From a theoretical point of view, it is more instructive that Furet's interpretation in its retrospective insight demonstrates what could be called the vulnerability of democracy. Since the representative democracy as the formal political system does not offer much else, but the rule of the abstract *Law*, it maintains openness for a variety of different political alternatives and unfortunately for the anti-democratic ones too. This trait of democracy is known as its basic paradox: as soon as democracy defends itself using the power of the State apparatuses, it is in danger to cease to be democracy. Alternatively, democracy stays open to a subversion or usurpation by the anti-democratic movements. Therefore, the perpetuation of democracy keeps dependence on "fine tuning" between the democratic parties and maintaining the democratic functioning of its institutions of the state of law. This task seems to be complicated during the times of prosperity and even more, when tensions and crisis hit a society. Robert Michels in his brilliant sociological book (first edition was published in 1915) made his point about the *iron law of oligarchy*: "There is no essential contradiction between the doctrine that history is the record of a continued series of class struggles and the doctrine that class struggles invariably culminate in the creation of new oligarchies which undergo fusion with the old" (Michels. 2001: p. 233). Michels actually hints that

the "iron law" is self-propelled as it is reinforced by theories such as Gaetano Mosca's.

Bolshevism and fascism were both very much aware of the paradoxes of democracy and both took advantage of its weakness – very much exposed in the times after the World War I and the economic crisis – using the persuasive powers of their ideology. Joseph Stalin clearly explained the strategy of bolshevism, saying: "When Lenin fought for the victory of bourgeois revolution and for a democratic republic, he didn't intend to be stuck in the democratic phase, and so to limit the wide-spreading of revolutionary movement by accomplishing bourgeois democratic goals" ("History", 1946: 74). As the story goes, Stalin says that what Lenin really had in mind was the success of socialist revolution brought about by the exploited masses. On the other hand, Nazis justified their upsurge on power in structurally similar terms: "The state is no longer an entity which, be it close to the party and the movement, or be it a mechanical apparatus is a ruling instrument; rather it is an instrument of the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*" (Rosenberg, 1970: p. 191).

A quite visible structural similarity between both types of discourse should not be disregarded. In both cases democracy is perceived as a wheel to power and at the same time as an insufficient instrument for the accomplishment of goals, set by the respective ideologies: the rule of the proletariat in the first case, and the fulfilment of the German *Volk* in the other one. In both cases the ideology representing the "content" – people's needs and will – otherwise alienated from the state, serves as a persuasive reason for the eradication of democracy. As simple as this may seem, it is apparent that the ideology brought to the extreme enabled both movements to institutionalise extremism in the shape of the totalitarian state. Both ideologies – as also Furet pointed out quite frequently in his book – could be classified as ideologies of the emancipation, apparently aiming at liberation of working masses, but with differing accents concerning especially the notion of nationhood. So fascism and bolshevism, each in its own way, remain to be a historical proof that the extremist ideology stands a chance to acquire and even keep for a prolonged period the power of the state. Historic facts prove beyond any doubt that a development of the extreme ideology does not dwindle after the conquering of power. On the contrary, it actually increases out of proportions.

One may argue that both successes of the extreme ideologies happened in rather special situations, in the circumstances of weak democracies, or

almost no democracy at all as in the Soviet case. Therefore, it may seem that in the modern or post-modern democracy such ideologies are necessarily condemned to remain only ephemeral and more or less marginalised. This would hold true if the extremist ideologies could be just a reappearance of exactly the same ideologies with the same strategies as the original ones. There are strong reasons to believe that the extreme ideologies are able to adapt, to develop and get strengthened by any kind of crisis of democracy or even by provoking a crisis themselves through the support of economic, class and other vested interests. They can even become different ideologies; they may even mimic a democratic discourse and behaviour – as in many cases of the postmodern political hybridity. However, they cannot change their basic attitude as they are making use of a criticism of democracy, presumably "empty of content" and unable to deliver for the needs of deprived masses or disadvantaged *Volk*, or *popolo*, or *narod*, or whatever may be the case within different languages and cultures.[4]

Furet's outstanding historical reflection written in the wake of the post-communist world, may be read as a strong reminder that any simplified view of the past or over-optimistic assertions of a rise of a discontinued new epoch may be fatally wrong. The inevitable reduction of complexities of the historical circumstances that occurs in a historical narration or, for example, in a condensed film or edited video, may suggest to the reader/viewer of today an utterly wrong impression of the nature of events in the not so distant past. At the time of the rise of bolshevism and fascism the world has already been "globalised", and this fact was quite clearly mirrored in the both ideologies, since bolshevism planned the world revolution and Nazism announced that the superior race is about to rule the world. The communication technology of the time was less developed, yet radio, telegraph, telephone and film were already able to induce a global cognizance. The "information society" of today and near future, apart from

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4   A good example how misread or misunderstood these interpretations may be was a prevailing perception of the events in former Yugoslavia by the reporters and their public in the West at the time of the last war in Yugoslavia. The horrible events that marked the first few years of the last decade and dominated the news in the global media for some four years were perceived because of "tribal hatred" with deep roots in centuries of rivalry in the Balkans. The same reporters and public would probably hesitate to accept an assertion that the Germany of the 1930s was "tribal" or "uncivilised". Yet, quite a lot of parallels between the rise of Nazism and the nationalist regime in Serbia were quite obvious. Certainly, a number of French intellectuals (Bernard-Henry Levy, Alain Finkielkraut, etc.) indicated the contours of this perception, when they tried to analyse the reasons of the West's inability to intervene properly in the Balkans.

the fascinating aspects of new communication technology, maybe does not represent much more than just a higher degree of a not so essentially different structure.

Clash of Identities

We cannot deny new complexities and new shapes of the social, political, economic and cultural realities, and for that matter, even less the extent to which contemporary social sciences are able to reflect and even to intervene within such context. Yet at the same time, it seems that the scope of such interventions is rather limited as it has always been. A widespread consensus that we happen to live in the time of profound changes, which evades our conceptual apparatus, actually indicates the problems of understanding the confusing movements of parallel-unsynchronised transitions. It seems that the functioning of institutions, which so far seemed so proper, are all of sudden on the verge of becoming obsolete. Descriptions of the contemporary situation and suggestions of concepts and solutions are increasingly vague and controversial. We could find hundreds of examples of the discourse of uncertainty, such as this:

> *On what basis should common norms of today be founded? It is unthinkable to present such norms as a system* a priori; *they can only emerge gradually from a renewed questioning on what good life is and what life in community (*vivre-ensemble*) is. We can only indicate a certain number of parameters. Hence, we might think that such norms should affect a syntheses between the tradition (and its validating of the particular identities) and the modernity (and its validating of the universal); and not only within each political structure, but on the world scale* (Bonny, 1995: p. 24).

Statements such as this are inscribed into the global antagonisms of today. On one hand there is the global market (with its powerful financial organisations, multinational corporations, etc.) accompanied by the mediating and by and large problematic international associations and organisations. On the other hand, there are regions and individual nations marked by their own cultural profiles, which are forced to adapt, to change, and to restructure their economies – albeit with often immense social consequences. Any transparent formula of a reconciliation of this central global antagonism, apart from the rhetoric of universal economic competition, democracy and human rights, is in the best-case scenario still in the making.

Widely repudiated and fiercely criticised Fukuyama's thesis on the "end of history" nevertheless represents a general point of reference concerning the problem. Although most of the criticism may be well founded, Fukuyama's idea of the end of history at least marks a point in (our) time, which has its symbolical beginning in the event of the fall of Berlin wall. "/.../ if we are now at a point where we cannot imagine a world substantially different from our own, in which there is no apparent or obvious way in which the future will represent a fundamental improvement over our current order, then we must also take into consideration the possibility that History itself might be at an end" (Fukuyama, 1992: p. 51). Advocating optimism, Fukuyama asserts that no viable alternative to liberal democracy is possible, although he admits that ideologies of nationalism or religious fundamentalism may play some role in the view of his notion of *thymos* or desire for recognition. If there is any importance of Fukuyama's work, then it should be found exactly in his "grand scheme", his somewhat abstract and superficial approach to the problem of the post-modern global society. In a certain sense then a criticism of Fukuyama's work might be read as a further approximation of the problem.

Having neglected to re-elaborate a thinking of the event, Fukuyama oscillates confusedly between two irreconcilable discourses. Even though he believes in its effective realization..., Fukuyama does not hesitate all the same to oppose the *ideality* of this democratic *ideal* to all the evidence that bears massive witness to the fact that neither the United States nor the European Community has attained the perfection of the universal State of liberal democracy, nor have they even come close (Derrida, 1994: p. 63).

This controversy finally brings us to the problem, which we were seeking to articulate throughout this chapter. Since Fukuyama – although widely misread in this sense – did not establish any end of ideologies, even within his schemes of the prevailing of liberal democracy in the empty space of, yet again, exposed tension between the ideal and the chances of the ideal to become real in the context of the "real world", there is a social space open for ideology as a medium of the externalising of a particular subjectivity. We may add that Derrida's criticism in a way brings forward an argument originating from another kind of reading of Hegel, who is one of the crucial points of reference in Fukuyama's text. To put is simply: Derrida points out the importance of the process (Hegel's dialectic represented by his *Phenomenology*) against the result (the end of History), which is much more than Fukuyama imagines open to manifold liabilities of the further pro-

cess. Even though Fukuyama sees the problem through his notion of *thymos*, one may agree with the criticism that points out the relevance of reality, within which the concept of activity should be taken more seriously, instead of in fact projecting a bridge between the ideal and actuality. What Hegel, for example, elaborates in the chapter on morality in the *Phenomenology of Mind*, imparts in its philosophical articulation the contours of a playground of ideology[5] related to activity. "The moral consciousness is, as a simple knowledge and Will of pure duty that has in its simplicity the object against itself, related in activity to the reality of the manifold cases, and so it gains manifold moral relationships" (Hegel, 1970: p. 339)

Speaking of extremism of today and its ideology, we can certainly assume that any kind of discourse of extreme ideology will respond to the state of affairs in the global society and to its effects in a local environment. Therefore, it will be addressed to the subjectivity, which is becoming moulded in the process: not only – sociologically speaking – to all kinds of threatened layers of a society (such as the unemployed, uneducated, youth, etc.), but to a larger society envisioned in a scope of separate identity. To understand this better, we can use terminology introduced by Martin Seliger, who may help us to avoid the sophisticated theoretical controversy concerning the definition of the notion of ideology in general. "/.../to whatever degree policies conform to fundamental principles, 'operative ideology' denotes the argumentation in favour of the policies actually adopted by a party. It is 'ideology' because it devises, explains and justifies action. It is 'operative' inasmuch as it is predicated on what is actually done or recommended for immediate action" (Seliger, 1976: p. 175).

Seliger's book presents a quite formidable effort to delimit the meaning of the political ideology as well as to elaborate theoretical tools for the analysis of it. Seliger's differentiating between fundamental and operative ideology makes it possible to place the extremism, as it develops within the ideology in general, in the context of antagonisms, which I attempted to explain through the controversy between Fukuyama and Derrida. These antagonisms might not be seen as simply objective situation, which would represent a clear ideological view, but they are as a rule mediated through ideologies themselves. The recent political changes, which trans-

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5   Since Hegel's language is dated, and the category of ideology had not been so apparent in the realm of philosophy at the time, we may attempt to construct inter-sections of older and later meanings. At the same time, no matter how narrow or wide our understanding of the notion of ideology may be, it quite indisputably comprises of signifiers of morality.

formed the political map of the planet, had inevitably set in motion a process of formation of ideologies including adaptations, restructuring and re-interpretations of ideologies existing from before. This definitely created an impression of confusion and, to an extent, of a disorientation in politics. New complexities, new international relations and an uncertainty on how to modify strategies must have influenced the politics. "/.../ each politics, worth of its name, builds on representations that people make for themselves about their life and their rights" (Badiou, 1993: p. 12). This transparent "rule" explains a lot.

Although, for example, the European governments are committed to democracy, international cooperation, and a whole set of values of multi-culturalism declared by the Council of Europe, they respond to the fears and uncertainties of their electorates. In the face of the global trends that increasingly make people economically and culturally dependant on the international communication, there is, for some years now, a visible counter-trend towards the emphasis of ethnic or national identities. Apparently, the ruling democratic parties in Western Europe try to accommodate their electorate, but this then causes troubles within the European Union, and especially with the newly democratic neighbourhood. Without any clear pragmatic way out of this contradiction, the European Union balances between the politics of compromises between the member states themselves aimed at securing a degree of sovereignty of each member state, and between the politics of controlling the outside borders and postponing the time for admittance of prospective new members. Simultaneously, within the European states new legislation concerning emigration and the citizenship of immigrants is being severely tightened. On the other side of the former iron curtain, what once has been idealised as freedom loving and human rights-craving civil society increasingly becomes obsessed with "problems of identity". The state of affairs, therefore, turns into a clash of identities, what creates new soil for a rise of extreme ideologies. As this happens, it is not too difficult to observe a liaison between ideologies of admittedly moderate ruling parties and the extremist elaborations of the same ideologies. "Moreover, the explanations and justifications offered in operative ideology contain all the structural components of fundamental ideology. Operative deviates from or corresponds with fundamental ideology according to whether or not the specific contents (and the emphases of structural components) in one dimension are congruent with those found in the other" (Seliger, 1976: p. 175). Considering this scheme, the extremism

finds its expression on the level of operative ideology stressing immediate action. The extremism, which I have in mind here that is tied to the ideological notion of identity, relies more and more on "democratic" means, although it inspires clandestine violent incidents as well. Such figures of the contemporary politics such as Gianfranco Fini of the Italian National Alliance, or Marine Le Pen of the French National Front, or the American Tea Party's Sarah Palin, without mentioning nationalist post-communist "democrats" all over the former Eastern Bloc, bear witness to the new strategy of the extreme right in new global circumstances.

With regard to the tradition of the extremism, bolshevism and fascism, universalism and particularism, it is obvious that time has come for the right wing extremism. If we are to believe the media, the general audiences perceive as extremism the acts of either minority ethnic groups (like IRA and ETA) or alien terrorists such as "Islamic fundamentalists". Although clearly this kind of extremism may not be justified, the media suggestion of externalising the meaning of the notion of extremism points towards legitimating the extremism that occupies its place among the democratic parties or sometimes within them in a form of ideological compromises. In other words, there are always ideological contents on the level of the fundamental ideology that may stay dormant until the extremist articulation – usually calling for action – represents the unpleasant truth.

In general, terms such ideological contents – notions, concepts and attitudes – are to be found within the legitimate framework, paradoxically maybe, in the development of the notion of human rights. There is no doubt that the ideas of human rights played an indisputably crucial role in the upheavals around the time of the "fall of the wall" that helped to end the bi-polar division of the world. However, not long after a period of enthusiasm, the supposed universalism proved to be illusory, and simultaneously with a return to the dubious *Realpolitik*, the notion of human rights relinquished its singular meaning to the signifiers of "civilisation". Many cases in the so-called post-communist time might be read in this sense: relieving pressure on China on the account of its abuses of human rights in the name of "higher" interests, the rather reluctant relief effort in Rwanda (after a million deaths), the attitude of the West concerning the unspeakable tragedy of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Most obvious in this sense is the recent arrogance of European politics against the final consequences of the Arab Spring in a form of hundreds of thousands of refugees. Alain Badiou

brought up such points in his essay on Ethics, where he elaborates criticism of the humanist ideology.

> *Victims are identified with the confused animal shown on the display, and humanitarians are identified with conscience and imperative... Who cannot see that these ethics, which deals with the misery of the world, hides white Human behind its Human-victim, good Human. Because the barbarity of the situation is thought of only in the light of 'human rights'- however in fact we have invariably to deal with the political situation that demands political thought-practice, whose real agents are always already present – this situation is perceived from the highs of our presumably gentle peace as uncivilised, as the one, that demands the civilised to intervene in the civilised manner. But each intervention in the name of civilisation* demands *above all a contempt of the whole situation including the victims* (Badiou, 1993: p. 14/15).

Fukuyama's liberal democracy therefore represents a framework, within which the extremist discourse develops. The Universalist *idea* of the liberal democracy that only recently got rid of the Universalist extreme represented by bolshevism and some other left wing ideologies, is now confronted with the strengthened particularism, which, in view of Badiou's criticism, grows from within it. The demise of communism even enlarged the field of argumentation for the right wing extremists: now their rhetoric increasingly comprises a criticism of capitalism as a threat to the national identity. Therefore, the multinational capitalism enters into the paranoid picture of a conspiracy against the "little man". As in the times of the rise of bolshevism and fascism, so today the formula of the "little man" makes it possible for the extreme ideology to connect its aspirations to the frustrations of large layers of society, to enlarge its rank and file and to scheme for an end of democracy. On the other side of this clash of identities within so-called new democracies, the nationalist extremism finds its reasons in the West's aloofness and in the myths of the past that support the idea of a nation's own "superior identity". The representative democracy, just being introduced in the former socialist countries, is already accused in the extremist populist and nationalist discourse as ineffective, corrupt and culturally strange. And although the historic paradigm of bolshevism and fascism seems to be mainly a matter of the past, which cannot repeat itself, the redressed and rearranged patterns are plain to see within the core of growing old/new ideologies.

A Distant View
in Michelle Pfeiffer's Smiling Eyes

Already at its beginning, the industrial society – when this beginning took place is perhaps a matter of some controversy – ruined or at least displaced many "traditional" institutions and forms of human relationships. Accordingly, we may accept that the most basic forms of human (co)existence, especially family, were generally understood as mediated by tradition. In almost all cultures this mediation was guaranteed by religion or other beliefs that had been, and still are, incorporated into society through such supposedly traditional institutions as the religious organisations. They are different in various cultures, but as a rule, they all have some form of hierarchy and a "spiritual authority" at the top. During the age of enlightenment, social thinkers discovered the fact that a "tradition" gradually or swiftly changes, and that it is even retrospectively constructed. This implicit and explicit discovery opened the way towards bourgeois society, secularism and individualism. In spite of the intervention of enlightenment, traditions functioned so that patterns and rituals determined the lives of the majority of society. "Tradition incorporates power relations and tends to naturalise them" (Giddens, 1996: p. 61).

The Paradox of Tradition

The rapid developments within different discourses of social sciences and humanities, which moved the notion of culture into the centre of their reflections, can be understood as an attempt to define different manifesta-

tions of the weakening and the breaking of social bonds. Giddens characterised this state of affairs in the framework of his theory as the processes of *detraditionalisation*. These processes, as he claims, bring us to the *post-traditional society*, which in Giddens' words is "an ending". What is (was) a traditional society and how it is understood after its "ending" may be reflected upon through a number of contemporary authors such as, for example, anthropologist Benedict Anderson, historian Eric Wolf and especially the French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu. In those societies, including industrial ones, where many traditional institutions are functioning in any form of rituals or through ideological patterns, social uncertainties are recognisably lower than in a so-called risk society as defined by Ulrich Beck (1998). This means that the traditional political cultures maintain social bonds in such a way that an individual (without any thought of doubt or in a conscious renunciation of a part of their autonomy or freedom) gets "in exchange" a well-defined position in the society. Additionally, an individual gets "safety" within such institutions as family or church and within other forms of collective life, which differ according to a society's cultural determinants. In general, the socialist states were an attempt to create "safety" and stability through an economic system that comprised of full employment of the population. However, this attempt failed at the very beginning, which could explain why these societies actually and paradoxically finally promoted a set of traditional values. It is, of course, doubtful that traditional societies (all of which transformed and adapted their rituals throughout history) always functioned in such a way as pictured by nostalgic traditionalists looking back from a context of modernism or post-modernism. Therefore, it is quite right to ask a complicated question regarding a problem of how much the notion of tradition explains anything at all about the time in history when nations and linguistic communities took shape.[1]

Culture and Transition

Some of us in contemporary Europe remember the period of socialism because we happened to live in one of the countries, which called itself "so-

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1   Traditions, as an invention of culture that took shape in the period of growing literacy, needed to find roots in communities of the past, and so it created the past "by itself". Thus, as characters in the renaissance pictures of religious events from the hazy beginnings of Christianity are dressed according to Florentine or Venetian fashion, the past is "redressed" repeatedly, when a new identity demands it to be changed in the name of the present and the future.

cialist" or a "people's democracy". Apart from the horror stories from the history of Stalinist Russia and from other socialist countries (especially during the period lasting a decade or so after the Second World War), the socialist[2] societies functioned as complex societies in all respects. This, simply put, means that they had by and large a kind of functioning economy, very strong public institutions and quite a complex culture, which comprised of traditional (folk) culture and different constructions of culture as envisioned by the socialist ideology. Still, in spite of whatever anybody may say today, these societies and states were perceived for a few decades as "normal" by their members/citizens, and up until the very last moment before their final collapse, not even social scientists had any idea about the extent of an imminent change.

How did analysts, journalists and the public in different countries read many different signs of a coming change? This question calls for an extensive analysis of the different discourses of the time. Furthermore, social changes (a concept that comprises vastly complex meanings) in different countries had different dynamics. Some socialist countries, ones that had managed to edge closer to some kind of democratisation and market economy, like Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia in the sixties, looked different in the eighties, when Poland and Hungary arrived closer to the invisible limits of the so-called "socialist development". The whole chain of events has been even less transparent since also different trends and tendencies existed within certain countries, notably those with some kind of federalist arrangement. It was a complex history in which politics and ideology played a central and, most often, a decisive role. However, in the fields of economy and culture, dissimilar developments on the way to different paradigms of society could be perceived. Of course, insights into "what has really been going on" were rare and not until just before the fall of the Berlin Wall, did such insights become known to the interested public worldwide. A full explanation of all the "whats and whys" is still an open task for future historians to undertake. Of course, it is impossible to predict which answers will be found – if any at all.

2   Sometimes one comes across terminological misunderstandings concerning the signification of the notions "communist" and "socialist" – especially with American readers. Since, what is in the West labelled as "former communist" societies, were the States, which considered them to be "socialist" and mostly anticipated communism as a "next stage of a social development".

Looking from the Perspective of an Object of a Case Study

While searching for literature, documents and other references for this chapter, it happened that I came across an elaborate paper, which addresses a phenomenon of the weekly magazine *Mladina* (meaning Youth in the Slovenian language), where I myself happened to be employed from 1976 until late 1986 and where I continued to contribute opinion columns and articles for another five or six years. The article, written by Patrick Hyder Patterson (published in the year 2000), gives a very informed report on the journalism in the magazine and its political context especially at the time before and after 1989. Patterson's article represents an approach to recent history that demonstrates how some case studies of the critical phenomena and some critical moments in the transition might shed some light on what happened, and what were the main driving forces within the events, deemed instantly to be "historical". Since such valuable work as Patterson's is still rather rare and unknown to a wider public, this recent history is often understood in a simplified way, or it is interpreted – or rather appropriated – from a very narrow political or economic perspective. So, let me quote an extensive bit of Patterson's article, where he quotes one of my own opinion columns in *Mladina*. In his observation, which makes use of my article from November 1989, many aspects of society concerning politics and culture and their implication in the processes of change are captured as in a snapshot of the moment before the period, which was later on grasped in the term of transition.

> *Especially revealing is a column by Štrajn that appeared in November 1989, as Hungary and Poland were disappearing down their paths away from socialism. Looking on, Štrajn could not help feeling that Yugoslavia, with its incendiary domestic politics and halting progress toward democratization, suffered miserably by comparison:*
>
>> Beyond the eastern and western borders of Yugoslavia… formerly unresolvable conflicts are being resolved with rational dialogue, with the introduction of democracy, with a great measure of tolerance, etc. Although, to be sure, events in the socialist world are still marked by the encounter with the spirits of the dark past, events there nevertheless cannot hold a candle to the spectacle of the Yugo-Scene. Let's take for example the end of com-

munism in Hungary. The formerly unimaginable event happened with the communists' self-abolition at a party congress, and now, with honest elections expected, it is coming to fulfilment with peaceful parliamentary sessions – with the prospect of voluminous foreign investments on the way. In short, no real spectacle, as would be fitting for such an epochal event as the abolition of the withered revolutionary social class: they did not shoot anyone, they did not accuse anyone of counterrevolution – just as if nothing special had actually happened.

In a language of longing and envy, Štrajn then contrasted the chaos among the Yugoslavs with life in Hungary, suddenly so remarkably unremarkable. In Budapest, the piece continued, a reader could now simply pick up an issue of Newsweek and sink pleasantly into a good read – for example, the recent cover story on the rise of actress Michelle Pfeiffer and her work on a film adaptation of the latest spy novel by John Le Carré, that great merchant of cold war mythology. The film, Štrajn pointed out, was a co-production of a Hollywood studio and the Soviet state enterprise Mosfilm. Moreover, the Russians planned to use their profits to film a novel by Bulgakov, previously banned! But while the Budapest reader could enjoy the luxury of indulging all this new East-West cooperation fairly mundane,

if a person were to live in Belgrade or Ljubljana, not to even mention Pristina, he would make out in Michelle Pfeiffer's smiling eyes a distant view of some sort of more normal world. And if, in spite of everything, he were to read an article about yet another incremental proof of ever greater cooperation and decreasing enmity in the world, during his reading his thoughts would run off toward the 'historic events' in his own unfriendly homeland of stubborn generals, vile secret agents, corrupt authorities and, here and there, conditionally-existing democracy (Štrajn, 'Oddaljeni pogled Michelle Pfeifer', Mladina no. 40, 17 November 1989, 12).

The mood here captures perfectly how reformist victories elsewhere in Eastern Europe made for bitter frustration among Slovenian

democrats, who saw for themselves a long and difficult fight still ahead (Patterson, 2000, pp: 435 – 436).

Thus, with my little help, Patterson noticed that cultural factors definitely played a role at the very start of the curious sequence of occurrences, which were immediately de-conceptualised as the "transition" without anyone really knowing from what to where. To have such an icon of the Western mass culture as Michelle Pfeifer – regardless of how insignificant or memorable Fred Schepisi's movie *The Russia House* (1990) proved to be – portraying the role of a Russian girl, seriously helped to create an impression that these times around 1989 were about to bring very real changes. The fact that the movie in question was a typical cold war spy story would be in itself unimportant, except for the detail that the movie was shot in the Soviet Union. This "detail" marked a point in the implementation of *glasnost*, which had a crucial altering impact on the core ideology that supported the socialist system as a part of the world order of two confronted political-military-economic blocs. As it became visible much later, this has not been exactly a deliberate aim of Gorbachev and his supporters. But then again, it was not the first time that people were "making history" and later on found themselves *made* by history.

At the same time, a few other overlapping meanings can be ascertained from this case. In most socialist countries, Western products for the mass market of cultural goods such as genre films, fashionable transgressing clothing or rock music, were officially looked upon by the loyal intellectuals and party politicians as, at the very least, inappropriate or as products of bourgeois decadence.[3] The socialist aesthetics within the framework of the ruling ideologies was indeed a bit curious. However, the topic of the aesthetics in the times of the softening of one Party regimes is not very interesting now since many past debates have already made clear everything about the contexts and the ideological signifiers of the Soviet aesthetics. However, the "socialist canons" could be understood as a symptom of the cultural profile of societies, which existed within the socialist states. The officially supported taste for artistic products varied significantly in different countries. In Yugoslavia, for example, all forms of modern art more or less flourished, except some very specific artistic movements and particu-

3   Such attitudes to mass culture in the Soviet Union were a basis for rather bizarre reports in the western press about the Soviet leader Leonid Brejnev's taste for films of the Hollywood Western genre. Brejnev even collected such items as cowboy hats, Colt pistols and so on while general Soviet audiences were denied to watch the bulk of Hollywood and other Western audio-visual products.

lar products, which were considered too politically provocative. Generally, the ruling ideology and media censorship in socialist societies helped to preserve a kind of conservative culture. However, on a scholarly level modernist and postmodernist differences between *highbrow* and *lowbrow* culture, as well as controversies between theoreticians concerning artistic values were not so different on the both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Transition Over the Barriers of Identity

In the realm of mass culture, socialism favoured traditional folk art, although as it was producers and authors who created some productions of entertainment in music and in cinema that tried to compete with Hollywood and Western pop music. However, in 1960s, the system in most socialist countries, especially in the central European ones, could not prevent urban youth from listening to rock music nor from forming some very provocative rock bands[4] as well as matching worldviews. Still, such phenomena – no matter how visible and aggravating they were – tended to be more or less sub-cultural exceptions. Hence, Giddens noted: "Paradoxically, state socialism, which saw itself as the prime revolutionary force in history, proved much more accommodating towards tradition than capitalism has been" (Giddens, 1996: p. 51). Considering all these aspects, I may remark that the above-mentioned shooting of the spy movie in the Soviet Union, pointed towards an opening of the already collapsing socialist society to the process of modernisation. However, this pretty obvious point should not be taken too far. A "Western" modernisation from a cultural point of view – including also so-called consumerism – seemed interesting to socialist citizens as long as it was unattainable, but the question of how much had this imported culture influenced deeper structures of the Eastern cultures, remains quite open. Of course, it should be noted that as long as we discuss European societies, the most basic cultural traits were more or less common in all societies both in the East and in the West. The socialist experiment caused a difference in consumer culture by creating a society without free private property and – to a lesser or greater degree in different countries – without a free market in their economies. Apart from this, I can assert that the collapse of the socialist system in a final psychoanalysis actually heftily contributed much more to a renaissance of diverse aspects

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4   One of the rare and very instructive books about the role of some radical movements in rock music is a collection of texts, newspaper articles and other documents, published in 1985 in Ljubljana under the title *Punk pod Slovenci* (Punk under Slovenians – Mastnak, Malečkar, 1985).

of traditionalism. We can even observe here that one paradox led to another. A mass longing for modernisation and its benefits, which looked bigger and shinier from afar, contributed to a jump into a form of what Giddens named the post-traditional society.

In the context of globalisation, the term *transition* became a universally recognised notion, one that applies to politics and economics as well as to anthropology and culture. It had been more or less accepted in most circles of the movements, which were involved in politics, economics or social sciences. The starting point of transition was the clear-cut collapse in the socialist political and economic system and the hazy goals were liberal democracy and a market economy. Nobody claimed any definite knowledge on how this road from point A to point B would be walked, how changes would be implemented, or what kind of problems might be encountered on the trajectory from the known system to an unknown new construction of society. All this had been delegated to the capitalist machine fuelled by the neoliberal ideology. With a high level of certainty, we can now say that most projections of a transition from socialism and a planned economy to democracy and a market economy lacked a specified knowledge of the broad cultural aspects of the roads of transition in different countries. Furthermore, progressive and highly committed social scientists who themselves lived in the socialist system and tried to get involved in various activities for the redemptive social changes, underestimated conceivable impact of ethnic and religious traditions on the political restructuring of particular societies. To an extent, everybody knew that the commitment to social changes could not really be kept under control. Eventually such social and cultural activists had to face the problem of their complicity with the consequences that followed the apparently liberating transformation.

Politicians like Milošević in Yugoslavia, Zhirinovsky in Russia, Meciar in Slovakia and many others appearing suddenly out of blue, were much quicker to decipher the potentials of the "cultural heritage". In some cases – notably in the former Yugoslavia – the misreading of the danger of an explosive mix of culture and politics contributed to irreparably fatal consequences such as ethnically and religiously motivated armed conflicts. These extremes of transition, which will take an awfully long period before their social effects are rearranged into anything resembling tolerant or even multicultural societies, mark the historical limits of the complex social changes in the former socialist world. The processes, which Giddens understands through his notion of *detraditionalisation* (a concept within a

whole conceptual set-up that designates the "new" global reality), acquired much more dramatic and traumatic dimensions in the former socialist world than in the Western countries. On practically all levels of discourse, the notion of *identity* took centre stage in the post-socialist post-traditional world, where a restructuring of the complex symbolic order took place. In most former socialist countries, which worked their way through the political and economic transition, there were (and still are) visible cultural movements and semantic displacements pointing towards new constructions of a range of meanings within the framework of the notion of *identity*. In most Central and Eastern European countries (with the above-mentioned extremes), supposedly old traditions were reinterpreted and historical texts were rearranged in order to fix new/old identities. Hence, we can say that culture is playing a very central role in a string of activities constructing a new order of so-called "new democracies". Of course, in these countries the public discourse on the general level, but also on the expert level and especially in the educational speech, points towards some newly "invented traditions". These discourses are becoming a basis of political rearrangements since a newly acquired statehood or just a new context of intercultural relations, formed a decisive hyper-framework in the field of symbolic social and political "language games", as this field has been called by Francois Lyotard in the Wittgensteinian manner. Most of the Central and Eastern European "new democracies", which survived largely rather unpredictable transformations of their legal systems (changes to property laws were the most crucial) acquired a form of society, which Giddens defines as post-traditional. However, this is just another level of transition, which is nowadays being experienced by all those countries that already underwent deindustrialisation. The kind of society that Ulrich Beck (confirming Giddens' description of society) defines as the "risk society" moves the central constituting agencies from the notion of class differences to "values", which means that cultural categories are gaining a new decisiveness.

We can now see that the sociology of risk society also brings about a turn in perceptions of the social realm with all its conceptual innovations. From its understanding of the reflexive constitution of post-traditional society (which visibly shows how a society constructs itself), Beck and Giddens are actually pointing in the direction of a search for inventions of new social bonds. It looks like this consequence is broadly compatible with the political left, but in the context of globalisation and in a post-traditional pattern, conservative thinkers are inspired to construct ideas of a society

from bits and pieces of tradition. On the one hand, an investment in knowledge from the field of social sciences into political projects is indeed as risky as ever before in history. It seems that the same risks were at work in the collapse of the socialist revolution. On the other hand, it looks as though these post-industrial societies (or their power structures) are, according to Giddens, unable to function without the participation of experts – becoming less and less independent – in the just mentioned fields of knowledge. At the same time, this participation brings about a demystification of formerly highly privileged knowledge, including social sciences, which enter through politics into a dialogue and exchange of experiences with other activities. They take part in the reproduction of a society, which they supposedly explain.

Among many theoreticians and in a wider public such "scientification" of administration, governance and inevitably domination provokes criticism and even protests. In a society, which functions in such a way they see a loss of perspective, alternatives and vision. Advocates of such views, for example, complain about "consumerism", which suppresses so-called spiritual dimension. They accuse mass culture of "primitivism and a decline" since it brought about a flattening of the sense of traditional aesthetics. Therefore, they ignore many facts proving that mass culture in the Benjaminian understanding brought about a genuine democratization of culture as well. In such views, an absence of transcendent and eschatological goals is a cause of alienation, cynicism and anti-social behaviour among youth, which is a pretext for a conservative appropriation of education. As much as there is no doubt about the need for critical perception within the reflexive social reality – which is also now increasingly apparent in some forms that are mediated through manifold uses of the digital technology – the above mentioned criticism represents an echo of nostalgic sentiments in a register of illusions of the feasibility of a "better society". A lot of extensive data, which are illustrated by facts, clearly describe a demise of some traditions, in spite of all "new age" ideologies and reified spirituality. The processes of secularisation are not stopped, the "crisis of family", which is in fact a transformation and adaptation, and "crisis" of most other institutions is evident as well. In view of some world outlooks, covering a range of discourses from the religious ones to both politically "traditional" left and right ones, we are approaching not only the end of history, but the end of the world too. Of course, it does not make sense to deny all big problems concerning the socialisation of youth resulting from the break-up of social

bonds, especially in the institution of family and in sexual practices. Nowadays, the crisis of family is the phenomena of the post-traditional society that antagonises politics and politicians much more than the "old" problem of class differences. Curiously, the political labels remain the same: conservative, liberal, left, right, and so forth.

The question of identity, the articulation of which is especially controversial in "new democracies", antagonises political as well as cultural views. Ethnic and religious determinations of a community are quite often used in fights for power, which frequently bring these countries to the brink of violating human rights and dignity. In the post-traditional society that enjoys the benefits of modernity and hesitates over representations of the past, the question of how to walk the fine line between preservation of identity and co-operation in the global setting remains quite a tricky question for everyone concerned.

The Pleasure to Forbid Pleasure

The political controversies, which in former socialist countries marked a decade before the collapse of the socialist systems and governments, shifted from oppositions between the State and civil society to other grounds and fields. New controversies sprang up from a process of political differentiation, often mistakenly comprehended as "pluralisation". A series of previously not divisive or unimportant signifiers from cultural order instigated a restructuring of the political agency along with many outspoken "new" ideologies. These processes – due to the openings and closures of plural social dialogue – made any comparisons between so-called new democracies more complex and in many respects even irrelevant. Still, we may assume that to quite a large extent, an obsession and fascination inside the space of social imaginary with a notion of *nation* is a common feature in the majority of these countries, but with quite specific consequences in different territories. In the case of Slovenia, a public obsession with the national identity contributes to an unleashing of almost forgotten tendencies to re-define the role of gender differences, meaning above all the place of "woman" in a society and specifically women's relation to sexual pleasure. An analysis of the conservative discourse uncovers an underlying meaning in its concepts of family, nation (ethnicity), sexuality, society and morality: the female pleasure – as ever, but now in a refreshed articulation – is supposed to be destructive.

Sexuality as a "New" Social Issue

Social changes in the last three decades remain phenomena to be analysed and conceptualised, as they continue in the direction of the neoliberal political and economic (dis)order. It is increasingly more obvious that the term comprises of a heap of meanings, but the "fall of communism" maintains being a kind of central point of reference. A special position of this point of reference should not be attributed to any big conceptual weight of it, but only to the fact that as the supposedly breakthrough event, it represents a manifestation of the unpredictability of "reality". Other terms and notions from recent theoretical debates, such as all "post" phenomena are somehow legitimised through this complex event. The same goes for many speculations having to do with information and/or technology as well as for sociological explanations of shifts within the structures of societies. However, the epistemology of the social theories and sciences reflects their own "contamination" with the changes. This may be visible in a number of new concepts or old concepts with a new broader meaning, such as the notion of civil society. Jürgen Habermas observed some differences between the West and the East, concerning the notion of civil society:

> *Radical democratic theories in the West were inspired by a semantic shift within the concept of 'civil society' that has taken place in the political self-understanding of dissidents. But one should distinguish between separate realities that exist here and there. In the Eastern Europe, I am afraid, the structures of civil society are so much a mirror picture of the panoptic State apparatus that they come forth in a phase of its havoc, but they disappear with its termination – almost in all cases. In the societies of the Western type new social movements have a different basis. They commence from other motives, they stand in a different context, and they have dissimilar aims since a dimension of liberties, for which they fight for in the East, is already attained here* (Habermas, 1993: p. 119).

This observation may be taken as generally true, although it succumbs to a bias where judgments of "higher and lower" development "phases" are all too quickly taken for granted. Quite undoubtedly, the two structures of civil society may not be too easily compared, but at the same time, it should be added that the demise of the civil society in the East sometime after the "fall of communism" gave place to a development of the political pluralism within the processes of a supposed construction of democracy. A

need for the formation of new social binds within the changed political order was answered by manifold elaborations of various convictions, projections and, most significantly, by regressions to some almost forgotten values in an effort for social agents to impose their ideological or even straight political hegemony. Although the countries in Eastern Europe represent a vast diversity, we may assume that they are all mostly occupied with a very much controversial construction of society. Politics of gender and the corresponding ideologies, almost un-important or at least less critically exposed in the time of opposition to the bureaucratic socialism, took a place on the central stage.

With some exceptions (notably Romania), the socialist societies in the last decades of their existence introduced many reforms in the domain of sexual politics. The communist parties in a desperate search to modernise their ideologies, along with an effort to patch up the economic systems, introduced a range of reforms in the "soft sectors" of society, such as education and culture and, last but not least, in the domain of rights of women. Therefore, it is not surprising that especially in Central European countries (mostly sharing common Catholic tradition) new governments introduced (or were at least exposed to such pressures) explicit or implicit policies for reducing women's rights. This reduction of rights touches most explicitly upon the right to have abortion on demand.

Conservatism and Traditionalism vs Freedom of Choice

Many efforts of political groups, and characteristically the Catholic Church, to cancel or limit women's rights have become a boring fact of daily life in most former socialist countries. On the phenomenal level something very similar to what has taken place in the USA in 1980s occurred. Questions of abortion, along with the neoliberal concepts of economy, became a constitutive element of a new variance of conservative ideology. Although the underlying social circumstances are plausibly totally different, American slogans and pointed phraseology entered the ideological discourse of various traditionalist political groups. Among such slogans we can find the "right to life", coined by the Family Division within NCCB (National Conference of Catholic Bishops) in USA in 1970. (All references to the American anti-abortionism are to be found in Petchesky, 1986.) Later on, when the front against abortion broadened, miscellaneous forms of the protestant fundamentalism, groups of the orthodox Jews, Mormons and black Muslims entered in to its ranks. This strongly religiously marked social bases of the

New Right was joined by a number of various organisations of far Right such as Young Americans for Freedom, John Birch Society, and World Anti-Communist League to name just a few. Interesting connections to the Republican Party were visible. On the way to power the Republicans made use of zealots in this groups and organisations, but in spite of a degree of anti-abortionist rhetoric and some legislative set-backs concerning women's freedom of choice, the actual politics under Reagan did not totally succumb to all aspirations of the far right. The problem of abortion appears to be a politically mobilising issue by being always caught in a series of equivalences, which visibly mark the field of the conservative discourse: to advocate "life" means to support "the family", which further on means to uphold "morality", that under a historical signifier is identified as adherence to "America". The logic of such discourse is a reduction of differences: "/.../ the logic of equivalence is a logic of the simplification of political space, while the logic of difference is a logic of its expansion and increasing complexity" (Laclau, Mouffe, 1985: p. 130).

The same rule applies to the times of the activity of Senator McCarthy's HUAC that pursued not only "communists" but also homosexuals, left wing liberals and other "non-Americans". Recent American neo-conservatism, of course, may be comprehended as having its historic roots in the notorious witch-hunt of the fifties. However, a more recent movement has much broader sociological reasons, which incorporate a changing role of women in society and, naturally, the representations of political antagonist in the conservative mind-set. In this case, the adversary is the feminist movement that takes place, which was formerly occupied by communism in the views of anti-trade-unionist, Rifle Association, advocates of death penalty, and so on. An ideological construction with a moral emphasis, clearly related to repressive convictions about sex, makes a framework of these political trends. In American preconceptions, the anti-abortion platform evidently comprises a distinct view on sex, in particular on sexual pleasure, and within this context it contains the disfavouring of teenage sex, sex before marriage, to different degrees and oppositions to contraceptives, and even a resistance against the sexual education.

Pleasure Against Nation, Nation Against Pleasure

The Slovenian front against abortion[1] that emerged soon after the apparent political changes cannot be in all respects compared to the American one. However, it is a fact that it borrowed most of its terminology from its American counterpart. To a great extent it made use of anti-communist rhetoric from the darkest times of the cold war. Ultimately, the motive remained the same: *the disapproval of sexual pleasure*. Undoubtedly, the religious resistance against abortion on demand had a triggering role, since the campaign against free abortion had been instigated by the Party of Christian Democrats almost simultaneously as it has been established in a new pluralist political setting. On the other hand, in Slovenia a peculiar feature of an element, which we may label as the *Slovenian ethnic paranoia* is distinctly noticeable. By a pointed interpretation of the statistical indicators of the falling birth rate, a range of right wing ideologies delineate abortion on demand as a threat to the very existence of the nation in a foreseeable future. The argumentation supporting restrictions of the freedom of choice or even a total ban on it, as a rule conveys a message that women's right to have abortions gives rise to a certain way of life, which damages the survival of the nation. According to this line of argumentation, a free abortion represents a licence for an irresponsible attitude towards sexuality, which harms the stability of family and so diminishes morality in general. In such a perspective, this brings about a tolerant attitude towards homosexuality and pornography, which especially cripples the spiritual growth of the youth. As one may observe, the Slovenian anti-abortionist rhetoric does not differ very much from others of the same kind. The difference is maybe

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1   It should be remarked that Slovenia – especially compared, for example, to Poland – does not represent the worst case among the former socialist countries. Tendencies to ban or limit the freedom of choice for women were actually quite quickly repudiated in the political arena after the "fall of the wall". Due to an activity of women's pressure groups, which gained a wide support by general public, the traditionalists lost a political battle in the Parliament in 1991, when the freedom of choice was written into the new Slovenian Constitution. It can be speculated upon how much the already considerable level of women's emancipation attained in the socialist period, hampered attempts to introduce regressive legislation. Nevertheless, the ideology that incorporated anti-abortionism, persists and finds its articulation in the initiatives concerning a "renewal of moral values", in some pressures to introduce "catholic ethos" into the school curriculum, in a fight "against pornography", but above all in hindering the full equality for homosexuals even through referendums on liberal family and gender legislation. The Slovenian version of a fundamentalist movement managed to win until now three referendums mainly due to the legislation, which makes low electoral participation valid.

only in the mode, in which it is structured around a double axis of the religious *and* nationalist signifiers. *The religious argumentation coincides with the nationalist one in a condemnation of sexual pleasure.*[2] Another type of rhetoric, conservative but not explicitly religiously based, does not defy the use of contraceptives and claims them to be a suitable alternative to abortion, which in this view should be more or less restricted. Such discourse finds arguments for restrictions within medical and psychiatric sciences blending them with anti-communism. In this line of thought we can also find standard paradigms of juxtaposition between responsibility and sexual pleasure. There are "theories" of a special advantage of "love" as opposed to "bare sex", and persuasions about grave psychic consequences of abortion. The pattern of this line of argumentation very much resembles the one, which ascertains that masturbation is harmful since it induces a "feeling of guilt". But as much as we try, it is impossible to find any other basis for such an assumption, but the self-referential one: a "feeling of guilt" is derived from the conviction that masturbation induces a "feeling of guilt". The spectrum of opposition to free abortion on demand is completed by a range of compromising standpoints, which do not advocate any ban on abortion, but they would install counselling, and various administrative barriers. Such measures should effectively dissuade women from seeking a solution for their problems in abortion. However, this permissive attitude shares a common denominator with the above-mentioned stringent views: a conviction that the abortion is a practice of women, who irresponsibly or ignorantly indulge in sexual pleasures.

All that is available as a common sense argumentation against any hindering of women's free choice has been told many times over, comprising of explanations, which point out that abortion is still necessary beside contraceptives. Further on, free choice is supported by the assessments of the fact that abortion makes an integral part of the social equality of women. In addition, medical reasoning, which demonstrates that a supposed

2   In the universe of "new democracies" in an empirically observable political reality, some phenomena differ from usual patterns. Some undoubtedly right wing political groups and Parties appear to resist "capitalism" and advocate interests of the working class and some nationalist parties do not express a definite stand on sexual politics, which one would expect. Such cases are to be found in Slovenia as well. The irreligious stream of nationalist ideology in part intermingled with a flow that one may label as "enlightened" and it was expressed throughout 1990s in a fringe, but significant, Slovenian National Party (SNS). We may take this as a sign of a situation of a social restructuring that is reflected in an eclectic construction of new ideologies within the pluralist setting.

dangerousness of abortion is minuscule, if an abortion is performed early enough and in the aseptic setting, makes reasons for free choice much more strong. The research in areas all over the world proves, that psychological consequences are rather relieving than the other way around.[3] A most powerful proof based on hard data, that the suppression of abortion within legal framework brings about illegal and truly dangerous practices, has been put forward over and over again within a context of liberal view on special women's rights, which should be left untouched. Although at least for the time being, the adversaries of free abortion on demand in Slovenia scored a considerable political defeat, they continue to seek routes to at least hinder it. As in the United States, also in Slovenia an argument concerning the spending of taxpayers' money on "sexually unrestrained women" has been brought forward.[4] In the case of USA some decisions of the Supreme Court, that took into account such arguments and made some concessions regarding the Roe v Wade act (1973), already made open access to abortion difficult especially for socially underprivileged women.

Microscopic Human Being

One could go on and on excerpting arguments of the opposing sides in a never-ending debate. However, I shall concentrate on defining the dividing line between advocates and adversaries of free abortion. Across this line, obviously no dialogue that would make sense is possible. The view, that already a microscopic pellet of cells in the first few weeks after a conception represents a human being (and even a citizen) totally excludes another view, concerning the female body, which assumes that no one but the women themselves should decide on their bodies. A view that in a small nation any waste of "already conceived children" is a loss, excludes a view that only desired children should be born.

The dividing line between the advocating of free abortion on demand and the opposite attitude marks the difference regarding a relation to sexual pleasure. However, there is no symmetry between the two opposed positions – considering the kind of argumentation, which each of them brings

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3   Certainly, there are grave misuses of abortion in some culturally determined environments, for example in a number of Asian countries, where modern medical technology helps to establish the sex of foetuses, and then female ones are aborted in mass.

4   The overviews in this section of the chapter are mainly derived from the collection of articles in the book edited by Eva Bahovec-Dolar (1991) and published by a feminist group that called itself "Women for Politics".

into debate. Examples that directly or indirectly refer to sexual pleasure are above all perceived by the *adversaries of free choice*.[5] Advocates of free choice confront the adversaries with the sociological, legal, and political argumentation, which points out that a direct link between free choice and phantasmatical unrestrained sexual life is practically non-existent. In any seriously prepared data on abortion, "ordinary" family women represent the largest proportion among all women who make use of the procedure of abortion. Those women, who may be marked as "promiscuous", appear only in a marginal – almost insignificant – ratio. Finally, all data clearly indicate that abortion is one of the instruments of a control of reproduction, which makes sense considering the changing role of women in the society and in the economic and political systems. *Considering these facts, it seems odd that adversaries of free choice, almost without any exception, insist on their phantasm of abortion as the cause of supposed widespread over-indulgence in sexual activities.* Why is it so? The answer is not easy to be found, but it should be sought in the origins of the phantasm of sexual pleasure. As we know, and especially taking into account catholic and some other religious terminology, sexual pleasure is to the extent, in which it does not serve procreative purpose, marked as the most sinful among all possible pleasures. However, this fact alone cannot explain fully why abortion is solely such an important point in the constitution of the right wing and conservative ideologies. It is known that abortion, as almost the only method of controlling the birth rate (along with big health risks for women), existed already in previous centuries but it did not cause any significant political response (Petchesky, 1986). The reason is not so hard to see. Considering the organisation of the family, especially in the 19th century, from which at least some raw data on abortion are accessible, it is obvious that what had been going on has been happening in the framework of the bourgeois patriarchal family.

Sexual Pleasure is Male

"Non-functional" sexual pleasure was in such a patriarchal society clearly regulated by a number of moral, ideological, religious and even quite decidedly legal mechanisms, and accordingly, forbidden to women. A woman, as a wedded person and mother, simply was not a subject of sexual pleas-

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5   The declaration of the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), which includes a clause on the right of women to have a satisfying sexual life, should have brought about a turn in the stalemate discussions concerning abortion. Of course, it did not.

ure. *A real place of sexual pleasure, defined as the male pleasure, and consequently tolerated, has been the brothel.* From this we can jump to the conclusion that a *"problem of excessive sexuality", represented by phantasms of conservatives, is a "problem" since it concerns the female sexual pleasure.* All rhetoric concerning the "responsible attitude to sex" (this includes of course an unconditional acceptance of the monogamy and a set of values attached to it) aims at "owners" of the particular reproductive organs, "owners" of the uterus. As much as the feminist movements may be right in their criticism of many aspects of inequality of women in a society, one can, nevertheless, assert that the *breaking point of the conservative fears is the changed* (and hopefully still changing) *social role and status of women.* Their fear was even aggravated by the appearance of the feminist movements, which in the 1960s brought about also some radical demands in an attempt to speed up the process of women's emancipation. In the area of (sexual) pleasure, therefore, appears to emerge a displacement of previous relations – instead of patriarchal legitimacy of sexual pleasure as a male category. This displacement is furthermore illustrated by the fact that the feminist discourse enters open pluralist concepts of society, which embrace the rights of all kinds of minorities and marginal social groups. This explains why the feminist discourse is apprehended as a discourse of a social minority although women cannot be in real terms considered as a minority. The implementation of women's rights, hence, clearly indicates and instigates at the same time, a structural social change. Of course, this does not involve an immediate collapse of the institution of family, the breakdown of morale and who knows what, which the conservatives claim. However, it implies shifts within these institutions, as well as a changing of their position in the complete institutional environment. Consequentially, this structural social change anticipates a change in the political organisation of a society, thus complementing the changes in the sphere of economy. The fact that in such a setting women may freely decide on the use of their reproductive organs gains a huge threatening symbolic meaning in the eyes of conservatives. From the very definition of conservatism follows an articulation of arguments that are projected into a never existing "stable times" of an order, which has been founded on the interdiction of the female sexual pleasure.

The conservative contrariety to sexual pleasure is therefore *aimed against the female sexual pleasure and not against pleasure in general*, especially not against the kind of organisation of pleasure, as it supposedly ex-

isted within the patriarchal type of society. The tendency to restrict abortion rights in fact clearly aims at a restriction of sexual pleasure, which consequently could be identified with an imperative of the male sexual pleasure. *And what pleasure is there in this restriction of pleasure? Obviously, that is the pleasure of forbidding pleasure to the other - to the woman.* From this conclusion it clearly follows: *those who believe in existence of an immoderate and unrestrained sexual pleasure, are the conservatives and not the feminists!* The advocates of the pluralist, liberal, and democratic concepts offer a new model of an economy of sexual pleasure based upon a demystifying of the right of the other to seek pleasure. This type of discourse therefore is not in fact concentrated around the "problem" of pleasure, except in the ironic remarks about the arguments of its adversaries.

3: Transformations: Ways of Art

Counter-identification and Politics of Art

Art is taking positions in the symbolic universe by affirming singularity, which by virtue of being always some *artefact* (i.e. artistic fact) transcends any particularity of the singular as such. This holds true for artistic products of all kinds in no matter which period of history or culture or other relevant contexts; but really remarkably, such claim has been made possible and rather clear only in recent periods due to the profiles of art and its "statements".

The Ineffable

However, for some older art, such aspects have grown to be readable through theory, which of course cannot but keep being problematic due to a special reflexivity, which is linked to the dialectics of subjectivity. This enables some positions within the field of theories, which "assign science a priori limits" (Bourdieu, 1996: p. xvi). Pierre Bourdieu mentions philosophers from Henri Bergson to Martin Heidegger and in a distinct manner Hans-Georg Gadamer as representatives of – let me just say it – fetishism of art, which denies sociology's capacity for any relevant analysis of art. Largely this denial can be generalised for any other form of "rational" knowledge.

> *Is it true that scientific analysis is doomed to destroy that which makes for the specificity of the literary work and of reading, beginning with aesthetic pleasure? And that sociologist is wedded to rel-*

ativism, to the levelling of values, to the lowering of greatness, to the abolition of those differences, which make for the singularity of the "creator", always located in the realm of the Unique? (Ibid: p. xvii).

As much as these questions clearly aim at constituting a methodological basis for what follows in Bourdieu's influential book as a complex analysis of the "literary field", heavily building upon, above all, Gustave Flaubert's work, they mark a very significant period in the modernist and contemporary discussions on a position of art in the social context; as if any other broad context existed! The very need to stress the "socialness" of the context is indicative for the position of art and its activity at the time of significant transformations of forms of art and a revolution of conditions, within which it is being produced. Changes of modes in which art is "consumed", of course, make part and parcel of these varying contexts. At the time when Bourdieu had put a new emphases on these questions, he denoted what was already becoming a rather common knowledge in different fields of cultural analysis, shaped gradually through and by various combinations of the post-structuralist epistemology, critical discourse analysis, feminist and postcolonial theories, and so on. Correspondingly, one must not forget the influences of a multitude of modern and postmodern forms of artistic practice itself as well. To make my point even clearer, let me just expose another set of Bourdieu's questions, which address what happens to be designated by the notion of *transcendence*:

> *Why such implacable hostility to those who try to advance the understanding of the work of art and of aesthetic experience, if not because the very ambition to produce a scientific analysis of that* individuum ineffabile *and of the* individuum ineffabile *who produce it, constitutes a mortal threat to the pretension, so common (at least among art lovers) and yet so "distinguished", of thinking of oneself as an ineffable individual, capable of ineffable experiences of that ineffable?* (Ibid.: p. xvii).

These questions could be read not as a destruction or reduction of transcendence, but rather as a defence of the notion – to an extent – in the original Immanuel Kant's sense. Addressing the realm of transcendence as "ineffable" actually represents a renouncing of a potential of subjectivity, since the transcendental cannot reside anywhere without the agency in a figure of a subject. Since I do not intend to get caught in the discourse of Bourdieu on the level of its methodological opening, let me just point out

that the part of his work, dealing with art, demonstrates and opens more than just a possibility for articulations of many different perceptions of artistic production. At the same time, this means that an artistic activity becomes determined in a field of the reflexive symbolic practice, which is undoubtedly recognised and anchored in his sociology.

Therefore, when Richard Shusterman, commenting on Bourdieu and his quest for a "generative formula" of art, says that "there are other models of understanding and interpretation that are more immediate and experiential" (Shusterman, 2009: p. 6), he overlooks Bourdieu's point. Bourdieu indeed does not deny the existence of "other models", but he draws our attention to the approach, which is (not rarely quite aggressively) excluded by many such other models. His focused analysis, therefore, cannot be taken as any "reducing [of] all artistic creation and appreciation to social mechanisms" (Ibid.). On the contrary, Bourdieu shows how certain perceptions of art, based on some philosophies such as Heidegger's and Gadamer's, exactly reduce art to categories of the "ineffable". Additionally, it does not matter whether they are linked or not at all to the notion of beauty. What they do is to suppress the awareness of unavoidable agencies in a social space, including so-called social mechanisms and the role of schemas of perception. Later in his text Shusterman demonstrates himself how art is readable in the coordinates of the social space, acknowledging "an impact" that art "has on our social and ethical attitudes" (Ibid.: p.7).

Anyway, such misunderstandings and/or shifts of emphasis and focus mark the field, into which my writing in this chapter is inscribed. It seems to me, that putting art into any relation to politics implies a whole range of notions and categories within a framework of a concept of society and especially within the framework of the idea of culture as a homonym of the notion of "society" – at least from the period of the 1960s, when the concept of culture was increasingly becoming a part of cognitive maps of society. Hence, this approach to art does not "reduce" it, but it actually expands the field of its relevance and broadens the framework for understanding of it.

Some political concepts in a framework of so-called politics of recognition were attached to distinct social groups, which were characterised by their "cultural" features. "Above all the idea of recognition has been used to develop an alternative to normative thought grounded in what has been called the 'philosophy of the subject'" (McNay, 2008: p. 61). Besides this, the idea of recognition played a significant role in shaping the field of politics in practical terms and, as it happened, art entered this domain as an

independent activity or sometimes as a pursuit, supporting some social action, which acquires additional symbolic power through artistic gesture. As much as the "nature" of art changed through the period of modernism, this change provided new readings of whichever art considered as classical art. Therefore, Bourdieu's interpretations of Flaubert's literature represent a new instance of a reflection on art, which consequently enables artistic practice to work with social facts as its "material". Our starting point in Bourdieu's explanation of his approach, however, does not imply that we are about to undertake a "sociological"[1] research; I am just aiming at taking a point of view in accordance with the above mentioned transformations in modern history. What I have in mind is much more an implication of a founding of the need for exposing the singular (work of art) in its meanings, positions, intentions, readability, paradoxes, and so forth in order to grasp an artist and their work of art as an object in the framework of aesthetics. Of course, this framework is changing through time. Especially after Benjamin's intervention in the field of theory of mass culture, the framework is expanding by widespread usages of the methodologies of multi-disciplinary theory. So Bourdieu's positioning of *science* in a rapport to art gives way to a positioning of art, or at least of a particular work of art in the order of politics within a social space. This claim should be read as the hypotheses, upon which I am continuing to discern particular features of the politics of art.

Reversal of a Perspective

Are we nowadays abandoning all links between art and human happiness? It looks very much so that one can never get rid of ethics. The perspective taken by Bourdieu – and not only him – does not abolish all these aspects; it actually puts a stronger emphasis on them. However, one question remains pertinent in its radical articulation in the last instance: have artists ever really existed, or were they just figments of theoreticians' and critics' imagination? The answer depends on historical moments and on social changes as well as on the shifts in economic and political (power) structures. On this background, another question arises as well: who believes that art has ever been truly defined and clearly determined? This, on the other hand, does not mean that art "functions" without definitions. On the contrary,

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1   It would also be a rather disputable matter to reduce the complexity of Bourdieu's theory to "sociology" as it is designated in more mundane terms in other contexts, where sociology quite often happens to be deprived of a serious theoretical framework.

one can say that an ever recurring redefining of art represents a part of any "generative formula" of art along with aesthetic theory. The whole history of reflections on art – from Plato's and Aristotle's concepts of mimetic function at the core of the meaning of art to the many explicit negative and positive definitions of art in relation to the sensual experiences, insights, truth and social action in avant-garde manifestos – one way or the other – exposes various aspects of manifestations of *subjectivity* through artistic practice. It is important to stress an innermost determination of subjectivity, which in spite of all efforts by philosophers such as René Descartes, Johann G. Fichte or Jean-Paul Sartre, makes any total reduction of the *duality* as an inevitable attribute that determines the subject impossible.[2] As we know, especially from the times of German idealist philosophy in the period of romanticism, this *duality* as a determination of the notion of the *Subject* can be discerned ontologically, epistemologically, ethically and, very significantly, also aesthetically. What I basically have in mind is the *opposition subject-object*, which in the relevant articulations finds everything from Kant's epistemology to Hegel's dialectics. However, this duality bears importance for aesthetics because it differs from just "simple" duality of empirical sciences, since the activity of the subjective side makes the opposition decisively asymmetrical.

Giorgio Agamben brought forward an aspect of the *duality* within subjectivity, which more or less determines a whole period of bourgeois culture. The fact that within this culture aesthetics and art were largely linked by the concept of beauty situates subjectivity at the centre of any reflection and consideration of the activity of the perception of art. Agamben exposes the determination, which I talk about here, by evoking Friedrich Nietzsche's criticism of Kant from *Genealogy of Morals* in view of aesthetic "pleasure without interest", which introduces the "spectator" into the concept of "beautiful". Nietzsche disagrees with Kant and therefore, as Agamben says, his point is to "purify" the concept of "beauty":

> *This purification takes place as reversal of the traditional perspective on the work of art: the aesthetic dimension – the sensible apprehension of the beautiful object on the part of the spectator – is replaced by the creative experience of the artist who sees in his work only* une promesse de bonheur, *a promise of happiness. Having reached the furthest limit of its destiny in "the hour of the short-*

2   "*Mais la dualité est indéfectible*," (But duality is ceaseless) said also Jean Baudrillard not so very long time ago. See: Baudrillard, 2004, p. 159.

est shadow," art leaves behind the neutral horizon of the aesthetic and recognizes itself in the "golden ball" of the will to power (Agamben, 1999: p. 2).

This is, of course, one of the possible articulations marking a basic shift in the very position of art at the time, which followed many social, political and spiritual turbulences of the 19th Century. In a way, it is also explaining how it had become possible to talk about the rules of art, as in the case of Bourdieu. This *turn from the spectator to a creator* could not ultimately succeed in its unilateral sense. Even *l'art pour l'art* mostly reflected more a hopelessness of its "project" than any serious ambition. However, what was left of it has been an idea that a work of art might and can contain a statement, or that it even could be above all a statement – no matter how appalled any advocate of the original meaning of the concept would be. Such ponderings played very visible role in the mid-20th century and ever after – as it seems. The residue of the heroic attempt of *l'art pour l'art* are many annoying questions, repeated, rephrased, connoted and asked: if art is about statements that artists utter, what happens then to the cherished aesthetics? To answer such question we should take into account Benjamin's observation, which probably most conclusively wrapped up the contribution of the concept of *l'art pour l'art*:

> With the advent of the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction, photography, simultaneously with the rise of socialism, art sensed the approaching crisis, which has become evident a century later. At the time, art reacted with the doctrine of l'art pour l'art, that is, with a theology of art. This gave rise to what might be called a negative theology in the form of the idea of "pure" art, which not only denied any social function of art but also any categorizing by subject matter. (In poetry, Mallarmé was the first to take this position) (Benjamin, 1969: p. 224).

Agamben's and Benjamin's quotations point to the same direction. *L'art pour l'art* through these two (or any among many similar) readings becomes just an instance in art's and society's history. Agamben makes his point by way of a rather metaphorical mean in a more deep sense than it seems at first sight, as the point is caught in a dialogue with Nietzsche. Therefore, his observation of art that "recognizes itself in the 'golden ball' of the will to power" could be clearly joined with Benjamin's hint that actually the instance of *l'art pour l'art* achieves the total opposite of the in-

tent, which is inscribed in it. Still, as Benjamin remarks in the next sentence, the theory "(...) must do justice to these relationships, for they lead us to an all-important insight: for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual" (Ibid.). Not only by the turn from spectator to creator art "leaves behind the neutral horizon", but it also becomes involved in the social context as it produces signifiers, which are in the last instance political, since in any form or whichever presentations they unavoidably address the public. And the public, as a phenomenon of the bourgeois era, when the notion of society designates a formation, which had left behind a "phase" of organic community, has always been targeted by politics and *vice versa*. The very word "politics" invokes meanings like power, domination, and nation and of course, as also Benjamin points out, war. However, there are also many other aspects of politics, especially when we take into account some categories of social dynamics like economics, development, emancipation, redistribution, welfare, equality, community, freedom, population, and let us not forget biology. The bio-politics as it was conceptualised by Michel Foucault[3] is, for instance, reflected in the modern and postmodern art by representations of the body in various kinds and genres of art: from theatre performances to gallery installations. Well, one must accept that back in history perceptions of art (and of reality in general for that matter) were different, although we cannot know exactly what the authentic ("auratic" in Benjamin's terms) perception of the art has had been. However, we know the reason about the difference, which happened to be a product of many interacting developments, involving notions such as society, technology, history and revolution.

What kind of politics does art really represents? The answer to this, not just a rhetorical question, cannot be simple since art *is* – no matter how very special – a political agency; sometimes it mimics politics, sometimes it succumbs to a dispute with it, and of course, it likes to mock politics. Therefore, it seems almost impossible to grasp all the complexity of the relation between art and politics. Undoubtedly, politics produces a social space for art in many imaginable ways, and probably the bulk of art is being (re)produced in a rather active collaboration or at least in an attitude of pretence or forthright neutrality towards politics. One just has to think about all the music played in the settings of a semblance of a ritual, canonised theatre

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3   See a number of Foucault's lectures, published in: Foucault Michel (1997). *Il faut défendre la société*. Paris: Seuil/Gallimard

and literature, statues in public spaces, cinema as entertainment or propaganda, and so on. However, what makes art exceptional and, therefore, capable of producing singular "breakthroughs", are not only all these generally accepted forms of arts' undoubtedly very important contributions to our daily life under any kind of political system. What I am thinking about here, are the phenomena such as different interventions in the symbolic order, which consist of some novel gesture, an invention of an articulation or form, or a specific subversion of a meaning or of an ideological structure, and so forth. They are in most instances marked by some relation to politics, which can be described or theoretically elaborated.

It is understood that artists in different periods use specific means to achieve some decentring or destabilising, for example, of a cognitive scheme or some naturalised ideological meaning of a notion or a concept. But, in the "age of reproduction", which is simultaneously an age of the expanding communication and public performances, an attitude within the mechanism – or rather a set of manifold mechanisms – of identification process, stands out as a specific artistic effect. I am talking about *counter-identification* – obviously a term from psychoanalysis – which is strongly related to any construction of a subject. The positioning of a subject or "creation" of an imaginary and/or fictional subjectivity, which relates in various ways to the personality of an artist or identity of an artistic group, is always playing a role in no matter what kind of enactment of an artistic act. The term's meaning is related to a problem in the clinical practice of psychoanalysis and as such, it is noticeably synonymous with the notion of counter-transference. Mijolla's Dictionary of Psychoanalysis in this sense mentions Robert Fliess' definition of counter-identification as "an irregularity in the counter-transference that must become a topic of the analyst's self-analysis if it is to be overcome. Such a distortion of empathy results in a part of the analyst's ego identifying with a part of the patient's ego, causing the analyst to no longer observe the patient with the necessary analytic attitude." (de Mijolla, 2005: p. 348). However, the usage of the term broadened and diversified the meaning. Hence, the same dictionary, which lists two different meanings, refers to "French authors" as responsible for what I described as a broader meaning: "For certain French authors, it designates the subject's adoption of character traits, drive tendencies, or of defensive modes that are opposite to those of an object that the subject fears or with which he refuses to identify" (Ibid.). Especially at the time, when psychoanalysis had a strong impact in the theoretical debate in the framework of

structuralism and post-structuralism, the term entered the theoretical discourse and it determined also the field of aesthetics, which was visible also in Bourdieu's contribution. Madan Sarup refers to Michel Pecheux's theoretical advance on the bases of Althusser's theory of ideology:

> He has added to Althusser's account by sketching three mechanisms through which subjects may be constructed: identification, counter-identification and disidentification. Identification is the mode of 'good subjects', those who 'freely consent' to the image held out to them, while 'bad subjects', troublemakers, refuse it. Counter-identification is the mode of the troublemaker who turns back those meanings lived by the good subjects who are only stating the obvious. The main features of counter-discourses are that they are held in a kind of symmetry, which consists in resisting only within and on the terrain of the prevailing ideologies, which they would challenge. (Sarup, 1996: p. 74).

In a field, such as it is described in these sentences, and in which a construction of a subject through identification takes place, there is plenty of space for different stratagems of artistic intervention. Due to the historical and political circumstances a "strategy" of counter-identification was most visible and artistically effective at the time of modernism, which broadly coincides with the Benjamin's age of mechanical reproduction.

Making Statements

The positioning of art in view of Bourdieu's reading, which moves the notion of the transcendental into the field of an articulate aesthetic discourse, based on a reflexive sociology, should be perceived in an inversion of the relationship between social reality and art in view of the autonomy of art. My hypotheses that the positioning of *science* – meant in the general sense of rational reflexive *savoir* – in a rapport to art gives way to a positioning of art in the order of politics in the social space, is incorporated in the activity of artistic production, which works on its singular intervention in the symbolic universe. The element of transcendence, which enters into a fabric of meanings (or destruction of all meaning, representation, etc.) of a particular work of art, is an effect of subjectivity or the creator, as Nietzsche and Agamben would say. Subjectivity, or its (re)production to be exact, is operated through mechanisms of identification. The differentiation is, of course, just a negative identification, which is especially important in ar-

tistic acts of counter-identification. Working in a vast field of the possible production of singularities, which more or less address and express the phenomena of micro levels of social life, especially the counter-identification exposes or subverts the functioning of politics, which exists through the distribution of modes of domination. Artistic gestures, acts, stunts, reflexive exposures, etc. of social realities (often containing a self-reflection of their generative formula within a social space), which come to life through the counter-identification, are also readable as at least an initiative or an exigency for emancipatory counter-politics. This remains true also in the period of postmodernism, when the "shock value" of modernist art seems utterly exhausted, due to the acceptance of singular positions of artistic acts and products in the public space. However, as art continues to "make statements", we may say that in the best case it takes part in a political context within democracy or that it is in the worst case decentring perceptions of "normality" for which politics strives in its dealings within power relations.

On Digital Exposures

Contemporary Art is the institutionalized network through which the art of today presents itself to itself and to its interested audiences all over the world (Smith, 2009: p. 241).

After a closer reading of the sentence cited above, which sounds as a simple and quite clear assertion, we cannot avoid paying attention to the figure of replication in Smith's expression, which postulates a double position of art that "presents itself to itself". Smith's relatively discreet inference brings forward a kind of a double bind, which determines a positioning of art within the institutional framework that, in turn, makes art for what it is.

Double Exposure

Although he is not saying it, Smith actually points towards the notion of exposure as Mieke Bal has conceived it more than a decade before Smith's text was published. The institutional network, with which Smith even ontologically identifies the very meaning of contemporary art, was originally determined by the institution of museum. This is still the case even though the museum has expanded in between to other spaces, especially significantly into so-called virtual space. The triumph of the museum as the institution in the sphere of art is paralleled by some other such triumphs like University in the area of education. However, historically and socially such triumphs tend to have a transitional and mediating role. Therefore, for ex-

ample, the institution of University keeps determining levels of education as well as a global academic space and the notion of knowledge itself, but at the same time, knowledge is increasingly being produced and becomes available elsewhere as well. Still, the University ultimately keeps being the instance of verification of knowledge as well as museum and/or gallery functions as a safeguard that verifies 'art,' no matter where different artefacts happen to be shown or exhibited.[1] Therefore, the institution of the museum should be taken as a specific materialization of a metaphor of itself, which became universally recognised through the course of time of modernism and even more emphatically in the time-space of post-modernism.

Mieke Bal, explaining her "partly metaphorical use of the idea of 'museum'," subsequently points out: "The discourse around which museums evolve, and which defines their primary function, is *exposition*" (Bal, 1996: p. 2). There cannot be exposition without gestures "/.../ that point to things and seem to say: 'Look!' – often implying: 'That's how it is.' The 'Look!' aspect involves the visual availability of the exposed object. The 'That's how it is' aspect involves the authority of the person who knows: epistemic authority. The gesture of exposing connects these two aspects" (Ibid.). The idea of exposure points, as Mieke Bal elaborates further on the next page, to a "subject/object dichotomy," which is a fundamental aspect of the binary determination of the art and its notion as it happens to be recognised by experts and wider public.

However, there is also an agency of double determination of exposure in the process of the *production* of a contemporary artistic work. This side turns out to be much more perceptible, when we take into account the technological aspect of contemporary art, which works in conjunction with the institutional aspect. The analogue electronic media, the technology of CRT (*cathode ray tube*), which at first enabled television and the displaying of videos, entered into museums and increasingly shaped artistic events in the period of the peak of modernism, already entering the new age of post-modernism. Such an exposure of art to itself presupposed a double action within the very process of making an object for a video shooting. This double action of arranging an object and 'visualising' it on the magnetic tape was able to produce an exposure in the form of a display in an

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1   Paradigmatic cases for this are, among others, Christo's (and his wife's Jeanne-Claude's) installations in all kinds of open spaces, but their artistic significance was confirmed by museums which exhibited a range of artefacts related to the installations, like preparatory drawings, photographs, etc. It is understood that their work is abundantly documented on the Internet.

electronic presentation in a gallery or a museum or in an exhibition within an event – for example, the biannual *mostra* in Venice or the *Documenta* in Kassel, etc. Digital technology further enfolds the imagined space behind the screen since the object can be also generated within the act of what used to be the shooting of an object, or a scene, or whatever the case may be. Still, the double gestures are retained at least in the same way as a Derridian trace, which has a complex signifying effect. Therefore, double gestures also affect the institutional external/internal space within the institution of museum. "It is no exaggeration to suggest that new media provides performance with an energy and excitement perhaps unparalleled since the advent of silent cinema. Spectators, faced with the morphing shapes of holographic form and virtual reality, are confronted with an artistic spectacle strangely similar in effect to that of the silent cinematic image described in 1927 by Antonin Artaud" (Murray, 2008: p. 36). This gives Murray a pretext to suggest a new understanding of an increasingly important feature of contemporary art under the auspice of the *digital baroque*. Digital technology is only the last agency in a whole history, in which marvellous effects appear in the artistic field. Changes of the modes of production within the industrial civilization, which decidedly determined social and economic spaces, exposed a new relevance to the processes of making a work of art. These changes propelled a range of different approaches to the processes of the conceptualisation of reflexive impacts of representation (in a performance) of interactions between perception and objects generated in the artistic practice. Of course, Benjamin's epistemological break, as it has been expressed in the notion of *aura*, serves as an unavoidable explanatory theoretical reference here.

Shanghai Twins

"Expository agency ought, however, not to be equated with individual intention" (Bal, 1996: p. 8). This, Mieke Bal's imperative, expressed in a kind of a methodological request addressed to expository agency, could be taken nowadays as almost a rule by which the museum custodians work, being aware that their practice makes up part of some cultural politics. There is no need to say that especially in art museums, but increasingly in other kinds of museums too and in other forms and genres of the presentations of art, the curators tend to avoid any accusation of essentialism against them. Hence, in this sense they tend to ally with artists in an effort to contribute to a decentring or even subverting of a dominant (broadly ideologically de-

termined) gaze. Categories of the binary, the double, the dual in different asymmetrical arrangements, which are usually supposed to produce some deconstructive effect, form frames of contemporary art and its contents, attitudes, gestures and positions. Artists invent statements as much as they produce artefacts. However, so-called shock effects from modernist period are mostly absent; they mostly fail to be generated, although it is obvious that a form of presentation is derived from artistic 'shocks' in the days of yore. Henceforth, a semblance of a structural similarity with the 17th Century Baroque situation seems quite attestable in spite of relative narrowness of the analogy, especially when we take into account incomparable historical contexts and particularly only barely comparable notions of art.

Figure 2. Shanghai Twins at Venice Biennale 2007 (photo: D. Štrajn)

Globalisation, which may well be a content empty concept, has some relevance in art and in the theory, which is trying to crack meanings of art, to define a presence or absence of a message, or decipher any explicit or implicit statements. However, artists and thinkers seem to be, predominantly

in the contemporary art, in the same boat. Let me take just a small example of the intersection of different semiotic axes, or to be more precise, the case in which this intersection was simply positioned within an expository gesture by artists, who have taken the role of the visitors of the exhibition. In the particular case they, at the same time, pointed to a decentring of the colonial gaze and they put a specific and very directly pointed emphasis on the notion of double exposure. The case, which I shall briefly report on, is identified by the name of the artistic tandem *Shanghai Twins*. I had a personal encounter with this artistic 'phenomenon' at the *Venice Biennale* of 2007. I met sisters Cara and Celine Zhuang from Shanghai at the *Arsenali* exhibition space. At first, I took them to be global visitors or tourists from afresh prospering China. I shot two photographs of them, then I had a brief chat with the girls, and I promised to e-mail my photos to them. Only in retrospect was I able to decipher what they were actually telling to me during our brief chat on the spot, where an artist put an old issue of *Vogue Hommes* magazine in an aquarium. Their mission became obvious, when I got on my e-mail, the zipped portfolio of photos (one of the two I shot included in it) depicting the twins together with art objects at the *Biennale* and the *Documenta* in Kassel the same year. Their project in the given case was a work of double exposure on a basic level: two young artists produced their work of art by 'inserting' themselves into the position of art objects. This gesture, however, became more persuasive by the fact that they represented an agency of looking back or returning their look to the colonial gaze. Thanks to the Internet, it was possible to find out that their subsequent work consisted of exposures, which combine genres of fashion modelling and performances. Of course, photographic evidence of their subject/object artistic mix rounds off the exposure. In the same year (2007) they worked with a renowned fashion photographer Jeremy Stockton Johnson and another photographer Giuseppe Ciaolo in a Yu Wei and *Island6* project *Twins and Trompe l'oeil*.[2] Definitely, we have a case in which an effect, conforming the notion of singularity, was produced by the means of multiple double exposures. Obviously, the acts of *Shanghai Twins* retain the exposing representation only and foremost as a photographic trace; they are totally immersed in the aesthetic regime of the arts, which "dismantled this correlation between subject matter and mode of representation" (Rancière, 2000: p. 50).

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2   Evidence of this project can be found on this internet address: http://www.island6.org/Twins_info.html (Last accessed on the 17th September 2016).

Ocean Without a Shore

Many changes after a decisive transformation, caused by the *technical reproduction*, which Walter Benjamin found to be an irrevocable overwhelming social and cultural rearrangement, form folds, marked not only by repetitiveness and a potential for multiplying, but also by multifarious double productive gestures. One of the many impacts of these changes, which finally made the Benjamin's pre-war perspective fully comprehensible sometime in the 1960s, was a reformulation of aesthetics, which had to deal with many problems concerning the relevance of its categories, rooted in Romanticism and in Kant's philosophy. Let us just claim that what is happening in the realm of exhibitions and performances in recent times compels aesthetics to revise repeatedly its basic suppositions and core hypotheses. However, the problems of 'defining the beauty' and the ways of describing the sensual aspect of artistic objects as related to the subliminal dimensions linked to the *Subject*, somehow paradoxically return through the very same media, which made such categories seem almost obsolete. "In the most sophisticated arenas of electronic spectacle, theatrical performance, and multimedia installation, new media artists frequently endorse a paradoxical return to primitivism, mysticism and spiritualism. Particularly in the digitized arena of electronic installation and performance, artists as divergent in form and vision as Nam June Paik, Reeves, Dawson, and Viola have developed artworks that are often described, sometimes by the artists themselves, as soliciting a unifying, spiritualizing aesthetics in contrast to the shifting terrain of politics and identity" (Murray, 2008: p. 50).

The case of Bill Viola's installation at the same *Venice Biennale 2007*, we already mentioned above, illustrates this point well enough. The artist, who in a video on *You Tube*, in which he himself explains his installation in *Chiesa di San Gallo*, confirms Murray's point on both counts: the technological and, let us say, the metaphysical. In the Viola's narration on his own installation *Ocean Without a Shore* a line of explanation concerning the border between life and death, fragility of human life, human condition and mortality interweaves with another line on the technological and other aspects of making the videos, shown on plasma screens and mounted on three altars in the church. Each screen displays a different slow motion movement of human figures starting in black and white, passing through the water 'curtain' and slowly gaining colour. Saying that he "came up with this idea of the notion of the dead coming back to our world – just temporarily" Viola signals his use of a kind of primitive imaginary of the "liv-

ing dead". Looking at the movement of human figures in the recordings one cannot but remember the maverick director George Romero's cult film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). So Viola's installation in its 'metaphysical' dimension could be read as an internal visual interpretation or even as a dialogue with the modernist mass-cultural iconography of the ultimate zombie horror. The installation clearly suggests that such iconography belongs to the past since it exhausted its effectiveness belonging to the register of the modernist techniques of single shocks. His usage of similar iconography in another – digital – media takes, as he says himself, the "*notion* of the dead coming back to our world" not as an emblem of evil, but as a reflection of the human condition. Therefore, Viola demonstrates a power of digital imaging technology, albeit supplemented with laser and other devices in the particular case, to define the space in which the installation is created on a level, unthinkable before. This is not actually any return to the 'pre-Benjaminian' aesthetics, but it is a reminder that the 'old' aesthetics can be brought to "our world – just temporarily". Digital technology in this way signals that the age of new Baroque is our contemporaneity.

Information Accelerator

Another case, among many other and undoubtedly innovative cases, of usage of digital technology, can be seen in the work of BridA, the group of three younger artists: Sendi Mango, Jurij Pavlica and Tom Erševan, who belong to 21st Century researchers of meanings of art. They make use of digital technology in order to expose contours of the post-industrial world. Their installations and other objects can be surprisingly different as far as their form is concerned. Some of them are kind of sculptures like a 'giant' *Information accelerator* which, being a composition of prefabricated tubes, can be adapted to different spaces, but it is always interactive: the 'accelerator' after it is touched on some 'control panels' reacts with sounds and smoke. Another type of BridA's inventions is an artwork, which is generated with the willing public who put colours in the designated squares, following instructions through headphones. This work that directs visitors not only to look, but also involve themselves in the implementation of an artistic 'master plan,' is a clear case of a double exposure, which includes movement between objects and subjects (visitors, most often children), who are turned into instruments of the mechanics of BridA art. The work with the title *Change the Colour* gives its name to the whole BridA's exhibition, which took place in the International Centre of Graphic Arts in May 2011

in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Although much more could be said about BridA's work, let us focus on the question of a common denominator of different exposures, which even in the case of a 'classical' painting succumbs to its inclusion in the narrative of the whole exhibition and, therefore, the common denominator identifies the painting with a screen. This holds especially true in the case of the series of 'screens' under the title *Printed Circuit Boards*. Therefore, the common denominator of BridA's work could be defined as an exposure of a systemic construction, which functions as a metaphor of a scientific mind and its objectification. In the case of Viola's work we came across very visibly used elements of mysticism and primitive imaginary of the spiritual "realities," and in the case of BridA's work, the same aesthetic function is fulfilled by science. What makes both approaches comparable is their distancing from postmodernist play with identity and social signifiers. However, precisely this distancing, which can be deciphered in the visual effects of all three cases, and which we discussed in this chapter, must be read as primarily a gesture, which is in principle comparable to the original Baroque attitude.

Double exposure, which is fundamentally structuring digital and/or digital media one way or the other related to the digital technology, gives the contemporary art a common significance and readability. We are increasingly talking about the modes of production of art works, about aesthetics, meaning the affecting of senses, and about an institution that enfolds this aesthetics into itself and into the world, pretending to have resisted impulses for a social change in the modernist times.

The Principle of Montage and Literature[1]

"Real montage is based on the document" (Benjamin, 1991: p. 232). What does Benjamin mean by this sentence? This statement is a singular notional crystallization in the intersection between literature and film, and it emerged in the context of a specific encounter between Walter Benjamin as a theoretician and Alfred Döblin as a writer. Benjamin's sentence was articulated as part of his review of Döblin's novel, which was quite over-ambitiously titled "The Crisis of the Novel." What are the attributes of the "document" that determines montage? Definitions of the word *document* (which originated in thirteenth-century France) in various dictionaries more or less consistently relate writing to terms such as *evidence*, *proof*, and *reality*. Considering the entire intellectual milieu of the Weimar Republic, in which the novel was written and published, Benjamin's use of the term *document* should be read as a semantic link to the notion of reality within *Neue Sachlichkeit*[2] movement and to the connotations of film as an art that has a strong impact on reality. Hence, film is a "document" that has a special power to represent or modify objective reality. One should

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1   This chapter is derived from the article, published as: Štrajn, Darko. The principle of montage and literature: fragmented subjectivity as the subject-matter in novel, film and in digital forms of narration. In: Zorman, Barbara (ed.), Vaupotič, Aleš (ed.). *Literatura in gibljive slike: tematski sklop = Literature and moving images: thematic section*, (Primerjalna književnost, ISSN 0351-1189, year 37, 2). pp. 39-53.

2   The most common English translations of this movement's name are *New Objectivity* or *New Sobriety*.

also recall the attitude toward daily life and art articulated in the Dada movement and in *Neue Sachlichkeit*, distancing them from Expressionism and opposing the notions of highbrow artwork. Thus, there is a double explanation for Benjamin's sentence: *montage* has to do with evidence of reality and, in the case of the novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz,* the origin of the montage principle unmistakably has to be found in film. Therefore, Döblin's novel should be taken as a clear expression of a mutual relationship between literature and film, which was inevitably bound to happen. Indeed, it also happened in a variety of modes and within many individual novels by various authors such as Heinrich Mann, James Joyce, and John Dos Passos, to name just a few. Considering Benjamin's essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, written a few years later, on the role of reproduction as a founding notion of mass culture of the twentieth century, it can be assumed that Benjamin's review of Döblin's novel points towards the divide within the notion of culture and aesthetics (meaning the divide between "auratic" art and mass reproduced art), which was established by this utmost influential text by Benjamin. In the setting of industrial society, film and literature become entangled within the same field of entirely transformed aesthetic perception and production. The kind of perception addressed here has been described by Benjamin as "distracted perception" (Benjamin, 1969: p. 239).

All kinds of paradoxes of realities of social and moral spheres were inscribed in the aesthetic paradigms of the traditional novel; illusions and phantasmatic constructions, represented through characters of narratives, manifested and expressed subjectivity, which can be discerned at multiple discursive levels: from the philosophical "post-Hegelian" Marxist abstract notions of *das Subjekt* to existentialist and post-structuralist concepts of subjectivity and objectivity. The crisis of the novel as a form became evident when the subjectivity – philosophically not legally or socially – ceased to function as a definable central agency in the real world of the bourgeois system. What else but a new and powerful reflection of the world in moving pictures could have had such an impact as to reinvigorate and transform the very form of the novel, which now had to deal with decentred subjectivity? The encounter between Döblin and Benjamin as well as the interaction between Döblin's novel and film in the mode of "moving pictures" can be taken as one of many indicative points from which the literary text and moving pictures could no longer be considered separately.

Döblin's Hesitant Acceptance of Film

No matter how much Döblin considered some of his later works more important, literary scholarship and the reading public view *Berlin Alexanderplatz* as the peak of Döblin's work. It is more or less agreed that Döblin was involved in the currents of various reactions to what is known as German Expressionism. However, discussion is then open on the extent to which the novel itself conforms to the paradigm of Expressionism, which is mostly described in terms reminiscent of some basic aspects of the definition of Expressionism, as in Steven Brockman's assertion: "Whereas Impressionism seeks to accurately record the play of light and color in the outside world, eschewing sharp contours and favoring gentle transitions, curves, and blurring, Expressionism seeks access to an interior world characterized by garish and unnatural colors, jagged lines, and sharp distinctions between color spheres" (Brockman, 2010: pp. 49–50).

Döblin himself – not really opposing the label *Expressionism* – defined his writing as "epic fiction". Obviously, his work differed from the intellectual currents of the time, although it somehow simultaneously conversed and interacted with them. It is no accident that Benjamin brings Dadaism into his discussion of Döblin, which through its "fanatical battle against artwork has made use of it in order to ally itself with everyday life" (Benjamin, 1991, pp. 232–233). This assertion points towards the entire background of *Neue Sachlichkeit* in its emergence from Expressionism and challenging it at it points towards rich dialogues and polemics of the time, involving some of the greatest intellectual authorities of the twentieth century such as György Lukács and Bertold Brecht.

Döblin's own writings on the relation between literature and film show that his position changed over time. Erich Kleinschmidt goes a bit too far in his claim that "[t]he often-repeated allusion to Döblin's 'filmic writing style' must therefore be refuted. It originates with contemporary critics of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and has been repeated ever since" (2004: p. 167). Kleinschmidt does not mention Benjamin in his article, and so it can be assumed that Benjamin's emphasis on the montage aspect reaches beyond the simple direct and non-reflexive concept of a novel as a narration mirroring cinema. In addition, Kleinschmidt himself contradicts his own assertion because on the same page of the text he realizes that "Döblin's reserved relation to film changed around 1930, along with his changing conception of literature. In place of a rather elitist conception of art, Döblin now wanted to reach a broader mass audience." Benjamin's claim about the role of mon-

tage as the "principle" that affected the narration style of the novel thus envisaged a change in Döblin's position on film. Accordingly, it can conclusively be said that Döblin indirectly acknowledged the filmic effect in his writing retrospectively; at the same time, this retrospective acceptance was helped by the emergence of sound film because Döblin, reportedly in his early comments on cinema, perceived the absence of the spoken word in films as an impediment to film as a full-blown art.

Reading Berlin Alexanderplatz

Walter Benjamin presented Döblin's principal novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* in his essay *Krisis des Romans* in a very condensed manner. The discourse of the review of the novel moves through interdisciplinary fields (as one could say nowadays) such as comparative literature and cultural analysis. There are statements and opinions in the review that should be read together with Benjamin's *Arcades Project*. Howard Caygill rightly connects the project to Benjamin's reflection on the "epic,": "/. . ./ whether the epic theatre of Brecht and the epic novels of Victor Hugo and Döblin, or the anti-epics of Kafka and Baudelaire. The various themes are brought together in the genealogy of modern urban experience as the destruction of tradition undertaken in the *Arcades Project*" (Caygill, 1998: 64). Benjamin's inspiration for simultaneous poetic and theoretical descriptions of the complexities of urban experience in the *Arcades Project* must have been Döblin's novel. Hence, Benjamin's *city reading*[3] – which obviously mingles with Döblin's travels through the various urban and social layers of Berlin of the 1920s as sensed through Franz Biberkopf, the antihero of the novel – reveals the economic and political realities of the structure of Berlin's urban environment. Bourdieu developed the concept of social (and symbolic) space decades later through his reflexive sociological and philosophical conceptual apprehensions of complexities of modern society. Bourdieu's notion of social space incorporates basic aspects of meaning that I have tried to present above: "This space is defined by a more or less narrow correspondence between a certain order of coexistence (or of distribution) of agents and a certain coexistence (or distribution) of properties. Consequently, there is nobody that is not characterized by place where he is situated more or less in a permanent manner" (Bourdieu, 1997: p. 162). The aspect of urbanity has a structuring role because it is inscribed in the constituting movements of individuals as represented by the characters of the novel. "Döblin's epic unites

3   This term was proposed and developed by David Henkin (1998).

collective experience of a place – Alexanderplatz – with the fate of an individual character, Franz Biberkopf. The place forms the locus of the epic, dissolving the solitude of the individual character into a reflex of urban experience" (Caygill, 1998: p. 71).

Walter Benjamin was one of the first theoreticians, who determined some fundamental concepts for reading Döblin's novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, which could be taken as an example of a multiple uses of the counter-identification mechanism. As Benjamin indicates in the text of his review, Döblin's lecture at the Prussian Academy of Arts in 1929 made a strong impression on him. Under the spell of this lecture, he contrasted Döblin's "epic fiction" with André Gide's idea of *roman pur.* Although Döblin knew about and was very impressed by James Joyce, Benjamin insisted that it was unnecessary to operate with artistic expressions (*Kunstausdrücken*), or to talk about *dialogue interieur,* or recall Joyce while considering *Berlin Alexanderplatz.*

> *Actually, this is something different. The stylistic principle of this book is montage. Petit bourgeois leaflets, scandalous stories, misfortunes, sensation from 28, popular songs, and advertisements sprinkle this text. The principle of montage explodes the novel, its form and its style, and it opens up new, very epic possibilities, mostly with regard to form. In fact, the material of montage is not at all random. Real montage is based on the document. In its fanatical battle against the artwork Dadaism has made use of it in order to ally itself with everyday life. For the first time, if only tentatively, it has proclaimed the sovereignty of the authentic. In its best moments, film has prepared us for it.* (Benjamin, 1991: p. 232)

In the case of Döblin's novel the montage, as it has been brought forward by Benjamin, becomes a principle of counter-identification, which works for the author, a reader and, above all, for characters in the novel. As much as things are changing and one cannot speak about any unified field of literary theory, we can say that this theory – or better to say: set of theories – classifies, canonises and validates literary works as it interprets them and at the same time constructs a framework of interpretation. The literary theory undoubtedly declared *Berlin Alexanderplatz* to be an important novel worth of multi-dimensional interpretation: "Döblin's brilliant play with traditions and *topoi* opens doors to an interpreter of the novel to diverse spaces and offers utmost differentiated possibilities of links to biblical

and mythological types of characters as well as literary historical patterns of narration" (Sander, 2007: p. 122). Problems in a scope of readings within this field arise, when the novel has to be classified. For instance: it is more or less agreed that Döblin was involved in what is known as the German expressionism. But – as I mentioned above – it is debateable to what extent the novel itself conforms to a particular "paradigm" of expressionism. Benjamin took almost for granted this descriptive concept. Another point of discussion is how much the narration in the novel can be compared to Joyce's "stream of consciousness", no matter how much the author was actually fond of Joyce. It is less controversial aspect that connections to Brecht had some impact. However, we may say that literary theory did not really finish the job of canonisation of the novel and its author. An explanation for this is, to say the least, its complexity.

Sociological and historical reading of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is invited by the topic and by the polymorphous plot of the novel and its depiction of urban environment in a conjunction with theory of culture and even some strains of anthropology, what we should broadly call sociological reading of this novel. The novel is taken as a representation of a functioning of mass culture in its earlier modern "phase". This is also a specific aspect, which brings Döblin close to Benjamin as the author, who decisively changed fundamental concepts of art and aesthetics in a context of mass culture. It is not unimportant that Benjamin took film as the ultimate form and machinery of and for this culture. Of course, also some more recent sociological theories could make use of the novel. Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* and its imprint in the formation of a social agency, as well as in the constitution of an individual, seems utterly illustrated by the novel. The concept of social (and/or symbolic) space, which Bourdieu developed through his theorising of complexities of urban society, enters the same framework. Further on, an idea such as Danilo Martucceli's (2002) exposition of the sociological deciphering of a "grammar of an individual" in a field of such concepts as subjectivity, reflexivity and identity, could be easily applied to the novel. Political aspects, considering Döblin's explicit political involvements, make part of any sociological interpretation of the novel. The novel moves its narration between inside and outside of subjective field. The reader accepts that the text mirrors reality, but it is obvious that due to the form of narration of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* even the most naïve reading is turned into a reflexive activity of coming to terms with a rough and superficial psychology of the characters, which includes taking positions on their morals. Ac-

tually, reading of Döblin's novel could well be described as an activity of a "distracted perception", which Benjamin finds in a film viewing: "The audience's identification with the actor is really identification with the camera. Consequently the audience takes the position of the camera; its approach is that of testing" (Benjamin, 1969: p. 228-229).

Montage and De-montage

It seems that Benjamin's methodological materialism, "hidden" behind his unique theoretical articulations—a kind of revealing insightful descriptivism—generated such reading of the novel that transcends aesthetics, but retains it at the same time in a sense of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*. Benjamin's singular attitude is characterized by his inexplicit philosophical discourse. He actually never really enters problems such as subject-object relations, transcendentalism, speculations, and so forth in explicit philosophical terms, but his writing nonetheless addresses these problems. Perhaps Benjamin's shunning of explicit philosophy prevented him from taking a step further in defining Döblin's novel as a work of montage. Taking into account the notion of *das Subjekt* as a fundamental concept could make it possible for Benjamin to see Döblin's montage as *de-montage*[4] simultaneously reflecting the decentring of subjectivity as an agency and shattering its "outcomes" in a form of crushed (psychological) subjectivity. However, the process of de-montage, obvious only as the "hidden" and constitutive movement in Döblin's novel, surfaces only much later in Fassbinder's adaptation of the novel in his 1980 TV series.

Nonetheless, the most relevant aspect in Benjamin's reading remains his elucidatory linking of Döblin's novel to the logic of cinematic production, including the notion of *montage*. Comprehension of the text as "directly" linked to the notion of reality is facilitated by Döblin's category of *epic fiction*. This category obviously forms a link with the Brechtian category of *epic theatre*, in which the famous *V-effekt* confronts a spectator with a reality, say, of class exploitation or repressive domination. Döblin's narration style transfers Brecht's idea into the form of a novel and so it gives even a naive reader the chance to take part in an interplay of identification linkages. In this respect, the notion of de-montage would also func-

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4   The idea for introducing the term *de-montage* in this context was suggested to me by Thomas Elsaesser when we discussed the topics of this chapter before it was finished. Of course, the elaboration of the term is my own responsibility. I am also indebted to Elsaesser for numerous other suggestions and thought-provoking remarks.

tion well: the characters of the novel keep building and taking themselves apart. Their identities, relations, and subjectively suggested "appearances" are crumbling as much as elusive truths are working against them. Finally, this turn comes close to a post-modern twist on reality, constructed in a double bind between the reader and a fictional text. "In fact", says Benjamin, "the material of montage is not at all random" (Benjamin, 1991: p. 232).

The novel, decisively marked by the principle of montage derived from cinema, was first published in 1929, just at the time silent cinema was ending in Germany.[5] However, Benjamin himself does not say anything about sound cinema and its potentials in this context, nor in any other context for that matter. Döblin's novel was prompted in fact by silent film, but it implicitly anticipated sound film because one virtually "hears" the vibrating whirr of the city when reading the novel. Therefore, as hinted above, mutual relations between the film and the novel include Döblin's signalling a lack of sound in moving pictures of the silent era.

Fassbinder's Alexanderplatz

It did not take very long after the publication of the novel in 1929 for the first film version of the novel to be shot. Based on the script by Döblin himself and with Heinrich George in the role of Franz Biberkopf, the film was directed by Piel Jutzi, most famous for the successes of one of the "proletarian" films in the Weimar Republic, *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness, 1929). Although praised for its imagery of Berlin and especially the introductory sequence, in which Franz rides a tram after leaving prison, the ninety-minute film was widely considered inadequate in comparison to the "epic" proportions of the novel. Therefore, as much as the novel was generated in the world of cinema,[6] there were obvi-

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5   Brockmann quotes the dynamic of the transition process to sound cinema at the time. "Some basic statistics on production show how quickly the introduction of sound film changed the cinema landscape in Germany: in 1928 Germany made 224 films, all of them silent. In 1929, Germany made 183 films, with 175 silent and eight sound. The next year, in 1930, Germany made a total of 146 films, of which 100 were sound and only 46 silent. By 1931, Germany made only two silent films and the other 142 films were sound. Within two years there had been a total revolution in technology, and the silent film essentially disappeared from German production" (Brockmann, 2010: p. 55).

6   Döblin's connections to the world of moving pictures were abundant and multifarious. From simply being a frequent and enthusiastic film viewer and a writer of film critiques, Döblin's affinity to film also manifested itself in his professional activity in Hollywood while he was in emigration in the United States.

ous problems in transferring or "translating" the text "back" into cinematic format. In terms of the narrative, Jutzi's film was a montage of bits and pieces of the novel, but it missed the background of movement of de-montage through the entire novel.

Almost fifty years after this first attempt, Fassbinder's TV series *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1980) appeared. Yet, in view of the just vaguely dawning era of digital technology at the time, which later substantially altered television as a specific medium and introduced new modes of production and consumption of moving pictures, the format of the TV series still did not perfectly conform to Fassbinder's ambitions or to his ability as film author. Although the TV series offered Fassbinder the needed time span to "tell the story", the small TV screen at the same time represented a very serious impediment for him, and his disposition as a director of films meant for cinema screening worked against some rules of the medium. Therefore, the "lighting levels, judged too low for television" (Elsaesser, 1996: p. 219) in particular were strongly criticized in the series after it premiered in 1980. Regarding the scope of Döblin's novel, it seems that the format of the TV series represented a transitional medium for visual reading of the text. It is no wonder that most serious authors that wrote and theorized about the series analytically and extensively also spoke about a "film" and not about a "TV show" or episodes. However, the framework of this chapter does not permit commenting on some great interpretations of Fassbinder's *Alexanderplatz*, written by authors such as Kaja Silverman, Jane Shattuc, and Thomas Elsaesser.

In the film, Fassbinder made his "naive" reading an instrument of his own historicizing approach as well as an instrument of adapting the story to his "autobiographical" reading. On the other hand, he internalized the novel through two readings and let himself be conditioned by mechanisms of identification, especially declaring his own identification with the character of Franz Biberkopf. Thus, according to the form, the TV series was unintentionally anticipatory in pointing towards media that still did not exist, which opened a path to autobiography as communicable "style" of narration in the age of decomposed subjectivity at home in cyberspace. In any case, Fassbinder combined all of his experience in genre films (above all melodramas and gangster movies) into a montage that compulsively repeats Döblin's complex truth, including both a historical reminiscence as well as straightforward political prophecy. As far as montage is concerned, Fassbinder's approach is definitely much closer to André Bazin's concept,

which favours Orson Welles' deep focus and depth of visual field to Eisenstein's montage of attractions. Indeed, his montage works through the motifs of the novel as *de-montage* combining other means of cinematic narration such as usage of darkness and light, compositions of particular pictures in continuity and discontinuity and – perhaps in this Fassbinder work more than in his other films – handling of sound. Thus Fassbinder's masterful TV series transforms Döblin's very particular narrative into a movement that joins spaces and times, language and society, and subjectivity and its negative reflection as a part of the "metaphysics of social circumstances", to use Elsaesser's expression. Thenceforth, understanding becomes a politics of images and, consequently, a placement of the imaginary into the core of reality. In view of my quest, the most important aspect concerns the drama of a shattered selfhood. Fassbinder's film therefore forms the character as a never-accomplished person; moreover, "/. . ./ his identity is put to the test not according to the narrative transformations that confirm the hero in his full self-possession. Instead, the narrative 'empties' him, readies him for his complete merger with the social body" (Elsaesser, 1996: p. 220). Here, de-montage is at work: it is moving Biberkopf's personality. Therefore, Fassbinder's reading of the novel is far from a passive grasping of the content; it is a kind of re-reading, which opens the novel to a new understanding; it makes the dimension of de-montage visible by taking a clear view on the impacts of capitalism within the protagonist's subjectivity. A psychoanalytical viewpoint, especially linked to women and gender studies, is somehow presupposed and probably consciously communicated by the film. The entire gallery of ruined personalities from the margins of society (thieves, pimps, prostitutes, etc.), with the central character of Franz Biberkopf, makes possible an abundant deciphering of the novel in psychoanalytical terms.

Construction of sexual identities in the novel clearly exposes a connectedness between individual relationships and social repressions, otherwise visible in many of Fassbinder's films. What brings the novel – as well as Fassbinder's TV series – closer to a Lacanian articulation of psychoanalysis than to its Freudian source, is especially Döblin's presentation of the main character. Very interesting points in the narrative line are many Biberkopf's encounters with political agents of the Weimar Germany, like Nazis and communists, but these encounters do not result in the main character's adding any political attribute to his identity. One can say that the character of Biberkopf is constructed as a negative reflection of so-

ciety and therefore, he is offered to a reader as subjectivity, with which one is not supposed to identify. Accordingly, the rapport of counter-identification is projected on the reader, who is supposed to get an insight in the social reality of the time. In Fassbinder's presentation the main character consistently acts under the pressure of a compulsion of repetition, submission, and identifications through unequal exchanges in relations to others, as is shown and explained in detail in Elsaesser's book cited above. At the same time, Fassbinder's film points to shortcomings of psychoanalysis to transcend the boundaries of explaining individual trauma. It is perhaps one of those very special coincidences that his film came out at a time when at least the intellectual audience was widely sensitized by reading and discussing Deleuze-Guattari's *Anti-Oedipe*.

From the interesting viewpoint of gender studies, Fassbinder's TV series discloses a set of reasons for violence against women in this case not so much in merely simple patriarchal attitudes, but in the framework of such a system. Because Fassbinder made no secret of his views on the nascent neoliberal capitalist society as a path to a new fascism, his TV series quite visibly connects the libidinal economy to the capitalist economy. Therefore, no matter how constraining television as a medium functioned in the adaptation of the novel, Fassbinder made Döblin's implicit prophecy, describing the nascent fascist society at the micro-level of the lower layers of society in the 1920s, "functional" again, now signalling the transition from the welfare state to the economy of neoliberalism. Decentred subjectivity is forced to define itself in narcissistic terms and is prone to enter cultural reproduction schemes, which are based on ideological interpellations consisting of entrepreneurial spirit, the myth of individual success, and celebrity appeal. This is reflected in Fassbinder's TV series through categories from the crisis of the late 1920s. Let me conclude by emphasizing that Thomas Elsaesser's analysis of the TV series goes further than most others exactly because it points out the perversion of the economy as it literally becomes visible in the film: "What under one aspect may appear as exploitation and the power to dictate the terms of a transaction is in another respect a form of enterprise, where acts of exchange require the materialist poetry of savage thinking, of wheeling and dealing, of the opportunist's quick response and the speculator's risk-taking" (Elsaesser, 1996: 232). Now the question remains open: can one expect yet another adaptation of Döblin's novel, which still resists total canonization and classification, let alone

any ideological appropriation, in some previously un-imagined medium of moving pictures?

In the Age of Digital Montage-collage

The principle of montage in pluralist settings in today's world of interplay between constructed realities operates not just through artistic practices, but also through a whole complex of various communication, information, and presentations. "We recognize in montage this essential difference born from the principle of disappearance / appearance due to intermittence by the power of cutting to remove, eliminate and convoke, make occur" (Faucon, 2013: p. 47). Here I am referring to the "principle" because cutting and gluing pieces of film or magnetic tape is increasingly a thing of the past as with new technologies the notion of montage becomes much broader because interventions within single frames are possible in a manner in which traditional filmmakers could only dream about. Therefore, the case of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* could be taken as one of the early indicative appropriations of the practice of montage by the novelistic form and even more, as I have pointed out, as an introduction of the power of montage as de-montage. This, then, brings me back to Benjamin and his other immensely influential conceptualization of the culture of mass reproduction, which sheds some light on his view on Döblin – but also offers a paradigm for thinking about yet another change concerning the notion of perception within the framework of mass culture. In his book *Digital Baroque*, Timothy Murray suggests that "new media provides performance with an energy and excitement perhaps unparalleled since the advent of silent cinema. Spectators faced with the morphing shapes of holographic form and virtual reality are confronted with an artistic spectacle strangely similar in effect to that of the silent cinematic image described in 1927 by Antonin Artaud" (Murray, 2008: p. 36). This gives Murray a pretext to suggest a new understanding of an increasingly important feature of contemporary art. Changes of modes of production within industrial civilization, which decidedly determined social and economic spaces, exposed a new relevance of the processes of producing an artwork. They propelled a range of different approaches to the reflexive impacts of representation (in a performance or in a literary work) of interactions between perception and objects generated in aesthetic practice. Digital technology is currently a last result in a whole history of the process, which started by combining science, industry, the capitalist economy, and various criticisms of signifying practices.

Similar to photography, cinema, and video, this technology creates fascinating effects. Of course, Benjamin's epistemological break, as expressed in the notion of *aura*, still serves as an explanatory theoretical instance. Nevertheless, it seems that a change produced by digital technology requires much more than just a kind of quantitative comparison with the impact of mechanical reproduction. "To use a metaphor from computer culture, new media turns all culture and cultural theory into open source. This 'opening up' of all cultural techniques, conventions, forms and concepts is ultimately the most positive cultural effect of computerization—the opportunity to see the world and the human being anew, in ways which were not available to 'A Man with a Movie Camera'" (Manovich, 2002: p. 333).

The advent of digital technology has had a huge impact on a wide range of conditions for production of visual representations in artistic and all other known senses, commencing already at the time of "analogue" television as a "mediatic *flow*" in Raymond Williams' (1974) words (see especially chapter four of his book). The impact of ICT on the form of written documents, diverse genres, including aesthetically marked narratives, necessitates a rethinking of the relationship between literature and moving pictures, now appearing in many other shapes and on other ubiquitous screens than just on celluloid film and on silver screens in cinemas. However, one must take into account the fact that any thinking about this relationship already implies ongoing changes of both occurrences of culture: literature and the media. In new settings of communication, some forms and phenomena of (re)presentation with a vast number of combinations of means of narration have yet to be recognized as a kind of, say, literature or at least documents of reality within virtual reality and *vice versa*. As Manovich observes in his last book, *software* is at the centre of these new realities and, by virtue of being used by hundreds of millions of people, software becomes "cultural software" (Manovich, 2013). What one should look for, especially considering the field of literature and new very "democratized" uses of moving pictures, are therefore not so much some very complex phenomena of so-called computer art, but mass usage of interactive media, within which some forms of narrating, taking different views, commenting, expressing anxieties, accumulating memory, playing with identities, and disrupting many notions of objectivity are taking place. In transcending the boundaries between text and pictures, and between static and moving pictures, narration in the digital media results from de-montage of

reality, which becomes more real rather than a forever-lost "external reality" by virtue of the virtual.

For example, the works of Sophie Calle, who invested much of her daily life in self-presenting her life's experiences through a de-montage of various media, writing, images, films, and outcomes of unusual communications, signalled a future – which is the present now – of wild hybridism and all kinds of narratives, accomplished through mixing different genres. I propose a slight addition to the notion of montage in the case of these new kinds of narratives, and I refer to them as *montage-collage*, which integrates opposite principles of montage and de-montage. The indicative case, which already causes some serious theoretical pondering, is a re-enactment of autobiography, preferably in the form of a diary. One such case is quite a complex internet site, which presents the *Journal d'Ariane Grimm*, consisting of pictures of written pages, small films, blogs, fiction and "auto-fiction," and links the *Journal* to reflections on these activities by Philippe Lejeune (a university expert in autobiography).[7] The site contains a true-life drama because the writer of the journals, Ariane Grimm, died in a motorcycle accident in 1985 and now her journals and a number of ongoing activities around them are managed by Ariane's mother, Gisèle Grimm. The case in point triggers an investigation into whether it is necessary to deal with some new literary form, perhaps another form of novel, a *montage-collage* that is named *Un roman de soi*? One might say that many Facebook users as well as users of some less popular internet-based social networks are already actually doing the same thing. The Facebook universe is a vast world of *montage-collage*, in which there is space for construction of diverse identities, for presenting real and totally invented stories of real or pretended "selves", for unbridled narcissism, and for many other types of self-exposure. Dadaistic and *New sobriety* ideas of art joined to 21st Century daily life come true in an unexpected media – probably not exactly in accordance with the original Dada idea. Even a trace of epic form could be detected, the epic of leisure time incorporated in the system of vast exchanges of imaginary attributes of objects as pictures, small films, and more or less irrelevant statements. Nonetheless, such media proved to be a working tool in cases of the public unrest of the 2010s from Tunisia and Egypt to

7   See http://www.arianegrimm.net/pages/sommaire.html (Accessed: 13th October 2016). My claim that this internet phenomenon raises interesting theoretical questions is based on an oral presentation at the Nineteenth International Congress of Aesthetics in Krakow (22–27 July 2013) on 25 July 2013 by Okubo Miki: "The Actuality of Writing and the Mode of Self-Narrative."

Greece, Spain, and Slovenia. One has to remember the iconic image of Brecht's musing face with just a tinge of smile.

Deleuzian Delusionary Dividualism

Benjamin's diagnosis of the "age of mechanical reproduction," as one could say following Timothy Murray's logic, can be taken as a thought pattern that opens new venues of reflection on just what is being produced in the framework of reading and writing, looking, seeing, learning, and knowing. Curiously, another comparison between two periods – namely, the 1920s and 2010s – springs up: in the time of Döblin and Benjamin as well as in today's contemporaneity it is necessary to deal with a crisis, first of all political, economic, and financial, and also a crisis of art forms, considering that artists in all genres are searching for some new social relevance. The crisis, which appears in Badiou's terms as a surge of the *real* within reality, points in the direction of subjectivity, which inexplicably succumbs to forms of domination within a system paradoxically based on the notion of freedom. Yet another transformation of forms of social life and culture is evolving, and so the citizen, as a psychological subjectivity attached to literary and other kinds of narratives, becomes not only decentred, but in Deleuze's vision also deprived of indivisibility in the form of an individual. I am recalling that at the dawn of the digital era in 1990 Deleuze wrote a prophetic article called *Society of Control,* in which he detects a complex change in the social environment: from an environment of enclosure, as analysed by Foucault, there is a transition to the *society of control* (here Deleuze is recalling Burroughs). An entire range of institutions faces a manifest crisis within the new mode of capitalism, which Deleuze labels *capitalisme de surproduction*. "Individuals have become *'dividuals,'* and masses, samples, data, markets, or *'banks'*" (Deleuze, 1990: p. 244, English translation, 1992: pp. 3–7). Digital technology serves as a tool of society of control. An important aspect of Deleuze's assessments in this essay is a hint against techno-fetishism: "Types of machines are easily matched with each type of society – not that machines are determining, but because they express those social forms capable of generating them and using them" (Ibid.). What I am talking about here is a social form, within which a particular type of "non-personality" is taking shape. The formulae of life of this society contain a decomposition of what has been the incorporation of empirical subjectivity: the individual. Particular *dividuals* are now simultaneously citizens, actors, stakeholders, entertainers, immigrants, a combination of attributes and de-

siring constituents, disposed and exposed to an abstract domination. *Montage-collage* is obviously a form of narrative, which, through de-montage of the flow of "real life", is capable of articulating a morphing of bodies and its symbolic potentials. Hence, the Deleuzian delusionary concept of *dividuality* and its theoretical vision signals a scope of thinking within cyberspace – of course, not losing sight of past testimonies of decentred subjectivity, one that I found in Döblin's novel and its adaptations in moving pictures.

4: Balkan Cinema

Robar-Dorin's Mirror:
Rams and Mammoths in the Context
of Yugoslav History[1]

Issues connected to cinematic reflection of manifestations of ethnic identities can be observed in many films, but they cannot always be defined as symptomatic. Due to a specific historical context, the controversial approach to the phenomena of nationalism and ethnic intolerance in one particular film makes it possible to revisit a perspective on cultural and political events and trends in Slovenia in mid-1980s, which was a crucial time of accumulating potential for social changes and, in the case of the entire Balkans, for social disaster. This chapter re-examines the historical framework and aims at a deconstruction of the meanings of "culture" in Slovenia in its communist period from after the Second World War to the mid-1980s. It should be noted that the terms *nation, nationalism, ethnic identity, ethnicity, homeland,* and so on, in spite of their seemingly universal clarity, often become blurred and confusing when they are taken out of a specific political context. This is especially so in the time-space of Yugoslavia and in discussions of any part of its period of existence.

Nationalism and Ethnicity

Numerous studies on nationalism and ethnicity (notably by Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Yael Tamir, and many others) generally find that the meanings of these terms differ, as do their impacts within specific state constructions that encompass different cultural identities as well as self-reflections of them. This also means that translating the meanings of these terms and notions from one linguistic space to another is problematic. In order to explain briefly the usage of these complex terms in this chapter I suggest taking into account that in most cases the term "nation" as used by (post-) Yugoslav scholars refers to "ethnic group" and more or less corresponds with the federal republics based on the country's ethnic structure. The reason for this is the historical fact that the linguistic and ethnic groups that formed their identities under Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires perceived themselves as "nations" despite lacking their own states throughout the nineteenth century, at which time the custodians of culture ("national" intellectuals: poets, scholars, scientists, and artists) in the Balkans also appropriated typical romantic ideas about the "national" (ethnic) roots and identities of their peoples. Yugoslavia was a specific case, in which these historical investments in the meanings of identity acquired some special traits during the course of history. One can understand this specificity better if one considers the fact that "Yugoslav nationalism" was unthinkable, and that the Yugoslav federation was not perceived as a "nation" from within, but rather as "only" a state. Political, cultural, and other meanings of the notion of nationalism within Yugoslavia were attached to some political and cultural attitudes of members of ethnic groups in a variety of articulations, from "acceptable" concern for one's own identity to adverse or vicious viewpoints on the superiority of one's own "nation" over others. As much as I can try to avoid confusion by marking the meaning of *nation*, *national*, and so on, as "ethnic" in some cases, other readers (English and American ones in particular) may still have some difficulty grasping the various nuances due to the specific genealogy of this terminology in the Balkans. I prefer not to just simply use the term "ethnic" in order not to lose sight of the political content of the phenomena in question. Moreover, as we know, the political content of these meanings contributed to deadly consequences in 1990s. Still, I hope that with this explanation international readers will come closer to understanding the splits within social formations in the cultural space under discussion.

The final section of the chapter discusses Filip Robar-Dorin's film *Ovni in mamuti* (Rams and Mammoths, 1985), which revealed ethnic tensions in Slovenia at a critical time before the demise of communism and the impending break-up of multi-ethnic Yugoslavia. Even putting aside the question of the specific cinematic qualities of Robar-Dorin's *Rams and Mammoths*, this film should be perceived as a very important work of Slovenian post-modernism. Unfortunately, knowledge of the film is restricted to rather narrow audiences in Europe and elsewhere. The film is not mentioned in any critical or analytical literature dealing with cinema in the Balkans. It seems that this movie, which even won the grand prize at the Mannheim-Heidelberg international film festival in 1985, experienced the fate of many artistic or other intellectual endeavours that happen to expose critically a social phenomenon "a bit too early". In this case, the view is critical and ironic, and from the perspective of later historical events, it even appears prophetic.

In the case of Robar-Dorin's film, the object of irony and criticism was explicitly nationalism in its daily and also vulgar manifestations, specifically regarding the position of Bosnian immigrant workers in Slovenia. It is highly probable that this insightful aspect of the film was one main reason the film was not presented to audiences with greater enthusiasm, because any promotion of films from a country such as Slovenia depends on official presentations abroad in the context of cultural events. Perhaps the film was not considered "representative" enough for such purposes, or perhaps the company Viba film that owns the film simply was not proactive enough in selling it to distributors. Therefore, even film experts interested in the region somehow missed it for the most part. One of the rare observations that I managed to find was only published on the web by the (presumably young) German writer Otto Reiter, who said that

> [...] *only a few* [Yugoslav filmmakers] *prophetically addressed the shock of the 1990s, such as Slovenian director Filip Robar-Dorin. In his film* Ovni in mamuti *(Rams and Mammoths, made in 1985, camera: Karpo Godina) he shows in a sarcastic and semi-documentary fashion the lives of Bosnian "guest workers" in Slovenia that are marked by prejudices on both sides.* (Reiter, 2004)

One of the most interesting recent contributions of film analysis to the recent readings of the history of Yugoslavia and the ideology that aided its disintegration is by Pavle Levi, but this did not include Robar-Dorin's mov-

ie. Nonetheless, the film can be taken as evidence in favour of Levi's observation: "Although the flames of nationalism fully flooded the region in [the] 1990s, during the mid and late 1980s they were carefully and patiently nurtured by the 'ethnically concerned' intellectual and cultural elites" (Levi, 2007: p. 11). *Rams and Mammoths* actually confronted the discourses of a new construction of ethnic identity in Yugoslav federal republics, which Levi has in mind. The film did this at the time these discourses were entering the public sphere, and it meets them head-on by exposing social phenomena of ethnic myths and prejudices.

Ethnicity in the Balkans under Communism

The expression of ethnic identity in multi-ethnic communist conglomerates was not subject to indiscriminate repression, nor did the departure of Marxist ideology create an "ideological vacuum", which then presumably began to fill up with nationalist ideologies. The unfounded hypotheses that ethnicity as such was suppressed under communism (on behalf of the category of social class) opened the way for a simplistic line of reasoning, according to which the former repression caused the later outbreak of nationalism in a pathological form. This kind of view could be observed soon before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall in Western journalists' columns (in *Newsweek*, *Time*, etc.). On the other hand, claims of ethnic identity being repressed under communism were first uttered in Slovenia by some politically conservative groups, which also developed conceptual platforms for newly established right-wing political parties. The most prominent such group in Slovenia was gathered around the journal *Nova revija*, which, as it happens, had been published from the mid-1980s onward and had received subsidies from the (formally still "communist") government. Dozens of citations in various texts published in *Nova revija* could be offered in support of this assertion. They more or less affirmed this claim, just in different words: "The *national crisis* stems from an underestimation and neglect – typical of communist ideology – of pressing national issues and from suppression of legitimate national demands. They just sweep them under the carpet of a phantasmal 'unity of the working class' or 'working people' and their supposedly unified 'international' interests (Urbančič, 1989: p. 580).

In fact, communism placed the attribute of ethnicity within its (symbolic) system. "Hard data are hard to get at, but it seems that around 1950 the states of Europe had achieved an unprecedented ethnic homogenization of their populations" (Therborn, 1995: p. 47). These processes also took

shape in the communist states of Europe: In the East a turn towards nationalism and new chauvinistic divisions started earlier, however, with a paradoxical post-Stalinist disenchantment with Leninist enlightenment. From 1956 on, Eastern European communist leaders started to play the nationalist card. (Ibid.: p. 48)

The "national question" was constantly analysed theoretically and broadly discussed in public. Communism – especially in the case of the former Yugoslavia – claimed to represent a space of true equality of its federated "nations" (or ethnicities), and in reality this claim could have withstood the benefit of the doubt. Of course, speaking about all communist systems in the abstract omits many modifications. In the communist world there were cases in which larger nations ruled over smaller ones, minorities were repressed and excluded, and so on, which after all represented a continuation of many cultural patterns acquired in the "imperialist" past. However, in all cases the category of the national (or ethnic) was observed one way or another.

There is another aspect that should be taken into account, one that involves culture in a relation with notions of modernity and tradition. During modernism, broadly speaking, traditions were threatened or thoroughly changed. However, globalization unexpectedly brought about renewed interest in all kinds of traditions. As I mentioned before in the Part II of this book, this led Anthony Giddens to develop the notion of post-traditional society. Giddens found out that state socialism "paradoxically" in effect preserved traditions better than capitalism. (See: Giddens, 1996: p. 51). What is further interesting in Giddens' theory of de-traditionalization processes is his assertion that "/.../ in the post-traditional order. . . traditions do not wholly disappear; indeed in some respects, and in some contexts, they flourish" (Giddens, 1996: 56). Therefore, he finds important the way traditions enter into the context of post-traditional society, and so he emphasizes "preparedness to enter into dialogue while suspending the threat of violence." He goes on to say: "Otherwise, tradition becomes fundamentalism" (Giddens, 1996: p. 56). At the core of the "paradox", concerning communist societies there was culture, which was the realm of the construction of identity. How it happened that cultural tradition, also enveloping ethnicity, became fundamentalist in some parts of the world in transition is difficult to explain. This is particularly true in the case of the former communist Yugoslavia, which was constituted on the principle of "equality of nations" (i.e., ethnicities).

Apart from the prohibition of any openly nationalist politics, in the communist Yugoslavia ethnic identities flourished, framed by the concept of a cultural category that was fostered by some politically established institutions – cinema producers among them. As in other communist countries, which always made an effort to utilize the rhetoric and techniques of political populism, the Yugoslav government especially supported folklore and other aspects of "traditional" forms of popular culture. The effect of the prohibition of explicit nationalist politics did not equal censorship of ethnic identity in culture. On the contrary: culture was dominated by topics of national (i.e., ethnic) identity throughout this period. Two specific features of the ruling ideology in Slovenia were congruently verified by the very existence of the Slovenian nation (as ethnicity). The "mysterious" reason for the supposedly astounding survival of this ethnicity was (and still is in daily media speech) emphatically alleged to be its culture. The communist sovereign state, on the other hand, was legitimized by the fact that it brought this nation, which survived its fabled history thanks to its culture, to the highest degree of emancipation so far. In accordance with such *idées reçues,* politics took care of national cultural institutions in practical terms, and the authorities recognized the special calling of "cultural creators". To give an example, cinematography would not even exist in a small nation without substantial governmental financing. It is understood that subsidies were granted according to certain criteria. Furthermore, it went without saying that projects on *nationally* (culturally and ethnically) *constitutive topics most often won subsidies.* From the very beginning of Slovenian feature film in 1948 (with *Na svoji zemlji* 'On Our Own Land' directed by France Štiglic) one can see the dominance of an at least mildly nationalist ideology in the declared politics concerning film production.

On the other hand, Yugoslavia was unique as a communist country in which modernist art in all areas was tolerated and even promoted so long as the ruling bureaucracy did not see any political provocation in artistic products or events. The place of modernist Yugoslav films in any classification or in aesthetic terms has yet to be determined, although I tend to agree with the following: "The cinema of the 1950s and early 1960s in Eastern Europe seems like a kind of 'entre-acte', a limbo – a transitory state. It is a stage in between the void and the blossoming; a period that itself does not bear meaning. Its meaning is in what comes next, in what is going to evolve from that point on" (Pavicic, 2008: p. 21).

Images of Nationalism

Far from claiming that my analysis of the film, which rounds off the whole discussion, is in any respect exhaustive, I am actually offering a somewhat narrower contextualization of the film because this movie's point can be made visible (including in terms of its aesthetic form) through its place in the controversies of the time in which it was shot. Two contexts are most decisive within the complex historical and aesthetic determinations of the film. One concerns the place of this film in Slovenian culture and Slovenian cinema, and the other determining framework concerns the social space of the Balkans, especially in the period before the ethnic tensions acquired political and military shapes. I start with the contours of Slovenian culture and its cinema, which the film not only came from, but also at the same time reacted against.

Entertainment was a less important factor in film production in Slovenia because films were supposed to contribute to the "culture" of the country. There is a certain nuance in the meaning of the word "culture", strongly related to the notion of art in this context, within which film was invested with a mission. "For the first time in history, a film made in our own country became part of the cultural accomplishments of the Slovenian nation" (Adamič, 1954: p. 35), wrote an enthusiast in 1954, commenting on the first few publicly screened Slovenian films after the Second World War. The dominant cultural discourse throughout the period, preceding Robar-Dorin's movie, demanded that film put literary motifs on screen through its own lens, which would make literature more transparent and "closer to the people" – this last phrase being a contribution of communist jargon. It goes without saying that such a demand implied assertions about the lesser artistic importance of film in general.

These kinds of views founded an artistic canon of sorts for Slovenian cinema. Such statements could be supported by quoting some leading Slovenian writers, who also held strong positions in the academic and political establishment. Above all, these included Josip Vidmar and others such as Boris Ziherl, Matej Bor, Jože Toporišič, and France Bernik, who more or less saw the importance of film in spreading and reproducing traditional Slovenian culture. Because they mostly did not write anything serious about film and their observations were mainly sporadic – but nonetheless influential within the establishment – I spared the effort of looking for them in the archives. I hope that readers will accept my condensed coverage of this aspect. Hence, before the emergence of the new generation in

1960s (the work of "modernists" mostly remained marginalized, receiving only acclaim among film critics), Slovenian film was not founded in the paradigm of film as an art strongly related to mass culture, but much more on the obsessive formula of "film as art", which was supposed to follow traditional arts. In this sense, Slovenian film had to reinterpret a literary agenda that was articulated in the mid-nineteenth century by Fran Levstik, who wrote: "Of course one should write using home-grown words, using native thoughts, on the basis of domestic life, so that Slovenians will see Slovenians in a book, just as they see their face in the mirror" (Levstik, 1858: p. 19).

No realistic pattern followed from this agenda, but much more a kind of narcissistic attitude. This Slovenian obsession with Slovenians was noticeable in mainstream Slovenian cinema, which especially in 1980s was interested in national identity to a high degree. A thought by Thomas Elsaesser applies nicely to this pattern: "In the wings of these self-portraits, in other words, hovers the shadow of sacrifice and the sacred" (Elsaesser, 2005: 49), which raises the question of the role of tradition as a component of a culture, including culture in former communist countries. This point is revisited in the following section of this chapter.

Anyone that looks today at the well over 100 Slovenian films (produced over a period of about 50 years) would definitely doubt the repression of ethnicity under communism, and especially under the Yugoslav brand of it. In general, throughout the history of Slovenian cinema "national" topics were overwhelmingly present; therefore, it appears that film in the postwar period played a crucial role in forming notions of Slovenian identity. However, along with the changes leading towards the end of communism, whereby the ruling political groups were losing citizens' support, Slovenian films were losing their audiences. For instance, in 1980 the editor of the only serious Slovenian film journal, *Ekran,* pointed out that Slovenian film was losing its audience. In his view, the reasons were not to be sought in the dwindling creativity of filmmakers; he remarked that "the reasons for the crisis should rather be seen in the huge archaic institution [i.e., the Slovenian film company Viba] that spends more on itself than on the production of movies" (Zajec, 1980: p. 3). Zajec's assertion supports Robar-Dorin's harsh view of the situation in the establishment upon which all filmmakers' work was dependent.

A specific "cult of the mother" formulated in Slovenian literature (in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) stitched together elements of a universal myth of the mother as the basic matrix of the nation, and the

more specific image of a peasant woman with a son that enters a hostile urban world. This formulation of the Slovenian mother cult was deciphered in the writings of some Slovenian philosophers and sociologists, who imported French structuralism and Lacanian psychoanalysis to Slovenia in the 1970s. For example, the most prominent representative of this group of scholars, Slavoj Žižek, analysed Ivan Cankar's (1876–1918) portraits in autobiographically based narratives about his mother. In Žižek's view, this "greatest" Slovenian writer was the first to outline systematically Slovenian phantasmatics: "I take it that Cankar's 'mother complex' is not just his own personal psychological quandary, a result of his 'unwell oversensitive psyche' or the like. Moreover, in it is articulated a linkage that could serve as an indicator of the structure of the 'socialization processes among Slovenians" (Žižek, 1982: p. 243).

Robar-Dorin's construction of the frustrated Marko Skače character, described below, probably would not be possible without this preceding reflection by Žižek. This passage is taken from one of the rare fragments of Žižek's work that has not been translated into English. The book cited here represents Žižek's contribution to a study on Slovenian identity (financed by government resources), to which he contributed his study on "the role of unconscious phantasms in the processes of forming Slovenian identity" (Žižek, 1982: p. 9). Apart from his contributions to some weeklies – most notably, the opposition magazine *Mladina* – at the end of 1980s and his work on the phenomenon of the rock group Laibach, Žižek has not paid much attention to Slovenians in his subsequent philosophical work. In his book from 1982 (published only in Slovenian), Žižek also developed his interpretation of Althusser's notion of "the ideological apparatus of the state, as that key form of institutionalized practice that ensures ideological reproduction" (Žižek, 1982: p. 139). Žižek's introduction of Althusser into the Slovenian academic and public sphere had a strong impact in Slovenia and contributed to a decisive shift in public debate as well as to forming the discourse on the civil society movement in the very decade discussed here. The term *ideology*, also applied below in the analysis of Robar-Dorin's film, should be understood in this sense. Of course, Žižek was not the only one in his peer group that developed the notion of ideology, which can be applied to an interpretation of Robar-Dorin's film as a theoretical magnifying glass for seeing the microstructures of a society. Braco Rotar, who focused on paintings and architecture, for instance, contributed his "definition" of ideology, which is in accord with Žižek's position: "The analysis of ideolog-

ical existential forms, which are transmitted by 'concrete' individuals of a given social formation, encompasses much more than just observation of their speech and deeds. It must penetrate to the mechanism that produces the existential forms of subjective individuality in which such a mechanism is to be found" (Rotar, 1985: p. 33).

The period in which Slovenian film entered its modernist form (the 1960s to the early 1980s), brought a significant change of register with regard to topics, as well as in view of its messages. Contrary to the earlier period, Slovenian film became much more aware of itself as an agent within national culture. A range of various indexes of modernity entered the work of reconstructing identity in the imagery of films, which were still based on traditional and modernist local literature. Instead of emphasizing the peasant roots of the Slovenian nation (i.e., ethnicity), there was a shift towards the construction of an almost non-existent bourgeois past, with all imaginable components, from characters of frustrated intellectuals to brothels.

Films that were not preoccupied with the problems of the closed "national (ethnic) universe" were rather rare. Such films, shot in the 1960s, appeared to be sophisticated, existentialist, and very particular. They flirted with French New Wave cinema, and finally some similar (yet different) films appeared as alternative film in the 1980s. Slovenian cinema was the first among Yugoslav cinematography to join other Eastern European trends, which in final analysis, especially in view of aesthetics and topics, does not differ very much from the contemporary Western European *auteur* film. It should be added here that in his film Robar-Dorin in part also reacted to this tradition of modernism, represented most visibly by Boštjan Hladnik. In his "post-modernist" montage, Robar-Dorin turns this current of Slovenian film from certain universal topics to local problems – only to confront the phenomena of nationalism.

Having said all this, the film *Rams and Mammoths* represented a transgression of the established institutionally supported form of film production in Slovenia. For the group of critics formed around the journal *Ekran* in the late 1970s and 1980s, who for a long time were silently ignored in the public arena, this transgression was more or less expected. The basic structure of the film, which is discernible in a "polyphonic" *montage*, resembles a sociological method. The film nevertheless retains its specific cinematic form, but this form benefits from sociology in the sense that it intensifies its suggestive potential, compared to films determined by artistic mannerism. Even measured against the "traditional" criteria of aesthetic

effect, Robar-Dorin's film appears much "stronger" than some other "artistically obsessed" films of that period, which received far better institutional support. As Robar-Dorin perfectly demonstrated, the phantasmatics of "artistic" creation, which determined the course of Slovenian cinema as an obsession with the cult of art, had obstructed the cinematic functioning of films and kept film enclosed in the boundaries of more or less explicitly nationalist ideology, as it had been analysed by Žižek. *Rams and Mammoths* introduced a split into the linkage of ideology-nation-imaginary, originating in a specific sociological approach to the topic of identity. In this context the importance of culture was reduced, and film in Slovenia took on a different role.

Love of Our Own Soil

Robar-Dorin's film was shot at the time of a growing wave of democratization in communist Slovenia. Robar-Dorin's situation as an independent artist coincided with the emergence of an alternative in the political space, which was defined in an open concept of civil society. The film *Rams and Mammoths* was one of those contributions that redefined Slovenian national identity in the notion of democracy. However, the meaning and importance of both Robar-Dorin's film and the political alternative was substantially mitigated in later political events. The understanding of the notion of national (i.e., ethnic) identity, which was once relegated to official culture under communism, was later moved to politics. Moreover, its space is retained in the divide revealed in Robar-Dorin's film: the divide between explicitly "traditionalist" nationalist ideology and urban multicultural tendencies. Because this film exposes images that "speak" in frameworks of discontinuous and parallel narratives, the divide between Slovenians and "non-Slovenians" turns into an internal Slovenian divide between different perceptions rooted in ideological positions. Thus, for instance, the "superior" position of a "civilized" Slovenian becomes visible as explicitly vulgar and offensive. Such a presentation subsequently turns into a metaphor of the nationalist ideology, which points to a role that this ideology plays as a cultural agency in a formation of socially framed perceptions and corresponding attitudes. On the other hand, the movie makes clear that other attitudes exist as well, which is visible in the narrative of a young Bosnian and the degree of acceptance he finds in his school environment, and also in some aspects of another narrative of the character of Marko Skače, who is treated for his aggressive behaviour by institutions that are supposed

to provide an element of multiculturally-based tolerance. Of course, these topics, which are evident in the movie, could be related to a number of universally existing political and cultural exclusion phenomena (such as, above all, racism). These phenomena form particular social contexts into which various schemes of community forms and formations are inscribed.

As an independent filmmaker, Filip Robar-Dorin, who opted for the formula of alternative film in permanent conflict with the national cinematic establishment, reacted against the narcissistic construction of national identity in Slovenian cinema. Of course, I am not claiming that national (i.e., ethnic) narcissism is in any sense an exclusive attribute of Slovenians. However, compared to larger nations, this Slovenian "syndrome" can be deciphered through some specific expressions. As mentioned above, in the late 1970s and 1980s, the Ljubljana school of (Lacanian) psychoanalysis, led by Slavoj Žižek, contributed much to an academic and wider public discussion on profiles of Slovenian identity, within which the idea of ethnic narcissism also became quite legitimate. This attitude became obvious in Robar-Dorin's earlier documentary *Opre Roma* (Stand up Roma!, 1983), in which he confronted the Slovenian population with a radically different identity of Roma people. Unlike other Yugoslav artists at that time, who portrayed this ethnic minority as an idyllic metaphor of untamed freedom and spontaneity (supposedly lost in civilization), Robar-Dorin made an involved statement concerning the problem of tolerance in relations between Slovenians and the Roma. In this way he started the work of demystifying the "artistic" cinematic phantasm of the Slovenian, whose particular identity in many films was constructed from various mythical, historical, metaphysical, and other such determinations. Of course, one could say this about almost any other construction of a national identity, but in each case a critical observer (philosopher, social scientist, or artist) is concerned with particular local narratives, mythologies, intellectual and political projections, and so on. On the other hand, Robar-Dorin's film can also be understood as an aesthetic answer to some modernist achievements within a cosmopolitan trend in Slovenian cinema of 1960s and early 1970s. Some films from the 1960s, and especially films by Boštjan Hladnik and Matjaž Klopčič, dealt mostly with some universal existential topics and worked on introverted "psychological" themes, emphasizing the cinematic form or new wave kind of approach to directing, disregarding troubling social realities in the process. Robar-Dorin's film thus turns his camera-eye towards the existing social realities.

There is also a biographical aspect, which is inscribed in an attitude emanating from the film. Robar-Dorin became an assistant instructor at the Academy for Theatre, Radio, Film, and Television at the University of Ljubljana after he completed his studies in the United States in the mid-1970s. However, his academic career quickly ended because he got into trouble over his "pedagogical" ideas. His first movies were made for national television, but work on a feature film was inaccessible to him for some time. Another topic for a new study could be also the hypothesis that Robar-Dorin's subversion of the aforementioned construction of Slovenian national identity continued in some new formal and aesthetic directions, which became clearly visible much later in new Slovenian film; for example, in Jan Cvitković's acclaimed films *Kruh in mleko* (Bread and Milk, 2001) and *Odgroba-dogroba* (Gravehopping, 2005). To substantiate these claims, I first describe the film *Rams and Mammoths* along with some necessary explanations, and then move to an analysis of the film's main aspects.

The film bears the unambiguous subtitle *A Fable of Nationalism*. Robar-Dorin produced the film; he also wrote what was a rather makeshift script and directed the film. The film is quite structured and is edited in a manner that vaguely reminds one of Dušan Makavejev's *montages* in his famous 1960s movies.[2] Three stories, presented in a disjointed narration, are interlaced with documentary and other visual material. The stories, documentary images, and spoken comments are connected only by the topics of identity and ethnic conflict, not by linking up characters or events. The first narrative line is about a Bosnian youngster at a Slovenian vocational school for coal miners that enjoy reading Ivo Andrić's[3] essays. The Bosnian boy's "story" is inconclusive and it is mainly used to show clumsy educational efforts to build Yugoslav patriotism. This is shown in a scene in a school class in which the teacher asks his "non-Slovenian" pupils to read some canonized Slovenian poetry, creating a humorous effect for the Slovenian audience due to the readers' accents. The teacher then tries to explain the universal meaning of poetry, and here the irony becomes accessible to foreign viewers. There are also scenes of "cultural" events at the school – celebrations of Republic Day. However, this narrative also contains some touching

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2   For an interesting presentation and analysis of Makavejev and his cinema of *montage* see, for instance, Levi (2007: 18–35).

3   Ivo Andrić was the Bosnian Nobel Prize winner for literature in 1961. He also wrote a number of interesting essays, containing many reflections on the Balkans and its ethnic diversity.

poetic and sentimental aspects, some hints about a possible love relationship between the boy and a Slovenian girl.

Another storyline is about a non-Slovenian worker, a garbage collector named Huso (a typical Bosnian male name). Slovenia, the north western-most republic of Yugoslavia, was economically the most developed part of the country and it therefore invited workers from other Yugoslav federal republics. The wave of immigration grew stronger especially after the beginning of the Yugoslav experiment in "market socialism" after 1965. In about two decades, these internal "immigrants" finally approached some 8% of the total population of Slovenia (which totalled nearly two million at the time). Especially interesting is the maddeningly complex pattern of migrants' ethnic structure: "Some members of nations and ethnic groups came 'from everywhere,' and others from their republic of origin" (Mežnarić, 1986: p. 70). Thus, for instance, Croats came from Croatia and from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbs mostly came from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Muslims, who were recognized as an ethnic group in Yugoslavia, came from Bosnia-Herzegovina, religious Muslims, who were ethnically Albanian, came from Kosovo, and so on. The "story" is used to show some foul circumstances of such workers' lives in Slovenia and it deals with the character's homesickness and alcoholism. The Huso character dies of a heart attack.

The third story is the bizarre narrative of Marko Skače (the name is also the title of a traditional Slovenian children's song), who hates Bosnians. Marko visits places where Bosnian immigrants gather and attacks individuals in public restrooms, biting their ears and noses. He is eventually apprehended by the police and subsequently undergoes psychiatric treatment. Because of group therapy, his hatred for Bosnians finally turns into a vague sympathy. He is shown again in the bars where Bosnian workers go for their miserable entertainment, smiling with the grin of a tranquilized person.

These stories are then interwoven with some semi-documentary images and especially with the addition of a dialogue between two Slovenian musicians. One of them happened to have a sister that married a Bosnian. The musicians' comments that punctuate the movie lead to the impressive ending of the film, which is presented later in this chapter.

A very specific aspect of the film is contained in the fact that it is not based on a precisely elaborated and detailed script or rooted in a literary work (a novel or story), but, more significantly, stems from sociological research. In fact, Silva Mežnarić, a sociologist that carried out a critical soci-

ological study on the position of immigrants to Slovenia from other parts of Yugoslavia at about the same time (Mežnarić, 1986), participated on the production crew of the film. Her study was helpful for the creator of the movie because (in addition to the usual sociological descriptions of the phenomena in question and a lot of well-collected data) it also contains extensive anthropologically marked sections, in which researchers interviewed immigrant workers. These dialogues exposed the nature of problems in the inter-ethnically determined framework.

The film represented a unique breakthrough in scriptwriting in Slovenian cinematic production, where critics found scenarios increasingly more "artificial." The films that were shot on the basis of these scenarios were perceived as "hermetic" even by domestic audiences, let alone foreign viewers. At the beginning of the 1980s, one scriptwriter and film critic exclaimed that "writing scenarios is just like performing in a circus" (Rudolf, 1980: p. 54). In the case of Robar-Dorin's film, the script is not a matter of "talent," but a matter of exposing (social) problems in a manner that makes use of aesthetic means such as parody, irony, contrast, and deconstruction. The rather loose form of the script mentioned above also leaves a lot open for the filming itself and to the editing, which is another difference from the standard scripts of Slovenian films at the time. Robar-Dorin therefore shook the prevailing outlook that the origin of a script must be a piece of literature, which is coded differently than a film being shot. Instead of the rapport *literature* (artistic practice) – *script* (craft of writing) – *film* (mediated artistic practice) there is now a different rapport: *sociology* (science) – *script* (narrativisation) – *film* (reality within the imaginary).

The sociological profile of the film did not produce any kind of boredom effect because Robar-Dorin knew how to make use of cinematic "discourse" as a parallel to the sociological focus. The film did not expose just "any" sociology. In its aesthetic code it actually exposed the production of critical sociological research, contrary to legitimizing a particular system of power or merely practicing utilitarian research. This comes across through some documentary scenes that call attention to the "traditional" link between Slovenians and wine as one of the banal attributes of their identity. This link is presented through some documentary scenes of mass alcoholism. There is not space here for a deeper discussion of wine drinking in Slovenia, which is actually a wine-producing country.[4] However, it

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4   The annually published Wine Guide listed "550 of the top Slovenian wines" for 2011. See: http://vinskivodic.si/English.html (accessed 9 December 2010).

can be said that a widespread self-exoticizing view resulting in the construction of Slovenian identity linked to the signifier of "wine country" also manifests itself in the statistics of alcoholism in Slovenia. The documentary images (as a disjointed insertion into the movie) of a mass party are "commented" upon by an off-screen narrator's voice, saying:

> If there were no Bosnians, we would have to invent them. Once all the Slovenians quarrelled with each other, but now they are fond of each other because we have a common enemy, the Bosnians. We are proud once more of being Slovenians. The Bosnians are our most urgent historic necessity. We forced out or exterminated the Jews a long time ago, yet the few remaining gypsies could not be made responsible for everything ... Oh, God give us our daily Bosnians and our hearts will be lighter.

The documentary and the voiceover narration thus use a metonymic gesture to comment on what is presented in Mežnarić's book on a different level (Mežnarić, 1986). The Slovenian perception of Bosnian migrant workers as primitive, uncivilized, and such developed gradually as the numbers of immigrants grew during the economic growth of the 1960s and 1970s. A rise in hostile attitudes from the majority position – considering itself more "civilized" – was a very typical occurrence in most European countries, which were targeted by immigrants during this period. The documentary scenes of the "primitive" Slovenian mass drinking party, therefore, very straightforwardly counter the stereotypes of Slovenian "superiority" over Bosnians.

Undoubtedly, this film's cinematic narration owes some of its deliberately bizarre moments to serious research. The construction of two of the three central characters, who are shown in parallel movements towards psychological or physical breakdown, was made possible by projections of the subjective onto the real, which is allegedly founded in the Lacanian category of imaginary at the lowest levels of apolitical ideology, strongly based on nationalism. The cinematographic means used by the author were not so sophisticated because, after all, the author lacked a decent budget. After he completed the film, he gave an interview for the journal *Ekran* (1985, no. 7/8), in which he very angrily spoke about the circumstances in Slovenian cinematography that compelled him into a kind of political dissent:

> All around you suppression, aloofness, fear, hypocrisy, haughtiness, primitivism, egotism, suspicions, and defensiveness in the televi-

sion and Viba [national film production company] *management and councils. For this reason, there was a need to invent literally a different film, a different production scheme, form, technology. Yes, even technology. Technology of work, method. Something that could become a weapon for defence, for attack, something that would help me cut into the tissue of an aggressive corpse, that is, Slovenian cinema with all its sacrosanct apostles, wheedlers, theoreticians, profiteers, journalists, cinephils, necrophiliacs ...*

Thus, for achieving effects such as mixing levels of subjective perceptions and a reality "outside," the author could not use many fancy means such as "subjective views," camera tricks, and a cinematic narration based on a large quantity of film shots. Although the camera in the hands of Karpo Godina performs more than merely correctly in the acted sequences of the film with regard to its iconographic aspects, the aforementioned sequences are rather "straight" and viewers receive the impression of a simple film narration. It appears that the author's "method" has resulted in a "distanced view," which can be achieved through a combination of camera angles, few close-ups, and directing scenes such that the space the camera creates becomes visible at the expense of the performing characters.

One example is the effect of the distanced visual account of an encounter between Bosnians and arcade games, which works as a sociological reference. In the story line of Marko Skače, a bar with pinball machines and other such games represents the place where Marko comes searching for his victims, whom he attacks in the restrooms. In this sequence, certain axes of gazes from within and outside the frame are crossed. The scenes are directed in manner in which a viewer receives the impression that gazes of the Bosnians and the character Marko hardly ever meet. For the Bosnians, Marko does not exist in "their" space. The "machinery of civilization" (arcade games) in the Slovenian's nationalist gaze from outside the frame exposes the difference between "primitive" and "cultured" individuality. The Bosnians, hooked on their games, are exposed in their "primitive" identity (in the nationalist gaze) like tribal people given glass beads by colonizers. However, the camera does not identify with the look of any of characters; it persists in its point of view, which shows that the characters move within their closed worlds, their realities, which eventually clash with other realities. Therefore, the aggressive intervention of the Slovenian character comes as though it had sprung from the mythological ethnically *surde-*

terminé constitution of ethnic agency. On the other hand, there is different machinery: the film camera itself.

Furthermore, it should be added that what the author could not achieve at the level of images, he did with *montage*. Thus, as stated above, he inserts all kinds of absurd as well as meaningful shots between (or actually into) the sequences of narratives. For instance, a shot of Huso smoking is interrupted by the insertion of images of roller-skating girls to make a transition to a documentary scene of a mass party. A scene of two Slovenian musicians in a lively conversation is preceded by a quote from Andrić's essay on "narrowness of the minds of people that are nationalists" while the Bosnian vocational school student looks at his image in the mirror. In their dialogue, the two musicians parody the narcissistic construction of Slovenian identity in vulgar vernacular, full of stereotypes. This is supported by the symbolic mythical items of Slovenian self-identification (mountains, an accordion, and figures of speech).

The effective final scene makes the entire point of the film transparent because it gives its literal cinematic vision of the metaphor of the close and passionate love relationship between the two Slovenians and their native soil. As they walk, cursing Bosnians as "non-human," the musicians come to a freshly ploughed field and suddenly they see a virgin dressed in white. They reach for her, pulling her to the ground and, after a cut and a backward move of the camera, we can see them having sex with the soil. This sequence of frames, which was shot especially carefully, clearly functions as a determining scene for the entire movie. It is understood that it signals a multitude of meanings that could be linked to the Central European cultural space, with the notion of *Blut und Boden*[5] at its centre. Thus, in the film *Rams and Mammoths* a shift was carried out from a prevailing "tragic" interpretation of problems of identity in other Slovenian films to cinematic thematization of the split in real/ideological (imaginary) space. The saturation of the *montage* space in the parallel narrative structure, with some simple contrasts of text and image, produces an "ideological noise," which makes the effect of the movie complete.

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5   This refers more or less metaphorically to the "Blood and Soil" ideology based on ethnicity, which is defined through descent (*Blood*) and homeland (*Soil*). As described in many encyclopaedias and other such resources, the phrase itself appeared first in the late nineteenth century in Germany. It praised the people's connection to the land and stressed the virtues of rural living. As is well known, the concept of blood and soil preceded Nazi ideology.

By subversively revealing the ideology of national identity, Robar-Dorin's film – because it exposes the construction of national identity based on differences from the Other (identity) – does not represent a mirror for Slovenians to see themselves in as they would wish to. Instead, it is a film in which they are compelled not to miss the gaze of the other. In other words, the film moves from the problems of the Slovenian nation as equated with suffering subjectivity to the problem of an imaginary nationality in the context of state, economic, and urban determinations of an individual's space of existence. Robar-Dorin's manner of dealing with ethnic problems provides a clear ideologically subversive note because the ethnic problem in *Rams and Mammoths* is presented from a "view from afar", in the sense that was formulated by Claude Lévi-Strauss: "Ethnology… takes man as its object of study but differs from the other sciences of man in striving to understand that object in its most diverse manifestations" (Lévi-Strauss, 1992: p. 25).

Troubled History

Relatively soon after it was established, the Yugoslav system enabled the consolidation of "national" cinematography in the constituent federal republics. However, as it became apparent in the break-up of Yugoslavia and the end of communism, the potential for conflict was lurking in forms of nationalism, which were generally accepted or at least deemed relatively benign. Nonetheless, "[n]ew resentment between the Balkan countries appeared that evolved around the questions of their proximity to or suitability for Europe" (Iordanova, 2001: p. 33). As the research of Silva Mežnarić has demonstrated and Robar-Dorin's film highlighted, such resentments were part of daily life in Slovenia long before the break-up of the federal state. On the other hand, "[s]cholars have likewise recognised that it was the Slovenians' quarrels with Serbian and federal party leaders in the late 1980s that formed the sharp forward edge of the great wedge of divisive politics that split the federation to pieces" (Patterson, 2000: p. 413).

A specific element here is that Slovenian nationalism found its "threatening" object within its own federal republic, the "beloved country". Bosnians therefore stood for the Balkans; they represented otherness to Slovenians, which finally translated into Bosnians' being "non-European". However, such perceptions would presumably have merely remained a bizarre aspect of daily life if they had not acquired articulation in the official politics that instituted itself after the demise of communist regime. "Since

their separation from Yugoslavia in 1991, Croatia and Slovenia have issued state documents explicitly stating their desire not to be referred to as 'Balkan'" (Iordanova, 2001: p. 34).

Unfortunately, Dina Iordanova did not see the film *Rams and Mammoths*, but a few years after her work cited above was published she made a statement that ought to have been included in her analysis of "intercultural film": "My attention here is mostly to films that qualify as "intercultural" because they address issues that awkwardly transcend national borders and undermine established regimes of historical knowledge by dismantling the commonly known story and temporarily reconstituting a surreptitious highly personal account" (Iordanova, 2008: p. 11). Saša Vojković, the editor of the special issue of the journal in which Iordanova's paper was published, expressed an expectation for a "step forward" from the "fascination with Balkan violence", which in her view should be "a thing of the 1990s, when the high visibility of the region was linked to negative factors, as was traditionally the case when the Balkans were at stake" (Vojković, 2008: p. 1).

In the eyes of Robar-Dorin, the system of filmmaking in communist Slovenia had become "vicious" and was worth fighting against. Apparently his personal fate within the system was congruent with the frightening trends in the society that his film had exposed; in fact his film received a slightly above-average response from the public (some 7,000 viewers in Slovenia), and it remained a prophetic warning of things to come. Unfortunately, this warning was not heard more widely, as usually happens with the voices of intuitive artists and philosophers. The film was "hushed" not by censorship, but simply by being overlooked by wider audiences, and this was a work of ideology of accumulating nationalism. Therefore, a re-evaluation of this film and the context of its time in the sense of Saša Vojković's comment would agree with the hypotheses at the beginning of this chapter: that this important film must be dealt with in its own right, but is also an important resource for analysing and understanding troubled Balkan history.

Cinematic Road to a Redefinition
of the Balkans

No matter what one may or may not know about the period of communism in the Balkans, we can say that this period coincided with the pattern of organisation of film production in a framework of national cinematographies, which were at the time universal. In this period the activity of filmmaking, especially in countries like Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and Yugoslavia, developed in its top products a mode of *auter* cinema. We can generally assert that aesthetics, topics, approaches, and so on, of these cinematographies did not differ much from what we have known as *nouvelle vague* type of cinema in Western Europe. Even after some setbacks following the year 1968, when the political executive and ideological powers of the time rudely interfered with accusations and exclusions of some authors or whole cinematic currents,[1] this kind of cinema persisted in a somewhat softened form until the fall of the Berlin wall and Ceaușescu's departure. In the period after these events, cinematographies in the Balkans had to re-invent themselves due to a double (or even triple) impact of political, cultural and technological changes.

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1   A very well known case was the so-called black film *(crni film)* in Yugoslavia, which actually got its name through the anathema, launched by the Party *nomenclatura*. However, in a typical self-mocking denotation this labelling was used by the youngest representative of the trend Želimir Žilnik as a title of his semi-documentary film *(Crni film* – 1971) on homeless people, who theoretically should not exist under the socialist system.

A film of Corneliu Porumboiu is known in the West under the title *12:08 East of Bucharest* (2006), which is not the translation of the original title *A fost sau n-a fost?* that alludes to an essentially different dimension of film's topic. The English title refers to the location in Romanian province and to the time, at which Nicolae Ceaușescu fled, when the revolution broke out: 12:08 on December 22, 1989. The original Romanian title translates to something in a sense "Was There or Wasn't There?" Namely, the central theme of the film is the question of whether the Romanian town of Vaslui participated in the 1989 revolution or not? A rather ironic answering, which is circling throughout a good part of the film around this question, depends on whether the city really had any protest before – and not just after – the moment of Ceaușescu's flight. The film obviously points to a very recognisable political signifier, but it has rather specific features, comparing it to many other films of the Balkans, which are marked by some political meaning, message or topic. In the film of Corneliu Porumboiu we can find an illustration of the spirit of the time, the contours of which are more and more clearly delineated after the transition of the Balkan former socialist countries to a different political and economic social (dis)order. The joining of some of these countries to the European Union allegedly completed this process. As far as the aesthetic side is concerned, the movie surprises us with images, the rhythm of the editing and general atmosphere which are very similar to what older spectators would recall from the waves of openly or metaphorically socially critical films in the age of socialism and late modernism. What we have in mind here, are films from the 1960s and 1970s from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and former Yugoslavia. Apparently, imperfect film images were taken with an unstable camera. Quite dull, more black than white or dark-coloured films were finished in frequently not very precise film processing laboratories. The action was set in dilapidated, untidy, ruined environments with actors, who had appeared as quite authentic non-professionals; dialogues in a rather un-censored speech, and many other such features characterised these films. However, all this in combination with well-written scripts, often based on an inherent cynicism of dialogues and realistic images, emitted strong, reflexive and witty messages.

What have these indexes of former socialist times to do in the film shot seventeen years after the end of socialism? The film gives an answer by actually depicting the dubiousness of success of the uprising against social-

ism in relation to subsequent results, which the film recounts with its own means in an implicit retrograde technique.

The film presents the story, which culminates in a conversation in a local television studio in the provincial town of Vaslui east of Bucharest. The owner of the TV station and host of the talk show, one in the same person by the name of Jderescu, together with the interlocutors – the retired man Piscoci and the professor of history and drunkard Manescu – are trying to answer the above mentioned question, whether revolution did really happen or not in their town on 22nd December 1989? Through the stumbling conversation between the participants of the TV chat, among the viewers' telephone calls, amidst an increasingly bizarre atmosphere the problem ultimately boils down to the question of whether that particular day did anybody really demonstrate *before* the twelfth hour and eight minutes or were there demonstrations only *after* that hour? As it is generally known, at the said time national television broadcasted to the citizens of Romania the image of the helicopter, with which Ceauşescu and his wife left the scene of the first decisive act of the Romanian revolution against socialism. Manescu insists throughout the conversation that he and two other teachers from his school had in fact a quarter of an hour before the twelfth hour protested against the established local government and the Party. The pensioner Piscoci freely admits that he had gone to demonstrate only after a crucial moment as many others did. Through a series of funny incidents during the conversation, the problem becomes increasingly challenging because Manescu cannot prove that he really had been at the square, where the would-be revolution took place. His two colleagues, who supposedly were there with him, had died in the meantime, two other potential witnesses (the door attendant and an employee of the *Securitate*), who phone in to the TV show, both have uncertain memory. The manner in which this chat is depicted is very straightforward, almost in a style of a filmed theatre as the film camera identifies with the angle of the TV camera, leaving no doubt that it confronts the problem of *truth*, which is about to be revealed or concealed. The outcome of the whole chat is finally confusing, it turns out that it is impossible to know whether in the town really was a revolution or not. Even if the revolution were there, it would have seemed to be primarily the source of the confusing rhetoric, which retrospectively projected into history empty meanings, open for a legitimization of the supposed revolutionaries and other participants in the events. Conversely, it remains doubtful whether these people really did anything revolutionary and if so, it was fur-

ther questionable whether they had known what they have been doing at all
or not. However, there was one exception, represented by the voice of the
former *Securitate* agent on the phone, who leaves no doubt about his repu-
tation at the time and after seventeen years, when he speaks as a respecta-
ble citizen and a venture capitalist.

This narrative, which establishes the whole film metaphor, of course,
crosses the border of Romania and indicates relationships of political con-
siderations in most transition countries. No matter how clear it is that in
the years of social disruptions something decisive happened, it should also
be noticeable that in all countries there are on-going never-ending strug-
gles for interpretation of those events. In this new social space, designat-
ed by such co-ordinates, films, starting with the Porumboiu's film do not
interfere with definite direct statements – like films in the era of nation-
al cinematographies did albeit in many metonymic ways – but rather with
visual descriptions, ambiguous gestures, often poetic visual "discourse"
and, above all, with a universally comprehensible genre or artistic cinemat-
ic reflections on social realities.

Political Epistemological Break

Porumboiu's film, therefore, delivers a readable epistemological break ef-
fect considering the role of political signification in films, which were pro-
duced in the Balkans, especially those shot in former communist countries
in the area. The film marks a point at which a space of political signification
opens to deconstructive re-structuring: a troubling opposition "democracy
versus dictatorship" is now rendered to the past, considering that the whole
framework of political culture becomes unclear as opposed to the times of
one Party rule. Porumboiu's film could unmistakably be taken as an alle-
gory of the dubious comprehending of the happenings of 1989 as a revolu-
tion, which brought about the fall of communism. However, taking into
account the film's interrogatory ironic vision, the very significance of this
so-called revolution could be read in retrospect in view of Badiou's criti-
cism and its central notion as the "non-event" (Badiou, 2003: 129).[2] The film
therefore re-configured the whole field, in which historical meanings of the
times after the World War II are being disputed, reflected upon and, final-

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2   As Badiou noted in his reflection of the end of communism, what was mistakenly
     apprehended as a social change remained a matter of the State. The reorganization
     of the State alone is, according to his theory of event, hardly something that would
     bring with it an emancipatory breakthrough, the invention of something radically
     new.

ly yet importantly, described in novels and pictured in films. Porumboiu's film concludes a whole epoch of many political films' approach to capturing of social realities in all Balkan countries, with maybe the specific exception of Greece and Turkey.

The film *A fost sau n-a fost?* can be taken as one of the most representative key cases of what was happening in the cinematic minds at a certain point in time in the Balkans, when the results of the so-called transition to democracy were becoming disappointingly obvious. The historical signifier of communism in the Balkans is just only one among other signifiers, such as the Ottoman rule, notion of the nation, (ethnic) identity and diversity – all involving a lot of emotionalised collective memories and conflicting narratives. *A fost sau n-a fost?* transcends the inherent determinations that follow from such signifiers. Although the film does not present any standpoint, concerning Romanian relations to other Balkan countries, it, in a general attitude, inscribes itself in a somewhat programmatic vision of Dina Iordanova, saying: "As soon as 'being Balkan' is no longer a troublesome position but it is recognised instead as a tolerable agenda, the surreptitious reluctant togetherness and the acquiescent ignorance of one's own neighbours may come to an end" (Iordanova, 2006: 9). This could be well understood as an echo of yet another Bulgarian scholar, Maria Todorova's observation: "It is virtually axiomatic that, by and large, a negative self-perception hovers over the Balkans next to a strongly disapproving and disparaging outside perception. I am acutely aware that resorting to a notion like 'the Balkan people' and how they think of themselves smacks distinctly of 'national character,' a category that I oppose passionately on both methodological and moral grounds" (Todorova, 2009: 38).[3] Where Todorova sees a moral dimension, we may add an aesthetic dimension as well, which in films works through cultural and social signifiers, which also command the gaze of film authors. This is related to Porumboiu's movie, where there is a strong message that actually the "revolution" functioned as a catalyst for a realisation that "what had seemed to be there actually wasn't there". The film, therefore, throws us in a social and moral void. This is, as far as such kind of a film can go. Its aesthetic gesture (which is composed from above mentioned elements of film narration) points towards a need of a social invention, considering the dystopian world that resulted from the infamous "transition" and towards a search for a new paradigm of the organi-

3   Let me make a note that the first edition of the cited book by Maria Todorova appeared already in 1997.

sation of society. Nevertheless, what is more important concerns the place of the political signifier, which is from now on displaced since power relations became shrouded in a context of apparent democracy. Now through films like Porumboiu's, visibly originating in the void, which is uncovered in their intervention, the signifiers of the past acquire a different legibility. The figure of former *Securitate* agent well represents these shifts between structurally changed and the shifted centres of power between politics, economy and the variable junctures of symbolic power, which gain their positions from exchanges in what is constituted as the "market".

The political agency in its different aspects did not vanish in the internal as well as international settings. Although in the social reality of Balkan countries where nationalism is far from over, the local cinematographies are tending to escape, or ignore, or criticise, or avoid, or, yet again, confront it. They mostly try to move away from representing it or even advocating it by interiorising its decisive codes. There is evidence[4] that could be verified in 21st Century films, which supports hypotheses that the political signifiers in films are reallocated, they are entering into a wider social contextualisation, through which the whole political dimension, far from being absent, loses its role of *surdétermination* of cinematic themes and the structure of film narratives. However, comparing today's cinema to modernist national cinema of yore, also elements of experimentation with a form, a layer of usually "leftish" intellectualism and artistic attitude are absent in favour of a more straight narrative and often an adjustment to a genre. In the post-national small cinematographies of the Balkan countries, this coincides with large structural changes of the cinema production worldwide. Thomas Elsaesser pointed out in his seminal book *European Cinema / Face to face with Hollywood* (2005) that in the post-national period "Films' attention to recognizable geographical places and stereotypical historical periods" begun to "echo Hollywood's ability to produce 'open' texts that speak to a diversity of public, while broadly adhering to the format of classical narrative" (p. 82). No matter how much this tendency had appeared in the past in the cinematographies of the Balkans, not so rarely also in the period of "national" cinema under communism, we have to

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4   Unfortunately, full research evidence is not easy to acquire. Apart from some singular films that make it to the international festivals, much of the production is hardly screened in cinemas internationally; there are difficulties to find films on such media as DVD, etc. Even when one finds a film in some not always "legal" manner, there are problems like translations of dialogues. Luckily, at least recently there is a recognisable tendency among young filmmakers to communicate internationally.

deal today in the Balkans – that became even more "balkanised" after the turmoil of the end of communism – with small cinematographies, which for the most part, confirm the just mentioned hypotheses. This holds true in the case of many feature films, which deconstruct the past, and in an increasing number of feature films, which make use of genre codes or simply try to work on globalized topics. However, at the same time, the location of the Balkans, its immeasurable cultural diversity, reach and in many respects baffling violent history remains to be a ground for some singular visualisations and dramatization in films by younger generations of filmmakers. A topic in its own right is, naturally, the war in 1990s in former Yugoslavia. Films, which are shot in the new states, which were involved in those incomprehensible events, mostly concentrate on the traumas caused by the war. They show individual tragedies, displacements, display absurdity, loss and in some instances project stories of individuals' and of the social reconstruction. However, even these films, partly due to the universal awareness about the Yugoslav tragedy, are not just a local product for local spectators; they also speak to world audiences.

Small Cinematographies, which became Parts of World Cinema

As much as it seems to be an open notion, the term "world cinema" is by no means just a broad neutral category. There is a whole history of its signification, which I cannot enter into here. So let me just indicate why cinematographies of the Balkans in their more recent cases should be apprehended by placing them in the context of what the term "world cinema" or Elsaesser's formulation of the notion of the post-national cinema designate. According to Andrej Šprah, most of "/…/ considerations of the concept are linked to the basics of the notion, where we are dealing with balancing the relationship between aesthetic and geopolitical aspects of the seventh art, or, very simply, between film and the world" (Šprah, 2011: 91). More detailed definitions of the term "world cinema" point towards meanings as deciphered by post-colonial theory and at least some aspects of such assessments of the term could be linked to the Balkan small cinematographies. However, the cinema of the Balkans went through at least two phases before it brought to bear its special emphases to the notion of world cinema on conceptualising efforts. Cinema of the countries of former Yugoslavia is especially illustrative in this sense. Still at the beginning of the new millennium, that is to say, before 2006, when *A fost sau n-a fost* was shot, there were clear indications that cinema of this area largely passed a phase of a specific invert-

ed nationalism. This gave ground to Fredric Jameson to say: "I think that much recent film production does bear this external gaze within itself in a constitutive way and includes the external look of foreigners, of the West, of the US, in the image thus presented. We are like this, and in fact, we're even worse then you thought we are, and we love it!' (Jameson 2004: 235). Pavičić was inspired by this insight to write: "As many critics observed, post-Yugoslav art-house hits of the 1990s have often exploited an exaggerated, grotesque and intentionally stereotyped representation of the Balkans" (Pavičić, 2010: 44). This point is strengthened further in the Pavičić's text by naming it in a paraphrase of the term of "self-exotisation", often used in cultural studies, as "self-Balkanisation". Pavičić observes that after the year 2000, this trend changed: "Economic, social and ideological changes in the former Yugoslav countries influenced film content as much as film style" (Pavičić, 2010: 47). What then Pavičić calls "normalization", which leaves the self-Balkanisation adaptation of films for an external gaze behind, could and should be re-apprehended as the entering of the Balkan cinema into the realm of world cinema.

More recently, political, economic and social changes have made an impact in the area of culture, that utmost affects cinema. Many changes of circumstances and conditions of film production and distribution, technological ones being especially important, merge with the symbolic transfigurations and new agencies of social imaginary within trends in the Balkan cinema, now shaping itself as a part of world cinema. In the sense of Manovich's (2001) conceptual inventions, the "language" of visual media interferes with the formation of local cultures, where new inventions of traditions and modernising tendencies mingle with one another. Furthermore, digital technologies work not always only in favour of democratisation, yet the accessibility of contemporary visual media is modifying perceptions and modes of appropriating cultural traditions. In such framework, aesthetics become interlaced with the social context. The political statements in films now display a wide range of plurality and variety of different levels of exposing social issues that get uncovered or emphasised. It should go without saying that Balkan cinema keeps the attitude, which is displayed also in Porumboiu's film and in political terms does not succumb to any apology for the world after the transition.[5] Therefore, the aesthet-

5   Some films, which were produced a year or two *before* Porumboiu's film, should be classified as films, which already include the instance of the epistemological break, contained in the Romanian film. Most of Slovenian films, which are mentioned further down in the text, should be taken as examples, which contain the logic of the

ics of such cinema cannot be so transparently formulated as it could have been in times when it made use of visual and verbal metaphors and "hidden" messages to point to existential problems or to expose a spectrum of repression within political and cultural systems of the Balkans. Small cinematographies of the Balkans now, nevertheless, enter the world cinema as rather "readable" to global audiences and especially to those, who attend many film festivals. It would require a lot of systematic research to underpin such generalization with facts and analysis. In the framework of this book, I cannot fully tackle such a formidable task. Therefore, what I have found through the analysis of the Porumboiu's film will now be further only superficially illustrated by a few examples and hints about contexts of cinema in some Balkan countries.

Some Examples

Slovenia

Double periphery status (European and Balkan) often causes that in many compendium-like presentations of Balkan cinema, Slovenia is left out. On the other hand, this new country, which stems from the federal socialist Yugoslavia, is much more connected to Balkan issues, both culturally and politically than local national narcissism would like to admit. This could be illustrated by the influence that Filip Robar Dorin and another filmmaker Karpo Ačimović Godina, who worked as professors at the Theatre and Film School at the University of Ljubljana, had in this respect on younger generations.[6] It should be stressed that Slovenia entered the currents in the direction of world cinema a few years earlier than most other former Yugoslav countries thanks to its lucky escape from Yugoslavia without an all-out war. Damjan Kozole and Boris Jurjaševič were the first representatives of a new generation of filmmakers, who made their debuts in 1980s already. Others (like Andrej Košak, Janez Burger, Sašo Podgoršek, Maja Weiss and Jan Cvitković… to name just a few) followed already in the 1990s in the

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"world after", the world of post-socialism or even simply the world of world cinema. Of course, similar cases, which are made inherently readable in a different register in the view of political signifiers, are to be found all over the Balkans.

6   Robar Dorin with Karpo Aćimović on camera namely directed a prophetic film in 1985 *Rams and Mammoths*, which showed a devastating role of ethnic intolerance in Slovenia, then a part of Yugoslavia. A detailed analysis of the film and the context can be found in: Štrajn, Darko (2011) Robar-Dorin's mirror: Rams and Mammoths in the context of Yugoslav history. *New Review of Film and Television Studies*. Vol. 9, No. 4, December 2011, 455–472

post-socialist Slovenia. Their work generally represents a significant paradigm shift and a change of the aesthetic code. The Slovenian cinema left behind its submissive attitude towards the canonised "national" literature. It moved towards a variety of productions such as genre films, parody in a manner of absurdist humour and it still insisted on critical reflections of social realities. The trend keeps being perceptible after the year 2000. Throughout this time the topic of ethnic intolerance, which Robar Dorin brought out so impressively in the 1980s, kept being reintroduced, deconstructed and demystified in a string of films such as *Outsider* (by Košak - 1997), *Stereotip* (Stereotype by Kozole – 1998), Venice film festival debut award winner *Kruh in mleko* (Bread and Milk by Cvitković – 2001), *Kajmak in marmelada* (Cheese and Jam by Branko Djurić – 2003) and *Rezervni deli* (Spare Parts by Kozole – 2003). However, the impact of these movies differs from the Dorin's as they enter into the category of already European films, which externalise the split identities in the increasingly multi-cultural context. Films by Podgoršek (*Temni angeli usode* – Dark Angels – 1999 and *Sladke sanje*, Sweet Dreams – 2001) could be broadly linked to the phenomena of the Slovenian cult rock group *Laibach* and the group of painters, known as *Irwin*. What happened to be an imitative gesture of power under socialism in *Laibach*'s performances, transforms now into a re-creation of the myth, exploited for making representations of universally recognisable patterns of fear, hatred and "dark" political signifiers. These trends and a number of new directors later led even much further towards the world cinema. Much differently from this, a special significance should be attached to the phenomena of new types of productions, based on the accessibility of digital technology, which made possible a part of work of Vlado Škafar and especially a breakthrough of Mitja Okorn. Škafar, who on one hand has an *oeuvre* in documentaries, is on the other hand an author with a taste for portrayals of special intimate relationships. So he, for example, after a few years of recording, made a digital film *Nočni pogovori z Mojco* (Night Talks to Mojca – 2010), which is only accessible on DVD, distributed among friends and shown on exclusive screenings in art cinemas. The film follows developments of interpersonal links between the radio night talk show leader and phone callers, identified only by their first names. His feature film *Oča* (Dad – 2010) deals with subtleties of rapport between a father and his young son with some grim signals of social crisis. The film includes a few documentary scenes from textile factory workers' strike. Škafar's film has got some acclaim by the critics at Venice film festival. Mitja Okorn, the

youngest and internationalised hope of Slovenian cinema, is much different character. His first film *Tu pa tam* (Here and There – 2004) was really an extremely low budget hilarious movie, shot with a digital camera, about four youngsters who get involved with mafia. The film shot by youngsters for youngsters was transferred to the cinema format and it had huge local success. Although *Tu pa tam* is understandably quite a naïve movie, it reflects broadly the social changes and positions of young people without a clear perspective of life before them. After working on some television projects Okorn had difficulties to acquire sponsoring from the Slovenian Film Fund, but he succeeded in Poland, where he shot a real genre film on the topic of Christmas: *Listy do M.* (Letters to Santa – 2011). The style and iconography as well as development of characters, multi-threaded narratives, contribute to a full Hollywood-effect of this accomplished movie. Some social signifiers, which at least give a hint of injustices in the framework of capitalist system, are recognisable in the manner of many films in the genre of Hollywood type melodrama.

Croatia

"[…] the acceptance of Otherness, reconfiguration of national, gender, or racial identity, and the subversion of limiting ideological and, most frequently, patriarchal norms are all becoming necessities of the current post-war period in the state of transition" (Vojković, 2008: 84). That is why, as Saša Vojković adds in the same text, the Balkans are the area, where "/.../ the European identity is being negotiated, as well as possibilities of co-existence". The Croatian cinema was much more decisively than the Slovenian one touched by the appalling events in former Yugoslavia during 1990s, which caused a stronger presence of war topics and traumas attached to the war. Nevertheless, the same trends away from the paradigm of national cinema are detectible in Croatian cinema as well as elsewhere in the Balkans. Some directors of the "old guard" can be found to be active with some new films as, for instance, one of the big names of Croatian cinema Rajko Grlić with the film *Karaula* (2006), financed by almost all former Yugoslav republics. The film about the bizarre events in a Yugoslav army's outpost at the Albanian border could be interpreted as a powerful allegory of the reasons for the tragedy of the Balkan multi-ethnic state. However, also in Croatia a new breed of directors (and, of course, scriptwriters, actor, etc.) makes its way in the direction of putting quite specific emphases in the framework of the world cinema. Hrvoje Hribar was one such young-

er author, who in the form of romantic comedy challenged social norms in his film *Što je muškarac bez brkova?* (What is a Man without a Moustache? – 2005.) The film story is about love between a young widow and a catholic priest, which was seen as a bit of a provocative theme in the overwhelmingly catholic Croatia, but of course, it has a message for other audiences as well, considering all the talk about sexuality in the Catholic Church all over the world. Another quite productive director Ognjen Sviličić joins the ranks of the same club. For instance in his film *Oprosti za kung fu* (Forgive Me for Kung Fu – 2004) he presents the world of the transition, where many social conflicts have roots in different realities. "In this film, it is paradoxical that kung fu as a global cultural product is introduced as a synonym for local narrow-mindedness, provincialism, and xenophobia" (Vojković, 2008: 88). Three young directors (Zvonimir Jurić, Boris T. Matić and Antonio Nuić) completed in the same year stylistically rough and narratively unbalanced and yet an intriguing film, which combines documentary shots of football fans and acted scenes, which are finished in a completion of destiny. Finally, there are attached scenes of heavy drinking at one's of the football fans home. The host's wife is humiliated and bashed in front of the group. The title of the movie gives itself a clear message: *Sex piće i krvoproliće* (Sex, Drink and Bloodshed – 2004).

Serbia

Ivana Kronja is quite critical about Serbian cinema after 2000 from a feminist viewpoint: "The majority of Serbian films after the year 2000 show a tendency of re-traditionalization and re-establishment of patriarchal values in terms of male-female gender roles and women's rights" (Kronja, 2008: 67). Many of the Serbian films from this period are indeed showing a grim social picture. As the critic rightly says, they suggest a retreat to the traditional (i.e. patriarchal) values in the political and cultural convulsions of a process of coming to terms with recent historical blows to the Serbian identity. They propose a sense of self-respect of members of the nation. Serbia, as it seems, has not only the most troubles in the field of filmmaking among Balkan countries in the way of a kind of small world cinema cinematography, but also in the field of film-viewing. In a relatively successful attempt of world cinema to be present in the Balkans through director Angelina Jolie with a film *In the Land of Blood and Honey* (2011), the tragedy of the Bosnian war is presented in a classical narrative (as Elsaesser would say) as an emotional encounter between a Serbian military man and Bosnian cap-

tive woman. However, the film was totally boycotted by the Belgrade audiences, which could be taken as a symptom of difficulties in Serbian society to come to terms with the troubling recent history of the Balkans. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Serbia, once the leading cinematography in the framework of Yugoslav cinema, should be written off as an interesting cinematography in the terms of world cinema. Ivana Kronja admits that such authors, as prominent directors of the so-called Prague school Goran Paskaljević (*San zimske noći* / A Midwinter Night's Dream – 2004) and Srđan Karanović (*Sjaj u očima* / Loving Glances – 2003) represent exceptions to what she found to be a rule in Serbian cinema. Although, I cannot claim to be really well acquainted with Serbian cinema, I think there are still some interesting products, which artistically and socially conform to an open paradigm of world cinema with some emancipatory messages or at least depictions of their cultural and political circumstances. An interesting film by Aleksandar Davić *Žurka* (The Party – 2004) gives a complex and frustrating take on the beginning of the war in Croatia in 1991 through a story of a group of young people, who gather at a birthday party and later become affected by the war in various ways. An even better argument for the future of Serbian cinema in the world could be found in some other products. Darko Lungulov's film *Tamo i ovde* (Here and There – 2009) in the category of Serbian "urban films" literally opens Serbia up to the outer world in a film, which takes place in New York and Belgrade and combines two interlaced love stories with historical backgrounds, world views and global–local relations. The manifestations of agencies, which move characters between worlds, are depicted as the microsphere relationships operating many controversies with an impact on the lives of ordinary people. Another socially and politically involved case is the film *Parada* (The Parade – 2011) by Srdjan Dragojević. The film confronts a still unforgiving attitude in Serbian political culture against gays and it builds its story around the event of a gay pride parade in Belgrade. The film by the author, who is otherwise known for his iconic war film *Lepa sela lepo gore* (Pretty Village, Pretty Flame – 1996), is one of the rare cases of a film with a surprisingly direct enlightening political and social symbolic effect for the public.

Shifted Signifiers

Following from the hypotheses that the film *A fost sau n-a fost?* represents a point of a kind of cinematic epistemological break with the paradigm of national cinema, ample evidence can be found in many Balkan countries

that supports a claim about small cinematographies in the region as being parts of so-called world cinema. Of course, this chapter was not meant to present all evidence, which could be attained only in a longer and exhaustive research. Still, we can say that multiple effects of social, cultural, political and technological changes are contributing impulses to an interesting range of small cinematographies, which are further important for their specific features, due to the region's turbulent history and cultural resources. The political signifiers within the structure of film narratives are generally shifted so that they project a perspective of a pluralistic democratic future, but in some instances, as mostly narrative arts always have been doing, present insights and warnings concerning social and political realities. Let me conclude these considerations by making a special point about one recent film, directed by Béla Tarr, a well-known and accomplished Hungarian author. *A Torinói ló* (The Turin Horse – 2011) proves my point exactly because of its elementary cinematic approach to the film narration and its topic. The uncompromising aesthetics of long takes and slow rhythm sequences compose a film, which could be apprehended as a philosophical essay or even less: as an alignment of reflexive visual aphorisms. Of course, the film makes no secret of its indebtedness to philosophy since the voice-over initiates the movie by telling the anecdote about Nietzsche and his attempt to help a horse submitted to an ill-treatment by his owner; the voice then directs the audience's attention to the horse and its fate. This introduction gives way to a repetitive visual contemplation pointing towards the ultimate problems of ontology and human existence by following the gloomy miserable routine of father and daughter, exposed to a common life with their old horse in an unceasingly windy steppe. This black and white film, it could be said, echoes recent contemplations by authors from Deleuze to Donna Harraway concerning the decentring of subjectivity in view of recognising environmental positioning of living creatures, including animals and humans on different registers of knowledge and science. As much as any political signifier seems absent from this meditative film, it is exactly this absence, which marks the problem of a transformation of the Balkans in accordance with its best reflexive traditions in the antiquity. Therefore, a possibility alone for such a film to be created in one of the Balkan countries, otherwise known for its rich cinema in the context of its middle European cultural position, is a statement of the inner strength and a potential scope of the small cinematographies of the Balkans.

5: The End of Cinema

Identity in a Notion
of the Eastern and Western
European Cinema[1]

If there is a distinctive trait of European cinema, it could be seen within an attitude towards the category of identity in most representative and intellectually challenging feature films. The very notion of identity opens a field, where we encounter a number of relevant meanings as far as films are concerned. There are common features between different approaches to identity in the European cinema in different periods. The notion of identity concerns a number of its enunciations that touch upon philosophical subjectivity, psychological subject, an ethnic entity, the political agent, and so forth. All these different aspects of identity, which naturally are, in most cases (but not necessarily so) inscribed in a constructions of characters, are manifested in films from different periods of European cinematography. Modernist movements of 1960s and 1970s both in Western Europe (as in the French *nouvel vague* or young German cinema) and Eastern Central Europe (especially Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia) addressed the theme of identity in a manner that could be read as ideologically subversive. At the end of this chapter, I conclude that after the political turmoil's in 1989 the theme of identity emerges in a new context.

1   This chapter is derived from an article published in New Review of Film and Television Studies on 11 Apr 2008, available online: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17400300701850616. (Štrajn, Darko. Identity in a notion of the Eastern and Western European cinema. *New review of film and television studies*, ISSN 1740-0309, April 2008, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 41-50.)

Identity with a Difference

It would probably be an almost impossible task today to classify all meanings and uses of the notions of identity, especially considering all the controversies and contributions of the many broad debates within the context of post-modernity. Likewise, within the more practical realm of social events, different perceptions of identity, and the uncontrollable interplay of all symbolic signifiers that have come with them, indicate sometimes grave conflicts, especially with regard to an ethnic identity. However, let us be reminded that identity as a concept has its relevance in philosophy. We can, without any hesitation, assert that throughout the whole history of philosophy – not excluding most of the "non-western" reflections which could be, in fact, compared to the Western philosophy – the notion of identity in many different articulations and different discursive contexts has played different roles: sometimes it was more a role of a central concept and sometimes it was just a "technicality". But the question of identity, which contained in itself the anticipation and difficulties of a vast number of formulations of the concept, has been seriously posed, of course, after the formulation of the Descartes' idea of subjectivity in its relation to knowledge. Later after the French revolution, Fichte building upon the complex system of Kant's philosophy, contributed his emphasis on the meaning of identity, which filled the concept with those signifiers that opened the way to a new development of concepts, most notably, the notions of culture and freedom in relation to identity (Fichte, 1977). Hegel's criticism of Fichte, especially in his early work concerning the difference between Fichte and Schelling, served as a way of appropriating Fichte's dialectics of Subject in what had been about to become Hegel's philosophical system. But simultaneously Hegel's critique in a paradigmatic sense cleared up a look on Fichte's positioning of the concept of identity in his construction of the Subject as the I (*das Ich*): "The foundation of *Fichte's system* is the intellectual scrutiny of oneself, pure self-consciousness I = I, I am; the absolute is subject-object and the I is the identity of Subject and object" (Hegel, 1970: p. 52). In view of Hegel's harsh criticism, Fichte actually failed on all accounts. In a very brief summation of Hegel's criticism of Fichte we can acknowledge that Hegel found that Fichte's system "was not the system" because identity was only "formal". On the bases of his observation of the Fichte's idea of identity as it is posited simultaneously with the difference (since the "formula" A=A introduces the difference in what should be inherently undifferentiated) and it is therefore opened towards the "weak infinity", Hegel denies

the main point of Fichte's idea of the absolutely free subjectivity in that the Subject posits himself by his activity. It could be argued that Hegel signalled here his own "step forward" by conceptualising the notion of alterity. Due to a degree – to put it mildly – of ambiguity in the discourse of both of these philosophies, one would need a much wider analysis to ascertain any definite claim. For our aim in this chapter it isn't so important to solve this very interesting controversy, which is still alive among specialists, who deal with the philosophy of German idealism. Hence, to put it bluntly – it is not so important either – whether Hegel was right or not. My aim here is only to indicate the fact that early in the 19th century the notion of identity gained such implications in its meaning, which later on proved to be crucial, and I have in particular in mind the connection between *identity* and *difference* (or in another specifically post-modern articulation: the alterity) and the *activity*. Of course, all of these notions are strongly attached to the notion of the *Subject*. Hegel's criticism of Fichte concerning the notion of identity marks a point in Europe's history, when the reflexive concepts became indispensable for any understanding of the productivity of concepts, which were inscribed into new social realities. Ethnicities, cultures, nations as new entities, which determined formations of collective identities, comprising slowly changing individual identities, happened to be just some aspects of these new social realities in the context of the rise of capitalism, industry and bourgeois class society.

Suicide at the Seashore

As the bourgeois class society developed new forms of representation of a socially constructed reality, and a special place and role for aesthetic practices (usually known as art) in this reality, identity became a denominator of a lot of different uses and meanings. On the other hand, the term itself lost its "innocence" due to complex impacts of new forms of representation, which (as a necessary intellectual addition) contributed to the reproduction of the public. The role of photography and film in this sense was immense. Maybe we could say today that film after a period of developing different formats in different registers reached a point, when we could almost determine subjectivity (in a psychological or sociological sense) in the social reality as a kind of "representation of representation", meaning that the "real subjectivity" represents an imagined or a conceptual representation of subjectivity. In any case, in the age of television and digitalisation, images, gestures, recognition patterns, representations of bodies and so on,

are all bringing us closer to such consequences. However, as much as such suppositions seem intellectually attractive, they should not be taken too far, but they should serve as an indication of some of the complex effects of audio-visual production, which is woven in the fabric of society. Here we are talking, of course, about symbolic exchanges within any society. Therefore, there is no doubt that the identity in the framework of culture by and large functions as a recognition scheme, within which the audio-visual production provides many particular views, angles, objects, gazes, suggestions and so forth, which modify ways of seeing things and also ways of "being seen". It should be added that the instance of "being seen" involves the *being* as such, which is the category of existence and of the existentialist philosophy.

Lacan's theory of gaze that was developed in his most quoted seminar can be quite helpful for comprehending the extent of this. Lacan's explanation of a little incident from his youth with a fisherman Petit-Jean has some methodological value for what we are trying to illustrate here. Petit-Jean's claim that the can glittering on the surface of the water "doesn't see you!" as we know, engaged Lacan's thinking quite a lot: "To begin with, if what Petit-Jean said to me, namely, that the can did not see me, had any meaning, it was because in a sense, it was looking at me, all the same. It was looking at me at the level of the point of light, the point at which everything that looks at me is situated – and I am not speaking metaphorically" (Lacan. 1979, p. 95). Why Lacan finds it necessary and, actually, so prominent to stress that he "wasn't speaking metaphorically"? Taking into account his relation with the group of fishermen, what we can characterise as a culturally structured situation, Lacan demonstrates how the subject, in a "form" of Lacan himself in this case, is thrown out of picture. Although in this chapter Lacan is not concentrating on identity, the process, if I may say so, of gazing and especially being seen by the objects, could be apprehended as a kind of a process of identifying. Here we cannot but evoke one of the most impertinent and beautiful *finales* in film history, namely the end of Godard's film *Pierrot le fou* (1965), in which the Belmondo character commits a very bizarre suicide at the sea shore. As the cords of dynamite sticks that he wraps abundantly around his head explode, and the subject goes up in smoke, camera turns toward the setting sun on the line of seas' horizon. It is the intense light of this final shot, accompanied by Rimbaud's verses[1],[2] which bear a resemblance to the scene of Lacan's vision of a vision. The differ-

2   Verses were taken from Rimbaud's poem *L'Éternité* (May 1872), which starts and finishes with this "dialogic" stanza: "*Elle est retrouvée./Quoi ? – L'Éternité. C'est la mer alée/ Avec le soleil.*"

ence between Belmondo and Lacan was only this that the Belmondo character took the absence of the metaphor very seriously and so he vanished into the light of the very bright sun. Lacan only recognizes the disappearance of subjectivity, Pierrot submits himself to the disappearance from the picture. Therefore, we can imagine Lacan as a viewer of this Godard's film nodding approvingly to Godard's perceptive visualisation of the productivity in a form of destructiveness of the identifying process. At the end of this we find nothing less than the obliteration of subject, not in just metaphorical terms, as Lacan very importantly remarked. We shall come back to this point further down.

Let us first try now to change the level of our elaboration of different angles of viewing upon the category of identity by bringing it into a context of the wider cultural space, which is of our special concern, namely Europe. If there is a distinctive trait of the European cinema, it should be apprehended through an attitude to the category of identity in most representative and intellectually challenging feature films. The very notion of identity opens a field, where we encounter a number of relevant meanings as far as films, which we have in mind, are concerned. These meanings, needless to say, cannot be perceived out of context, which is always historical. "History and identity are probably the two amongst those concepts, with which the influence of hundred years of cinema could be assessed" (Elsaesser 1996, p. 52).[3] The recent international theoretical discussion on a correlation between cinema and history brought up quite clearly a definitive realisation about the impossibility of recent history to avoid a deep impact of film. History is remembered, and it therefore exists through images, which were unavoidably taken at a certain point in time and so in turn the point in time becomes an image open to interpretation, which always integrates the time-image in the context of a present. Without elaborating such complex assertions much further, we can claim that the European cinema in its most "articulated" products particularly reflected this correlation, in which the present is the point of becoming and vanishing of identity as it is produced and destroyed in the processes of identifying. We could determine the roots of our understanding these processes in the classical European thinking, which is best represented by Fichte's effort to formulate an absolutely free subject, who reproduces himself in a form of his famous *das Ich*. The identity is, as we hinted at the beginning of this paper, a dynam-

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3   I translated this quotation from the Slovenian translation of the text. So, the responsibility for the meaning of the statement is at least in part mine.

ic category of a productive subjective activity, through which differences that are in many respects defined as cultural attributes, contribute to the self-recognition of the subject in the process of forming the identity. In this activity the subject triumphs over history as well, or in other words, the (abstract) subject's freedom is manifested also in his freedom from the determinations of history. However, this triumph happens to be an illusory imposition of the subject: history, as a rule, strikes back in a form of "events". In any case, films reacted to a correlation with history especially through their reflexive approach to identity. Therefore, we can say that there are common features between different approaches to identity in the European cinema in different periods. The notion of identity concerns a number of its enunciations that touch upon philosophical subjectivity, psychological subject, an ethnic entity, the political agent, and so on. All these different aspects of identity, which are naturally in most cases, but not necessarily so, inscribed in constructions of fictional characters, are manifested in films from different periods of European cinematography.

European Modernity: Decentring Identity

Modernist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, as I hinted at the beginning of this chapter, addressed the theme of identity in an ideologically subversive manner. Among many definitions of ideology, I am choosing here a very minimalist one, which joins a representation of reality and a system of domination. This subsequently means that a subject (person, citizen, man, woman, etc.) is defined within an order, which includes economy and morality, culture and education, politics and media, sports and traffic, language and religion and many more such conceptual pairs or oppositions. As the period of post-war prosperity on the both sides of the iron curtain opened a space for a new self-definition of younger generations, a great number of the European films of the period addressed the position of individual in a society in a manner, which uncovered the illusory stability of the world. These films addressed the so-called alienation,[4] they opened a view on social inequalities and poverty in a world supposedly without poverty, and they contributed to the decentred ideas of order in a manner that ironically paralleled the absurdist theatre. All these messages and

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4   The notion of alienation was largely used at the time in the intellectual discourses of existentialism and in some trends within the New Left, especially those, which were discovering the "young Marx" and which worked with ideas of the critical theory of the Frankfurt school. The term alienation itself could be a starting point for taking a deconstructive view of the period.

meanings wouldn't be observable without inventive approach of film-makers, who worked a lot on the aesthetic and communicative form of films, which means that they were exploring possibilities for new ways of visual narration and new ways of operating the look of a camera. In the midst of this the European cinema of the time gave way to a new definition of authorship, which, as we all know, followed from the *nouvelle vague*, but it can be argued that it was embraced all over Europe – both in the Western and the Eastern Europe – and at least in the independent American cinema. No matter how the perception and definition of *l'auter* changed later, a degree of a specific understanding of the role and autonomy of the film director survived until now.

We should not underestimate another important aspect, which concerns the personality of an author, namely the element of his personal investment into a film narrative. Michelangelo Antonioni pointed out as early as in 1958: "It is evident that an autobiographical part always exists in a film" (Antonioni, 2003: p. 9). Roughly, in 1960a and 1970s, which could be apprehended now as a golden era of the European cinema, modernism strongly affected the film view on identity in the context of the post-war history. As the field of a possible research, comparing and deconstructing the period in question is very large, I shall try to make my point only by indicating few examples, which illustrate a very interesting step towards a modernist visualisation of identity in cinema. As it all happened, the focus on identity in the European cinema of the period in the work of the most outstanding and innovative film authors was the individual lost or "alienated" in a society. Of course, one could say that this was nothing so very special, since most feature films one way or the other "tell" some story, in which individual character inevitably has a role. Still, I think, that we can determine some decisive attributes, which were built into the modernist cinematic construction of individual characters, and that precisely the incompleteness of these characters' shattered identity was the distinguishing element. With a certain reservations, we could establish a few quite common features of characters. They were mainly urban individuals, and their universal attributes (as men and women), with some notable exceptions, were much more emphasised than their specific cultural determination. As a rule, these characters were disoriented due to a traumatic past experiences, which is revealed through their search for identity without a definitive idea of their objective and/or purpose. These searches usually failed or ended in unsatisfying compromises or in open-ended films, which suggest-

ed the idea of identity in a form of an unanswered question: "Who am I, and who I am not?" Very often, these characters were representatives from some marginal social stratums.[5] The erotic aspect and ways of representing it in films distinguished these films from the film-making in the past in a manner, which was recognised as many films' contribution to a rebellion against the traditional patriarchal morals and as an illustration of the so called sexual revolution. Lautner's film *Galia* (1966) with a "paradigmatic" role of a liberated woman, who was impressively impersonated by Mireille Darc, is a very good example of this trend.

There are some typical topics, which can be found in the European cinema of the period. The motive of youngsters, who were delinquent or alienated or lost, is probably the clearest presentation of problems of identity as the central element in the modernist period in Europe. Truffaut, starting with his 400 Blows (*Les Quatre cent coups* – 1959), contributed a whole series on a character, played by Jean-Pierre Léaud, whom he named Antoine Doinel. Truffaut signalled the traumatic aspect of this character by pointing out the historical and social context: "A short time after the war there was a fresh upsurge of the juvenile delinquency. Juvenile prisons were full. I had known very well what I showed in my film…" (Truffaut, 2004: p. 26) The environment of the socialist societies proved not to be at all that different as soon as some film directors started to work on themes of so called daily life, which almost in a manner of aesthetics of home movies differed from the ideologically marked "reality" of the political and economic context of societies with the one political Party rule. So another well remembered adolescent character was Milos Forman's Black Peter (*Černý Petr* – 1964). Forman made a point on incomplete identity also in his film A Blonde in Love (*Lásky jedné plavovlásky* – 1965). Of course, we shouldn't miss also Andrzej Wayda's Innocent Sorcerers (*Niewinni czarodzieje* – 1960), which deals with the topic of the "alienated youth" and ads quite daringly, considering the times and the catholic socialist environment of Poland, an anthological explicit erotic sequence of a strip poker game. Ingmar Bergman's film, which addressed the young proletarian frustrations, and at the same time brought up a new focus on female characters, *Summer with Monika (Sommaren med Monika* – 1953) should be "classified" as an early case among such films. On the other hand a giant of the European modernist cinema Michelangelo Antonioni with his sophisticated, doubting, intellectual communica-

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5 The marginalisation as a critical and sociological concept that also addressed the problem of identity of individuals in the context of the social order has been developed then.

tion loosing characters, who seem psychologically and socially deprived of the sense of identity, is in a class of his own. Characters in his films are approaching the limit of the constitution of subjectivity through desire in the psychoanalytical terms, as they seem to be without an idea of the true object of their desire, of course, apart from Antonioni's own manifested desire to see through the eye of the camera, what is very difficult to see otherwise. Following the trace of identity as a topic in the European modernist cinema, we could of course go on and on citing and analysing many films, which were shot in the period also in Great Britain within the movement of free cinema, and of course in Germany within the Young German Cinema. But we can as well stop here, since my aim was mainly to map the European context of a case of a film, which I shall try to use as an example for a view in the Balkan's cinematic reality of the time.

Sand Castle

As in most other Central and Eastern European countries, which were liberated from Nazism in a flame of socialist revolutions, also in Yugoslavia, film production developed relatively quickly thanks to a high degree of support by new revolutionary authorities. In any case, Yugoslav cinematography eventually developed in many respects as the strongest film production in the Balkans. The initial period after the Second World War was marked by a sub-genre of the war genre, namely so called partisan movies, and a number of adaptations of the local canonised literature and drama for screening. Especially the latter sort of films, which were mostly *a priori* supposed to bear an "artistic value", could be studied nowadays as an expression of tendencies to form a cinematic version of identity aiming at the collective aspect, the so-called national (ethnic) self-image. Hence, we can say that in a quite early period of the socialist Yugoslavia the constitutive parts – federal republics, which were founded on the ethnic principle – worked upon some aspects of their traditional, cultural and ethnic distinctions in film, as they did it as well in the other art forms in spite of the so called internationalist political and ideological rhetoric. Each of the federal republics was autonomous in its cinematic as well as all other cultural endeavours. Not all of these films could be easily dismissed regarding their aesthetics, cinema craftsmanship or sophistication, but they predominantly represented a pre-modern view of film in tune with signifiers of a belated romantic vision of the ethnic identity and occasionally with "obligatory" class messages. A matter of a discussion of another kind is a question

on how much these Yugoslav movies could be contextualised in view of the post-socialist tragedy of the country.[6] Nevertheless, in between there was a period, when it seemed that a new urban culture, which transcended the attributes of an exclusivist ethnic identity, was emerging in this multi-cultural Balkan republics. Many cases of films could be found in almost all Yugoslav republics that in many respects shared a similar aesthetic codes and modernist views as some other European films mentioned above. However, let me bring up my point by briefly presenting just one film: Sand Castle (*Peščeni grad* – 1962) by Boštjan Hladnik, the *enfant terrible* of the Slovenian cinema.

In 1960s the Slovenian cinema made first most recognisable and serious moves towards a modernist approach in film-making. As recently deceased director of the Slovenian cinematheque Silvan Furlan remarked in his article for a special issue of the review Ekran, dedicated to the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Slovenian film: "[The Slovenian film] gained importance as the mass culture and as art as well. Why should our film be anything special in this regard? But it is certainly very special for our culture and art – it visibly co-created and it still co-creates an image of ourselves" (Furlan, 2005: p. 42). The period of late modernism, in which a part of film production in Slovenia went on dutifully screening "national" myths and canonised literature, brought about also some of the most important films in Slovenia so far. Boštjan Hladnik contributed quite a big share of them. The film *Peščeni grad* maybe is not Boštjan Hladnik at his best, but still the film very well represents his role in the history of Slovenian cinema. Already with his first feature film, Dancing in the Rain (*Ples v dežju* – 1961) Hladnik introduced the aesthetics of modernity in the cinema of Slovenia. And he did so very much so that the meaning of the film remains rather impenetrable and ambiguous for most average viewers. Although the Dancing In the Rain immediately gained high acclaim among the cultured audiences, it looks like that Hladnik perhaps felt a need to come closer to less sophisticated moviegoers. The result was in many respects not much less accomplished film, which is in view of a presentation of an identity problem much more transparent than the first Hladnik's film. As in the Sand Castle (which is a sort of a road movie or maybe more precise: off road movie) there is not much of a story, we just get many fragments, which emit double messages of joy and anxiety. The story of the film

6   In my view, a research along such lines would shed some additional light on many reasons for fierceness of the ethnic conflicts in the Balkans after 1990.

begins in the city (home audiences of course recognise the capital Ljubljana), where one of the lead characters, named Ali, feels bad due to his failure at the university exams. So after a quarrel with his girlfriend he hits the road in his *deux chevaux*, which was a quite popular car in Slovenia at the time. On his way out of the city, he first takes in his car a hitch hiker named Smokey, and finally a secretive girl Milena. The three then travel to the sea, later they drive on cart tracks and totally off any road looking for a deserted beach. They find such beach and they spend their time there playing, bathing. Some hints about a love triangle are given but not much follows from it; it looks like that Milena is falling in love with the both boys, but the story does not develop much further in any resolution of the love triangle. At the end Milena jumps from a sea cliff. For two of the three main roles in the film Hladnik engaged a pair of Serbian actors Milena Dravić and Ljubiša Samardžić, who became highly popular for their role in Branko Bauer's comedy about life in so called "youth labour brigades" *Prekobrojna* (since there is no official English title this could be translated as "Over the Number"), which was shot in the same year just before Hladnik shot his movie. The pair of young actors represented already in the *Prekobrojna*, what seemed to be a much-desired nascent Yugoslav identity. Hladnik made use of the two actor's image of a young couple looking for "joys of life". However, Hladnik's film is not any comedy in spite of the fact that what seems to be a love triangle is interwoven with many comic situations. On the other hand, at the same time the characters fall repeatedly in bursts of un-motivated laughter, which becomes more understandable only at the end of the film. Joy and playfulness of the youths, who could have been just of any nationality or ethnic origin, is, as it seems in the carefully chosen moments, punctured by unexplainable relapses of the main female character in weird conditions of sudden fear and sorrow. So, Hladnik throughout the movie hints at some emptiness in a subjectivity, which makes the identity of characters quite ambivalent. At the end, the trauma is revealed in a quite abrupt way. The explanation, which is given at the end of the movie, seems even too explicit and it is somehow not in tune with otherwise generally "*nouvelle vague*" kind of atmosphere of the film. Nevertheless, the film is one of the first Yugoslav films, which reflects the emerging urban middle class and new values of a cosmopolitan part of the younger generation at the time. If we talk on a different level about this film, we should be reminded of Godard and his *Pierrot le fou*, which happened to be shot three years later than Hladnik's "Castle". Hladnik's film is one of those black and white films,

which gives an impression to a viewer that he has seen colours in the film. As *Pierrot le fou* also *Peščeni grad* is throughout the whole film permeated by very bright light, which in an inexplicit way suggests the instance of "being seen" for the characters. As the Godard's hero vanishes into the light at the end of the film, so does Hladnik's Milena, only she vanishes from a high rock above the angry sea waves. But the effect of vanishing is still the same in its suggestion of the non-metaphorical blunt standpoint on the subject's identity, which is in the Lacanian view a tool of a production of subjectivity, which never can establish itself outside of a constant threat between desire and the total loss. At the end of Hladnik's film viewers are told by a doctor from a psychiatric hospital that the traumatised girl was born in the concentration camp. Therefore, the character of the girl stands for an identity problem of the whole generation of the modernist period. However, nowadays, we can recognise Hladnik's intuition that – maybe even unknowingly – got an insight into the destructive potential of such identity's construction. What seemed for years as a too explicit explanation of the subject's trauma in the film cannot be interpreted today without any association to the concentration camps of the war in Bosnia, which functioned in the social imaginary of many ex-Yugoslavs as an upsurge of hidden forces of history. Therefore, as we know, after the political turmoil's in 1989, that changed the map of Europe, the theme of identity emerged in a new context.

Memory and Identity in Film

Nowadays we must often specify what we mean exactly when we talk about memory: do we mean the memory, which we keep in our brains or do we mean some digital data, which is stored on a hard drive somewhere in cyber space? Although in probably all languages the figure of speech "I remember" is still widely used, it is meant increasingly more often as an inscription into a memory, which is uttered in some recollection residing somewhere "outside" of our brains. In our digital era, when implications of such an assumption have become obvious, we should look back to understand the genealogy of this state of affairs, and to be able to analyse a structural composition of our so-called post-modern reality. The complexity of meanings regarding the notions of memory has become more complicated and yet simpler at the same time from the beginnings of the development of the first photography and then film, as it entered human history and the lexicon of ordinary language already in very early popular culture. Images, which represented the visual world more convincingly than any artist's work – not because they were better as images, but because they were recognised to be "truer" – have forever changed human perception. How was human perception organised and how it functioned before this process of change started, we are unable to say in detail, but we can take into account many such written records as various philosophical texts, especially those

on epistemology, which demonstrate many troubles in explaining the perception and the true value of a reality outside ourselves.[1]

Mieke Bal notes in the *Introduction* to the collection of writings on cultural analysis, the "/.../ cultural analysis seeks to understand the past as *part of* the present, as what we have around us, and without which no culture would be able to exist" (Bal, 1999: p.1). These interdisciplinary approaches, which have been developed in the field of *cultural analysis* – no matter how this peculiar discipline differs from one school of thought to another – benefited from the development of knowledge and epistemology in the humanities in the period of modernism. Concepts such as *memory* and *identity,* which are helpful by structuring these thoughts and writing herein, mark some of the most relevant themes of the discourses of cultural analysis. The focusing of at least some schools of cultural analysis, as Mieke Bal points out, was made possible not only by an inner conceptual development within the social and human sciences. It stems from or follows from an on-going interaction and relationships between the writings within these sciences and many "moving" objects, which have been observed and researched through them. Of course, we cannot talk about the past at all unless we possess a memory in both possible meanings of the term: the memory as a capacity and the memory as a recollection or reminiscence…, that is to say, the memory about things, people, events, and so on. In both senses, the concept of memory must have been decisively influenced by such wonders of the industrial age as, in particular, photography and film. Of course, many other "wonders" of the age in question were relevant for modifying the concept, as for instance the growth of literacy, the rise of institutions such as schools, factories, media and a number of cultural institutions – museums and archives most certainly not the least important among them. Photography and film unquestionably functioned in this complex context, but they played a key role due to their specific relation to the development of perception. Or, to be more precise: the specific impact of the phenomena of photography and film on human perception resulted from their significance within the process of so-called mechanical reproduction, as Walter Benjamin had already made clear by the early 1930s.

1   Philosophy in the times of many revolutions (scientific, social, industrial) mainly in English and French philosophies of empiricism and rationalism dealt a lot with the problems of perception. Immanuel Kant has probably done the utmost of what was possible in a context "without" such means of representation that evolved later. His "transcendentalism" became much more understandable in the time of Hollywood, according to Adorno and Horkheimer.

Multiple consequences of this impact were broad and far-reaching and they were reflected in knowledge and sciences after they became recognisable and definable scientifically and in a variety of specific reflexive ways.

Bergson's Memory

As soon as we mention a concept such as memory, many people are quick to associate it with psychology as the science that can supposedly define and describe the concept. True, apart from neuro-science, psychology (no matter which of many different doctrines) deals a lot with the concept of memory. The psychological concept of memory, as much as it serves its purpose within the limits of psychology as a science, seems to be insufficient as an answer to a range of questions. Problems associated with memory have nowadays become a matter of cross-related issues and various types of knowledge and research. No one expects psychology itself in isolation from other research to deliver much more knowledge than it already does in the field, which is designated by the concept of memory. This divergence between psychology and other humanities started to come into view within the work of Henri Bergson. Gilles Deleuze brought this historical fact to our attention in 1983, when this great philosopher of the 20th Century stunned the intellectual community with his first extensive study on cinema. Bergson's works displayed many features of a great foresight, when he, in his discourse, revealed the full meaning of the concept in a nascent context, which fully developed later. By "this context" I mean not only aesthetic developments as such, but these developments as they were seen through the interactions with education, cinematography, and cultural institutions, which all contributed to a change of the perception of human perception. It is of the utmost importance that along with the concept of *movement* Bergson not only emphasised the notion of memory, but also the concept of image. It is not as important how exact or wrong Bergson's observations, assertions and statements were in view of, for example, modern physiology and the psychology of perception, since we are talking about the philosophical building of concepts. Thus, maybe – due to the fact that Bergson's book on memory was first published in 1896, roughly at the same time when the brothers Lumieres' *cinématograph* started film history – we can shed light on the problem. We can now better understand that the interaction between moving pictures and the changes of the meaning of the concept of memory was an immediate one. As such, it has been uttered in Berg-

son's discourse. Therefore, Bergson's text still reminds us that a presumably scientific explanation of perceptions of images lacks a grasp of complexity.

> *Our perceptions are undoubtedly interlaced with memories, and inversely, a memory, as we shall show later, only becomes actual by borrowing the body of some perception into which it slips. These two acts, perception and recollection, always interpenetrate each other, are always exchanging something of their substance as by a process of endosmosis* (Bergson. 1982: p. 69).[2]

Saying this, Bergson proceeds towards clearing the concepts of perception and memory through the criticism of psychology. He understood very well that the narrow scientific approach could not be sufficient for completing the task, which he envisioned as he tried to disassociate "pure" memory from "pure" perception. Maybe without being aware about it himself Bergson worked in philosophy, and therefore in humanities in general, towards a parallel result as the brothers Lumiere had ensued in the technology of film.

> *The proper office of psychologists would be to dissociate them* [perception and recollection]*, to give back to each its natural purity; in this way many difficulties raised by psychology, and perhaps also by metaphysics, might be lessened. But they will have it that these mixed states, compounded, in unequal proportions, of pure perception and pure memory, are simple. And so we are condemned to an ignorance alike of pure memory and of pure perception; to knowing only a single kind of phenomenon which will be called now memory and now perception, according to the predominance in it of one or other of the two aspects; and, consequently, to finding between perception and memory only a difference in degree and not in kind. The first effect of this error, as we shall see in detail, is to vitiate profoundly the theory of memory, for if we make recollection merely a weakened perception we misunderstand the essential difference between the past and the present, we abandon all* hope of understanding *the phenomena of recognition, and, more generally, the mechanism of the unconscious* (Ibid, 1982: pp. 69 -70).

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2   This and other translations of Bergson's text are taken from the translation of *Matter and Memory* by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer from 1911. Of course, such classic texts are available on the web.

It would take us too far away from our focus on film if we tried to follow Bergson much further. What is interesting for our current purpose is the following conclusion: "The *actuality of* our perception thus lies in its *activity,* in the movements which prolong it, and not in its greater intensity: the past is only idea, the present is ideo-motor" (Ibid, 1982: p. 71).

Film, which is often called "moving pictures", corresponds to this by putting together the idea of the past and the present since films are always projected in the present for someone, an audience, who is watching them. To recognise what Bergson's contribution to the understanding of cinema was, we should take into account the comment by Deleuze:

> *Now we are equipped to understand the profound thesis of the first chapter of* Matter and Memory: *1) there are not only instantaneous images, that is, immobile sections of movement; 2) there are movement-images which are mobile sections of duration; 3) there are, finally, time-images, that is, duration-images, change-images, space (*volume*)-images, which are beyond movement itself* (Deleuze, 1983: p. 22).

In view of Deleuze's assertion we can say that the historical "insertion" of film into these interacting movements, was not just any innocent act, especially bearing in mind Bergson's hint concerning the "mechanism of the unconscious".[3]

From Memory to Identity to Ethnology

The mechanical aspect of producing a photograph, a film and other visual or audio-visual representations, contributes to an impression of a special "objectivity" of any "documented" look through the lens of a camera. Unlike written records or different works of art, including architecture, these "instruments" of representation are simultaneously reducing and enlarging the impact of a subjectivity on a product, which makes a representation possible and it is itself a representation. Reducing the impact of subjectivity, while the mechanics and the chemistry of photographic or film camera eliminates all the work of "drawing and painting", but enlarging this impact, while a subjective decision is essential for shooting a picture or movie. Furthermore, this is done by choosing angles, light and shadow and – what

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3   Certainly, Bergson could not and therefore did not have in mind Freud's idea of the unconscious since the idea was just about to become a concept through Freud's and Breuer's analysis of the famous case of hysteria in 1895.

is especially significant – moments, which are meant to become "fixed" on pieces of film. It must also be considered that one of the inherent attributes of photography and film is the possibility for unlimited copying. By their reproduction we have to deal with the especially important impact on a collective aspect of subjectivity and its identity. This gives way to the implication of a simplicity of any audio or audio-visual narratives. There is almost no doubt that such a record as, for instance, a film, represents such a powerful means of verification of memory in almost any respect: historical, collective, and even individual or psychological. However, through the accumulation of various modes of audio-visual recordings – no matter what kind of objects we can think of. For example, a memory, which is stored on various media (photographs, films, tapes, drives, etc.), becomes more complex as it becomes increasingly inaccessible in its totality. With regards especially to film and other forms of audio-visual representations, such products in a sense, "objectify" memory by the inherent act of externalisation. However, due to many multiple levels of reality, memory itself becomes open and vulnerable to manipulation. Nevertheless, due to all circumstances, memory as it is "materialised" in film, is unavoidably constructed dynamically. This makes the work of film archives especially demanding and ethically accountable.

In the midst of these time-images and time-spaces, which are inhabited by memory, the notion of identity is formed. Thus, this notion brings us closer to the realm of culture since identity acquires its relevance in relation to the notion of difference. Each film is in one way or another related to these notions, which form its basic grammar. Since each instance of identity is a product of some course or process of identifying activity (or similarities of code and conduct within a cultural context), which works through the differences towards recognising something or someone as being the same as it- or him or herself, the movement of representation, such as in the case of a film, enters the process of identifying. This is the point, where the aspect of aesthetics plays a big role. It would probably be quite difficult to establish why exactly it happened that film, so soon after it's invention, became associated with art instead of remaining just some kind of gadget for representing reality in a sense of documenting facts, events or scientific research. As much as we take it for granted or as a natural fact that film prevalently became a form of art, we should be reminded of many perceptions from the early times of cinema, when many cultural authorities believed that film was only an ephemeral attraction. However, the very

idea of art has significantly changed under the influence of film. The above statement implies that there had not been any absolute necessity for film to become art. We might assert that the unavoidable identifying activity on the side of perception of a film (which is basically coming to terms with a look of the other, that is to say, a produced representation by the holder of a camera with film in it), gave way to such an approach to filmmaking that involved the aesthetics. As soon as the aesthetic aspects were identified as such, film could not help but be turned into a form of art. It appears that within only the last two decades theoreticians and critics have become aware about the real and far-reaching consequences of this fact. Film, was, from the point of its conception, a powerful element of so-called mass culture and it radically changed the whole field of art. It is not just a coincidence that especially traditionalist, essentialist and simply conservative critics and scholars complain about the situation and state of modern art, which is so much permeated with the images and impact of film, video and digital representations. Works of art are in this "cinema of reality" very well comparable to Deleuze's concept of *image-mouvement*. They do not simply represent "static" ideas, but they also intervene within a wider reflexive activity, which mark contemporary societies. In the light of this, operating both contemporary art and the traditional art more clearly reveal their narratives and their context-related meanings, which we can compare to Bergson's idea of a continuum.

This point brings us to another vast area of highly theoretical discussion, where a connection of film and language has been generated. It is understood that the concept of memory is closely related to language and *vice versa*. Still, the psychological evidence, upon which some recent feature movies[4] built their narratives, clearly corroborate that correlations between memory and language are both complex and surprising. One can, for instance, become amnesiac, but still not forget language or one can become very much aphasic but still recognises his environment and people that he or she knows.

Film theorist and anthropologist Rachel O. Moore found out that the connection between film and language is a source of another mode of over-

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4   Films, dealing with amnesia and related issues are sundry and they could be a nice theme for a thesis in film theory. Some recent such films as, for example, Nolan's *Memento* (2000), Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001) and Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), seem to bring some new accents to this theme. We can speculate that the digital technology and virtual reality are contributing their share to some restructuring of the memory and identity as concepts and in general.

lapping; in her case, between film theory and anthropology, which follows from an encounter between film and so-called primitive culture. There is no need to go over quite an extensive discussion concerning a comparison between language and film. The semiotic trend in film theory quite clearly proved that such a comparison, which gave way to an idea that film could be treated as a language system or even as a grammar, was quite a bit misguided. However, this does not mean that there is not a very complex structural relationship between language and film; also, it does not mean that film could not be analysed as a discourse. Still, there is a comparison between language and film on the level of their functions as representations. In elaborating her own consequences from Jean Epstein, Moore asserts that "film is a more primitive form of language than words" and therefore the effect of magic is greater in cinema than in naming things with words. This "primitive language", prelogical speech, was called "inner speech" by another inventive film maker and theoretician of cinema, Sergey Eisenstein. Further, we are reminded by Moore of Eisenstein's liking of James Joyce for his idea of "inner monologues". Hence, what Rachel Moore reveals quite clearly in her reading of filmmakers and writers, is the fact that from the viewpoint of cinema some functions of language became more obvious. On the other hand, cinema caused a development of a mode of perception, which is very well expressed in a quotation from Boris Eikhenbaum, whom she quoted from Paul Willemen's book *Looks and Frictions*: "The film spectator must perform a complicated mental task in linking together the shots (the construction of cine-phrases and cine-periods), a task virtually absent in everyday usage where the word forms a covering and excludes other means of expression" (Moore, 2000: p. 31).

Are we not yet again reminded of Bergson's and Deleuze's conceptualisation of the image and its inner movement, which prevents it from being torn out from the movements that it makes itself a part of. Willemen himself then described inner speech as "the discourse that binds the psychoanalytic subject and the subject in history, functioning as a locus of condensation" (Ibid.). Whatever relevance the psychoanalytic theory may have in deciphering what sociologists Thomas Luckman and Peter Berger called "the social construction of reality", it is obvious that the age of photography and film had a big impact on history as a science and as a collective memory. Just try to make a parallel between the Willemen's statements and with what could be described as an everyday experience of anybody, who owns a television set. Although history as a science is prevalently written,

it is much more present in our heads as an external memory of many images. This is not true only for the part of history, which was happening in front of the eye of a camera, but older history too, since it was reconstructed and re-imagined in many proper and improper ways in hundreds of feature films. [5]

But let us get back to the previous line of thinking. Rachel Moore in her book follows Eisenstein on his way to shooting in Mexico. As Eisenstein stopped in Paris, she reports that he read Lévy-Bruhl's book *How Natives Think* (*L'âme primitive*), where, as we are told, he found other evidence of the "prelogic". Therefore, I can conclude this following of the Rachel Moore's presentation by remembering Eisenstein's unfinished job on his *¡Que Viva Mexico!* and by realising that, this project was one of anthropological or ethnographic movies, which was shot on the ground of the author's theoretical reflection that in turn had sprung from his practice as the film director.

5   Geoffrey Nowell-Smyth (1990: 161/162) discovered that one of the first war documentaries in film history, which depicted the American war against Spain in 1898, had been actually a reconstruction. War ships, for instance, were just models floating in a bathtub. So, very early in cinema history a fragment of film news, which became later a part of collective memory, demonstrated that shooting a film is always a construction of reality, no matter how we pretend and try to diminish a distance between representation and the represented.

Immediacy as an Attribute of Cinema as Art

Questions about what we *see* when we watch a film have been raised and discussed many times over since the beginnings of cinema. These questions immediately implied not only *seeing* in most basic sense of the word – as what becomes an imprint on the retina of an eye – but also, perceiving, recognising, comprehending and understanding. Hence, the very act of visual sensing triggers a process of broadly understood thinking. What thinking is without language? And what function the preposition "without" operates in this question? Of course, "stepping out of language" into a so-called non-verbal form of thinking is made conceivable only in and not outside a relation to language. Therefore, it seems that any perception of objects or perception of the so-called outside world is a kind of "reading". Such intuiting of the world highly probably owes its presence to film, which made apparent a widely shared confidence in the epoch of the universal literacy that sensory activities work as reading and through reading. After the incursion of moving pictures into the field of reality, which, as ever, consists of a mix of subjectivity and objectivity, obviously sensual activity and passivity inherently affect both "components" of reality. The very idea of reading, no matter how metaphorically it functions, makes such a difference that there is no way to imagine what kind of legibility had existed before the intrusion of first photography and then cinema. Hence, the term "reading" functions here not only metaphorically, but also at the same time immediately.

Rachel Moore was strongly impressed by Epstein's observations and conclusions in his effort to define cinematic art, claiming that he "aligns his pure cinema with primitive language" (Moore, 2000: 30). In order to gain a new concept that suits her own theoretical pursuit, she quotes Epstein from his early writings on cinema (*Le Cinématographe vu de l'Etna* - 1926): "Moreover cinema is a language, and like all languages it is animistic; in other words, it attributes a semblance of life to the objects it defines. The more primitive a language, the more marked this animistic tendency. There is no need to stress the extent to which the language of cinema remains primitive in its terms and ideas" (Epstein, 1974: 140[1]). Drawing on this, she compares the naming of a thing with a word to "the representation of a thing on film". What film does is, as she says, the activity of "visual naming", which has an even stronger "animistic" impact than just naming with words. This line of reasoning is further exposed in her, already mentioned in previous chapter, dealing with Eisenstein, who wrote about "inner speech" as a form of "pre-logical speech". In Eisenstein's cinematic practice one can observe the effect of such hypotheses as his illustrious and largely celebrated *montage* transfers thinking in and through images into his films. I will not follow Rachel Moore much further from here in her highly interesting deliberation on the topic of language, image, magic, logic and so forth through commenting on a number of writers, which brings her finally to the semi-logical notion of "cinematic discourse". Let me just make a somewhat crude point on what beckons the notion of "primitive language?" It obviously marks the effect of cinema as a crucial agency within mass culture in a most basic Benjaminian sense. In the field of art or aesthetics it causes a confusion concerning that kind of distinction, which, as Bourdieu would have it, is inscribed in the constitution of bourgeois art. Even the illiterate members of a society are able to "read" a film.

Film as Art in Epstein's Vision

In any case, Epstein's work, which comprises of his (theoretical) texts and his films, took place between the coordinates of cinema and massively transformed the ways of sensing, which had already entered the *aesthetic regime*, increasingly penetrated by movements of modernism. Epstein's reflections on film as art follow the lead of Louis Delluc and his notion of *photogénie*. It is not surprising that Epstein in his own historical and aesthetic context finds it necessary to formulate a difference that distinguishes

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1   Translation from Moore (2000: 30).

film as a "young art" from other arts like literature, theatre, and painting. As Epstein puts it: "/…/ every art builds its forbidden city, its own exclusive domain, autonomous, specific, and hostile to anything that does not belong" (Epstein, 1974: 137[2]). Therefore, Epstein strives for "photogenic aspects of the world" which would provide the distinction of cinema as art. As a newcomer to the aesthetic regime only twenty-five years old cinema needs to establish itself:

> *It is a new enigma. Is it an art or something less than that? A pictorial language, like the hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt, whose secrets we have scarcely penetrated yet, about which we do not know all that we do not know? Or an unexpected extension to our sense of sight, a sort of telepathy of the eye? Or a challenge to the logic of the universe, since the mechanism of cinema constructs movement by multiplying successive stoppages of celluloid exposed to a ray of light, thus creating mobility through immobility, decisively demonstrating how correct the false reasoning of Zeno of Elea was?* (Epstein, 1974: 138[3])

The point concerning the role of immobility is of utmost importance as movement in cinema accentuates stoppages and *vice versa*. Epstein's evoking of Zeno of Ellea clearly heralds that there was an instantaneous reciprocated proclivity between cinema and philosophy. In a continuation of movement, the interruption as immobility often appears in still frames, which gives rise to an anticipation of movement. Therefore, such still frames happen to be very expressive in many close-ups. Consequently, the language metaphor becomes, through this, even more credible. Epstein's efforts to establish cinema as an art theoretically abundantly attained results in his own work as a cinematographer. "Epstein's exhaustive explorations of the sensibility the modern world requires to perceive it puts him at the advance front of the modernist project, in both artistic and theoretical terms" (Moore, 2012: 184).

I think that there is no doubt that Epstein did work on changing perception within already decisively transformed conditions for perception due to cinema. Many fragments of his films resemble what would a few decades later be described as experimental cinema. An example of Epstein's film *La Glace à Trois Face* (The Three-Sided Mirror – 1927) is one

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2   Translation from Keller & Paul (2012: 293).
3   Translation from Keller & Paul (2012: 293).

of many in his work, where the montage, superimpositions, accelerations and changing angles make clear that the narration cannot be but affected by the language of cinema. "Cinema begins with the external world; in this case, a landscape passes through the machine and ends affecting the body. From a moving vehicle, landscape becomes a 'landscape dance' that moves the body" (Moore, 2012: 178). In the film, which was shot quite soon after Epstein's reflections were written, the final sequence is a string of multiple movements in a relationship of the running machine (the car), the man driving the car (main character) and landscape blurred in the movement in the subjective view from the car. All these movements are intersected by strangely static images of birds on a wire. The final stoppage consists of the wrecked machine and the body of the man immobilised, dead. To put it briefly: Epstein in his theoretical work and in his quite diverse films, which preceded later sophistication in cinematic narration in the French or, indeed, the European cinema, struggled to create a language of moving pictures, which would comprise of emotion and reason, science and poetry and maybe that unachievable consensus of form and content, which would make the language of cinema universal. However, his work on "pure cinema" became a formidable anticipation of those trends in cinema that always resist the eclecticism of commercial cinema of genres or even of so-called artistic pretentiousness. On the other hand, especially from Rancière's point of view, he disregarded an important potential of cinema, which brings about manifold social consequences. However, in his reflections, he conveys an idea of importance of a reduction of distance in film viewing, which in a materialistic turn becomes the notion of *immediacy* in Jacques Rancière's pondering on film.

Writing of Forms

In the last twenty years or so of the 20th century cinema as art has become increasingly an object of an expanding interest for philosophers – of course, not only French ones. French philosophers are principal references when a wide range of questions concerning film and thinking are discussed. French film theory from its early days on, as it is visible in the case of Epstein, amply borrowed ideas, notions and logics from philosophy and aesthetics. Our contemporary colleague Jacques Rancière is undoubtedly a major thinker, who in his huge *oeuvre* pays an important tribute to cinema and very noticeably intervenes into the field, which recently has been globally identified as *philosophy of film*. In the chapter 11 (The Machine and

Its Shadow) of his book *Aisthesis* he comes up with the notion of *immediacy* linked to the notion of cinema: "Immediacy is what the art of projected moving shadows demands. Since this art is deprived of living flesh, of the stage's depth and theatre's words, its instant performance must be identified with the tracing of a writing of forms" (2013[4]). Rancière discovers "immediacy" when he is trying to point out how cinema organises within its capacities a "distribution of the sensible" and he takes Chaplin not just as an example, but also as a decisive figure in the time, when film was becoming art form and defining itself as such. Of course, as a philosopher, who cannot but draw on texts – in this instance on Shklovsky, Meyerhold and, maybe more prominently, on Jean Epstein, Rancière did not miss the question of language in cinema. Therefore, it looks like as if there is an inherent link between thinking through cinema and his notion of *immediacy*.

Let me go back to Rachel Moore's stance on "film as more primitive form of language than words". Of course, her discourse is already imbued by postcolonial anthropology and the "notion" of "primitive" derived from Epstein has more or less just a "technical meaning". Therefore, I am risking a hypotheses that – although both authors do not cite each other – her conception corresponds to Rancière's reflection on a reciprocal relationship between language and cinema in his book *Intervals of Cinema*: "It is a practice of language that also carries a particular idea of 'imageness' (*imagéité*) and of mobility. It invented for itself a sort of *cinematographism*" (Rancière, 2014, ch. 2). Although Epstein-Moore's concept of "primitive language" cannot just be simply equated to the notion of immediacy, I think that it is inscribed into it. As such, it touches upon Rancière's original and far-reaching conception of the distribution of the sensual.

Immediacy, which becomes apparent as a suitable answer to the demand of the art of "projected moving shadows", in the case of Chaplin it has to do with movement; what *Charlot* does, makes him and his art not only just comprehensible through Meyerhold's formula of theatrical art, but it makes him part of the same aesthetic process that generates art and its inventions of "glitches" in the work of machine. This Chaplin's involvement of pantomime along with the fairground theatre (*théâtre de la foire*) in his films is what instigates Epstein's partial repudiation of Chaplin's cinema as an art. However, one should take into account that this was actual-

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4   The accessibility of texts in different formats sometimes causes problems with quoting. The English translations of some of Rancière's books, which I received as the Kindle editions, do not have pagination corresponding to the printed edition. Therefore, my quotes are marked with the number of the chapter, where they can be found.

ly an opposition between two film-makers and contemporaries. Certainly, Epstein's sophisticated ideas of *photogénie* and pure cinema should be taken as a point of elucidation. Rancière does not make any gesture of a *hiérarchisation* of the both early cinema artists, but, regarding the point of his whole debating of the important unfolding of cinema as art, it is obvious that he, for reason in his idea of the politics of aesthetics, in a given constellation somehow favours Chaplin.

> *The art of moving images cannot be reduced to that of the camera's movements. The 'medium' of cinematic art cannot be identified with the instrumental paraphernalia that captures movements, gathers and projects moving images. A medium is neither a basis, nor an instrument, nor a specific material. It is the perceptible milieu of their coexistence* (Rancière, Aisthesis, ch. 11).

And exactly the notion of *immediacy* in "Chaplin's version" determines not only what we always knew as the art of cinema, but also what we know now as visual culture. Rancière does not bluntly define the concept of immediacy, but he brings it into a relation with the "redemption of empirical world proclaimed by German idealism: the redemption of sensible world where spirit recognizes the exterior form of a divine thought that it knows from now on as its own thought" (Ibid., ch. 4).

The notion of immediacy brought forward by cinema as art makes it possible to explain much more than it seems at first sight. Immediacy has nothing to do with simplicity; it has to do with exactly the opposite: the complexity. Although film as an art form and as entertainment for a wide range of audiences was transforming through time the effect of immediacy of what is contained, narrated, recognised, perceived and so on in the movement of images, remains a constant and most powerful "tool" of cinema as an art. This power works both ways: it is, for instance, used in visual advertisement and it works as a subversive impulse of all genre and non-genre cinema – often as a rule against a filmmaker's intention. In Rancière's terminology immediacy is operating the dissensus propelled by the complex *imagéité* of films.

My concluding remarks require further elaboration and explications, but let me just give a hint of a possible understanding of film productions within the capitalist market system and their polyphonic meanings through the notion of immediacy. In all its incarnations, Hollywood was always a cinematic condensation of capitalism as spectacle. Howev-

er, not just singular movies, but whole genres emitted aesthetic and political connotations which were not congruent with the spirit of the system, in which they were created. The Hollywood melodrama, for example, which was especially founded on suggesting emotions, as well as signalling and announcing simple but accurate denotations of sexual and social injustices, was made possible by the immediacy of moving images. Immediacy after all is what it is for somebody, that is to say, for a perceiving subject.

Transcending Cinema
as the Art of Mass Culture

The efforts of early theoreticians of film like Münsterberg or Arnheim to "prove" that cinema should be considered as a new form of art against the snobbish undervaluing of cinema as only a low form of culture or some kind of non-art, gained an unexpected settlement in Benjamin's still controversial essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*.

Dialectics in the Digital Age

Not only regarding the representatives of the old theory of film, but also some authors, who appeared much later (for instance Béla Balázs, Marcel Martin, André Bazin, etc.), Benjamin's conceptualisation of the industrial process of reproduction in the early 1930s turned relations between the notions of art and cinema around. Instead of "proving" its reputation as art, *film brought up far reaching consequences for the very understanding of art as such* and, above all, it reconfigured the whole field in which aesthetics can operate. In the age of digital media and virtual reality the process, which Benjamin indicated in the early 1930s, seems to have been accelerated. The process that I have in mind here involves the overwhelming multiplicity of interactions and inter-activities, which differ from, say, pre-mechanical and, of course, much more from the pre-digital epoch, by being decisively powered by technology. However, mass culture as it is defined in anthropology and sociology as well as even in the so-called science of economy, still determines the whole framework, in which any practice of art

operates from relatively early stages of the industrial society on. An overview of all art in the 20th century points to a conclusion that the existence of mass culture and huge transformations of artistic production depended on each other. They were part of the world, within which the mass perception of reality in a mutual confluence with artistic products worked as a dispersed agency that generated a movement of constant complex changes. Benjamin's emphases on the effect of "mechanical reproduction" epistemologically structured the understanding of this condition. Curiously, this structuring of theory did not happened immediately after the text was first published. "Benjamin craze" among philosophers and related theoreticians, as I pointed out a few times in the different contexts in the previous chapters in this book, actually erupted about thirty years later in the 1960s.[1] Nevertheless, a special importance of film within mass culture in Benjamin's conceptualisation cannot be circumvented as a presupposition for any thinking about the effects of recent technological leaps.

Benjamin's simultaneously aesthetic and epistemological breakthrough signalled particular dialectics between technology, art, and such social agency as politics. In view of these dialectics, how a work of art is produced became especially important and, even more, how it is re-produced, which includes also the mode of perception that he described as "distracted" (Benjamin, 1969: 239). These dialectics are what concerns us most in the digital age and not just in a mental construction of the repetition of a technological effect on a new "higher" stage of an imagined progress. Therefore, the effects of the digital technology on film, and indeed, on all visual representation, cannot be simply explained in an analogy of effects of the mechanical reproduction on a work of art in Benjamin's times. Of course, a mode of production containing technology cannot be taken separately from its consequences, which imply aesthetics as well as politics. Hence, when we discuss the "digital revolution" and its meanings in and for cinema as art, we should understand it strictly dialectically – not as an "end of cinema", but as a transcending of the art of cinema, which turns into the historical core of something yet inconceivable in the future.

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1   Actually, Benjamin's essay became an important and widely cited reference not before 1960s in Germany and after 1968, when the selection of Benjamin's essays (edited by Hannah Arendt under the title Illuminations) was published in the "non-German" world. Therefore, a whole range of film theorists in the period of some two decades after the Second World War, were not aware of the existence of the essay.

Reality

The context of an array of the modernist more or less avant-garde artistic movements in the decade preceding the dawn of fascism such us *Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity)* and *Dada*, as well as controversies among aesthetic concepts,[2] must have helped Benjamin to expose the question of reality concerning art in a given social order. "Benjamin's version of these ideas has the virtue above all of treating the category 'art' as itself having a history, and one continuing to be subject to drastic transformation" (Mattick, 2003: 96). However, Mattick, on the other hand, has a fundamental problem with Benjamin because he does not accept the idea of the disappearing of *aura* and he in fact insists on the continuation of *aura* and the *auratic* effect in art in the industrial and post-industrial society. To put it briefly, Mattick misses the point of the notion of *aura* in Benjamin's thinking and with it he also misses the connection of "category of art subject to drastic transformation" and the vision of reality, so much interlaced with perception that it obviously becomes folded within the construction of reality, not only as a concept, but as the sensual sphere. As Habermas observed, it is exactly the destruction of *aura* that points to a "shift in the innermost structure of the works of art; the sphere once removed from and set up in opposition to the material process of life now disintegrates" (Habermas. 1979, p. 34). In other words, the destruction of *aura*, which 'happens' through the very act of being recognised – its being is prompted by non-being – establishes a new correlation between art and reality in the space of mass culture. Without elaborating much further on this interesting and nonetheless controversial matter, it could be assumed, that the ultimate decisive consequence of the transformation of art within mass culture is created by first photography and then, above all, the cinema in which formidable aesthetic distinctive traits (for instance close-up, slow motion etc.) could have been highlighted in Benjamin's essay. Thus, cinema becomes the art of *mass culture par excellence* as it unites a complex aesthetic form with the machine of reproduction. Let me repeat that Benjamin points out that "/.../ for contemporary man the representation of reality by the film is incomparably more significant than that of the painter, since it offers, precisely because of the thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment, an aspect of reality which is free of all equipment. And that is what one is en-

2   Mattick refers to "Alexander Dorner's 1929 exhibition at the Hanover Provincial Museum, in which he matched original works with photographic reproductions" as a resource that inspired Benjamin in developing his concept of the *aura* (Mattick, 2003: 95).

titled to ask from a work of art" (Benjamin, 1969: 234). A more recent confirmation of this insight can be found on the conceptual level in Rancière's work on "aisthesis", where he almost in passing enunciates what I proposed as a relevant new concept, in a notion of *immediacy*. Consequently, this means that aesthetics as a complex pluralistic discourse operates as a ubiquitous agency; it is situated in the centre of a whole network of movements of interconnected changes, which involve the sensual world and subjective identities in a way that establishes the very existence of members of a society as participants in symbolic exchanges. Aesthetics, along with its own transmutation, instigate far reaching social transformations. Hence, aesthetics itself – as theory, as artistic practice or even as some modes of lifestyle – is caught in a dialectics of multiplicity of the cultural world.

This conceptual constellation was reflected in an extensive and long lasting debate on realism in cinema. Of course, Benjamin did not have in mind film as a mirror of the so-called real world since he built his very condensed argument on the concept of "distracted perception", which clearly hints to a "transcendentalistic" character of film. Although the cinematic moving image is always imbued by objectivity, considering that the lens of a film camera cannot but "look" at something, its gaze is always marked by subjectivity. Taking into account the fact that a cinematic production further requires chemical developing and physical montage, there is no doubt that we can only describe this production of reality with a transcendentalist metaphor in a strictly Kantian sense. The (objective) reality is always viewed by the mind's external eye of a film camera.

Film itself as an art form most explicitly undermined the "realism hypotheses" in the so-called experimental film of the 1950s and 1960s, which also preceded video installations that brought moving images into art galleries, thus transgressing boundaries between art forms and art genres. While discussing experimental films of Brakhage, Snow, Belson and Jacobs in conjunction with Vertov, Gilles Deleuze developed the term of a *gaseous perception*. Through the drugs metaphor, reminding a reader of Carlos Castañeda, Deleuze writes about the "third state of the image, the gaseous image, beyond the solid and the liquid: to reach 'another' perception, which is also the genetic element of all perception. Camera-consciousness raises itself to a determination, which is no longer formal or material, but genetic and differential" (Deleuze, 1986: 85). Film, therefore, modifies reality; the reality represented by film is always marked by its intervention into it and experimental film, which equalled, say, abstract painting and cannot be de-

scribed as directly a part of mass culture, produced approaches to filming, which had huge consequences also in mainstream cinema. It is more important that this special phenomenon in the history of cinema anticipated what became possible in a much more extensive form, when moving images became digital. Transcending cinema, regarding the very constitution of reality, therefore, started within it, when the technological "quantum leap" could not have yet been imagined.

Towards the Digital

When we are trying to think and/or imagine the future, which undoubtedly transcends cinema, we must keep in mind that cinema had a special position within the "aesthetic regime" in Rancère's terms. As such, it was fully recognised as an art form also outside the circles of cinema enthusiasts not much earlier than maybe in the 1960s. Alain Badiou made a crucial remark concerning the role of cinema as an art:

> *It is effectively impossible to think cinema outside of something like a general space in which we could grasp its connection to the other arts. Cinema is the seventh art in a very particular sense. It does not add itself to the other six, while remaining on the same level as them. Rather, it implies them – cinema is the 'plus-one' of the arts. It operates on the other arts, using them as its starting point, in a movement that subtracts them from themselves* (Badiou, 2013: 89).

Let us be reminded by Stanley Cavell about the mutual effects in the relationship of cinema to other arts: "/.../as Robert Warshow and Walter Benjamin more or less put it, to accept film as an art will require a modification of the concept of art" (Cavell, 1979: xvi – xvii). In Cavell's writing on cinema, the notion of "reality", which was highlighted for that matter in a similar reflexive gesture also in the above mentioned Rancière's recent work, marks the field of contemporary coming to terms with the digitally generated art works in a whole range of different genres in spite of the fact that at the time[3] Cavell could not have imagined the digital revolution. "Objects projected on a screen are inherently reflexive, they occur as self-referential, reflecting upon their physical origins" (Ibid. xvi). Further, Cavell in his unique discourse reminds the reader of one more "element", which is indispensable and makes part of the cinematic reality. When he exam-

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3   The time is the year 1979, when Cavell wrote a foreword to the new edition of *World Viewed…*, whose first edition appeared in 1971.

ines Terrence Malick's film *Days of Heaven* (1978), he emphases the *notion of beauty*.

Although venerable traditional aesthetic considerations on beauty seem mostly obsolete, the concept of beauty cannot be simply discarded considering that it is inscribed in the foundation of the very idea of all aesthetics. The cinematic reality, always one way or the other related to a perception of beauty (or, as it were, its contrast) of images, therefore, cannot be conceived without aesthetics, which in case of cinema transgresses the boundaries of "just" art. Elsaesser and Hagener ascertained and anticipated in their clarification that "/.../ the cinema seems poised to leave behind its function as a 'medium' (for the representation of reality) in order to become a 'life form' (and thus a reality in its own right)" (Elsaesser, Hagener, 2010: 12). In a self-reflective turn (meaning cinema theory as the subject) they proceed with their argument, based on the assumption that film theory "put the body and the senses at the centre" of its interest in the direction, which in the age of ubiquitous digital communication does not seem far-fetched anymore. They point out that the cinema is proposing to us "/.../ besides a new way of knowing the world, also a new way of 'being in the world', and thus demanding from film theory, next to a new epistemology also a new ontology'" (Ibid.). On a "technical" level of descriptions of what is going on, in both epistemology and ontology, film theory has to deal with vibrant changes. For instance: once the theory made up its mind and accepted DVD as the new medium, this "medium" or "material carrier" became much less important than video streaming through broad band internet channels to a growing number of devices with HD screens. "Ontology", therefore, keeps having problems in its postulates on anything objective or constant in the "third nature", which follows what Adorno and Horkheimer *à l'époque* named the "second nature" within the industrial society. Obviously, we are living in the Lacanian reality of floating signifiers, compelled to give-up any hope to be able to construct a notion of reality, which in Badiouan terms keeps being subverted by incursions of "the real". Of course, there are intellectual and simply nostalgic backlashes. Against the "growing popularity of Web and cell phone cinema" there are strong opposing opinions: "Indeed, the rise of new media has brought with it an increase in academic protection of the sacred ontology of film as something purer and healthier than all that is digital" (Murray, 2008: 87). However, the transcending of cinema across the boundaries of artistic practice abolishes the illusion of any representational function, causing

a movement towards a process of disembodiment, generating reality that we can label as "virtual". However, the labelling does not destroy its attributes of reality. Briefly: welcome to the world of simulacrum in the Deleuzian version. The "historic cinema" which still renders both the terminology on the level of ordinary language as well as on the level of film theory or aesthetics, now becomes truly the embodiment of memory, which becomes increasingly accessible mainly through digital media.

Conclusion

Ontology of the Virtual

How much is the notion of "film" – whose "material being" as a celluloid tape fades away – in its increasingly metaphorical presence decisive for understanding art, now marked by multiple signifiers of "virtual reality"? In the first move to answer such a question, one cannot help but agree with the following:

> *It is difficult to speak about only one cinematographic aesthetic experience, because digital demands, or allows, different kinds of perceptual experiences. Nor is it about annihilating our previous experiences, since hybrid qualities give way to flexibility and assimilation. Therefore, the mere expression 'let's go to see a movie' implies a ritual or habit: to visit a movie theatre and see the current film. This action remains inside us as an idea* (Gómez, 2015: 251).

Transcending cinema, therefore, at first glance runs rather smoothly. It is taking place almost exactly in a manner of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*. The reason for such an appearance should be sought in the fact that we still have to deal with the frame – no matter in what kind of apparatus, which could be a cinema screen or a range of screens of diverse digital devices. "Theorists of new media have made much of the notion of cinema as the dominant language of culture and of the computer desktop as a cinematic space: 'screen culture' is posited as the hegemonic cultural interface" (Nakamura, 2008: 63). To what extent is virtual reality undermined by the

effect of immediacy, such as it has been inaugurated by Walter Benjamin and, just recently, in other terms by Jacques Rancière? The problem now obtains the generational historicised framework, within which, curiously, history itself melts in the presence of a form of always accessible "knowledge" that abolishes "old" hierarchies of relevance of historic narratives about events, institutions, people, periods, and so forth.

Figure 3. View from the Seoul underground in 2016 (photo: D. Štrajn).

Michel Serres in his cute little book *Thumbelina* makes this fabled name into the emblem of the generation of the millennials. "These children inhabit the virtual. The cognitive sciences have shown us that using the Internet, reading or writing messages (with one's thumb), or consulting Wikipedia or Facebook does not stimulate the same neurons or the same cortical zones as does the use of a book, a chalkboard, or a notebook" (Serres, 2015: 6). How much the digital revolution has already affected different cultures in the global dimensions remains a task of on-going research, but it is clear – not only to Michel Serres – that the reality of the millennials, who are also deemed to be "digital natives", transcends the one of their parents. What is important for my examination here it is quite ev-

ident that what used to be cinema or film is now enfolded by visual media, which this generation takes for granted. Still, this change is far from any finished revolution: "The screen of a laptop computer – which itself opens like a book – mimics the page, and Thumbelina still writes on the screen with ten fingers, or with two thumbs on her smart phone" (Ibid, 23). In view of cinema as the art of the age of mass culture, the screen could be related to a (painted) picture frame. We cannot imagine exactly what would be a deliverance from the screen format, but "The new technologies are forcing us to leave the spatial format implied by the book and the page" (Ibid: 24), and I would add the "screen". However, a result, which will mean transcending displays, which "Thumbelinas" – for example smart phones – carry around as if they were organs of their bodies, will depend on much more than just technology. One should bear in mind that the effect of immediacy is at work: "Thumbelinas" do not think much about technology, but they communicate with a multiplicity of "contents", they live in a constant visually expanded inter-textuality, which includes even physical objects into the field of subjectivity. Therefore, the above-mentioned transition from epistemology to ontology is inscribed into this movement. This is reflected in the efforts to define, describe and understand what in some discourses acquires a categorisation of "new reality". For the time being, existing technology has reached the level on which it causes the effect of immediacy. The leap, which can be indicated for now, is a fundamental democratisation of, metaphorically speaking, film-making, which becomes a mode of life transforming the very meaning of the individuality of human subjectivity. Ontology and aesthetics merge in an inseparable assemblage.

Summary

A number of papers for journals, lectures and conferences constitute the basis for this book. Since most of them are dealing with artistic, cultural and political phenomena, they were arranged in different parts, which are focused on some specific theoretical problems or specific fields or phenomena. Although these texts, which were written over a period of about two decades, are not organised strictly in chronological order, they should indicate a trajectory of the author's own conceptual evolution.

Aura, Culture and what Becomes from Form?

Part one of the book deals with Walter Benjamin's theoretical intervention in the 1930s and some contemporary contexts, which confirm its relevance. In a historical context, mass culture as an actually established entity is almost entirely situated in the 20th century, and only from the viewpoint of this century were its earlier manifestations traceable to a time of the development and breakthrough of capitalism along with the industrial and political revolutions. The disappearing of what Benjamin called *aura* through the intrusion of the reproduction of the classic works of art, and even more significantly, through a development of the new forms of art made possible by technical devices, brings a turn into the functioning of the art itself. The media, for instance, represent the state of affairs as they express and propagate the dominant views and attitudes, in the words of many theoreticians in the category of the Western Marxism: the ideology. As such, the

functioning of the media importantly reflects a collective historical experience of which the media as agents and mediators of "truth" themselves play a part.

All culture of today is mass culture or, we may say, there is not one culture unaffected by mass culture. Probably the first author, who indicated this fact in a decisive, definite, clear and condensed manner, was Walter Benjamin, whose surprisingly short essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* made a serious and lasting impact more than twenty years after it was first published. "The name of Walter Benjamin, the omnipresent godfather, divided between the mysticism and technology (but very prudent not to mix the first with the other) is imposed by itself: *The Work of Art...* (1936) is one of our classics" (Debray, 1994: p. 130). In his dialectical mind Benjamin really only uncovers the ambiguous potential created by mass culture, and the question of whether or not the outcome will be social emancipation, points towards politics. The sentence at the end of the essay, that confronts fascism and communism in regard to mass culture, is more than just a slogan stating that fascism is rendering politics aesthetical and that "communism responds by politicising art". The underlying assumptions, which help a bit to explain this programmatic exclamation, are presented in the endnote 12, where Benjamin claims that a change in the method of exhibition "applies to politics as well". If we read this endnote in view of its anticipatory dimension, we should comprehend it as a description of the televised world, before there was any television. Yes, everybody sees that the print, photography, cinema and so-forth are the result of an intellectual (or the aesthetic) endeavour, but at the same time they are the products of machinery, the products of the process of mechanical reproduction, and everybody feels that the possibility to bring close to public many works of art from secluded places, means a change in a way. But in what way? This is the question, which "just anybody" could not feel important to answer. Copies of the portrait of Mona Lisa suddenly became accessible and could decorate a wall in any home, no matter how humble, great novels of French realism are accessible in cheap editions, etc., so what? This is the point, where Benjamin's intervention proved to be fruitful. Simple as his discovery may seem (though in the final analysis it is not so simple at all), it happened as a finally uttered knowledge of the fact, which had been repressed by the dominant "class culture." In addition, probably it is not just a coincidence that Benjamin named this "fact" vaguely the *aura*, which as a notion gets its meaning through the process of disappearing. The *aura* is,

by virtue of being something through non-existence, in a full sense of the word, a dialectical notion, which marks a profound change in the symbolic order of things. Aesthetic objects certainly occupy a distinguished place in this order. As Benjamin found out, their *aura* secured a special sphere of the effectiveness of their symbolic power. They were a part of an order of the especially divided social imaginary, which continues to be active long after the mechanical reproduction has taken place. The disappearing of the *aura* through the intrusion of the reproduction of the classic works of art, and even more significantly, through the development of the new forms of art, made possible by technical devices, brings a turn into the function of the art itself. Characteristically, these "new forms of art" were dismissed by the privileged public as cheap entertainment for the uneducated. However, entering mass perception, the new forms of aesthetic *praxis* overturn the whole functioning of the arts in the social imaginary. Although discussing the problems of the form of the aesthetic objects, the products of "technological" arts included, may still be a "noble" task of aesthetic theory, there is no doubt that Benjamin's observations assert that the aesthetic production interferes with the reproduction of the society in a much more decisive way than anybody has ever imagined or dreamt before the emergence of the mechanical reproduction. (Maybe today we could widen the number of synonymous adjectives, beside "mechanical," i.e. "electronically", "multimediatically" and so on.) In the industrial age, the recognition of the form became in a broad sense simply functional, and everybody has been trained to recognize forms automatically by being exposed to almost continuous and often unwanted influence of images, sounds, signs and designs. There is no way to sell new "contents" in approved forms. The public – or the consumers – must be shocked into perceiving the difference, which is nothing else but the form.

The cultural ideology that probably serves well to what is increasingly labelled as the "tourism industry" – and one cannot really blame it too much for this – can be comprehended as a sanctuary for everything from artists' narcissism to what is considered the "taste". This supposedly distinguishes class from masses, high from lowbrow, the West from the rest, and "us" from "them". This ideology is quite transparently based on a projection into the past, in which a construction of a world, in which "true values" were respected, is the central invented idea. As we know this imaginary world of "true art" is attached to the time of romanticism, which is also the time of the peak of aesthetics as a philosophic discipline. As Berg-

er persuasively argued, such a "world" actually never existed. What could be clearly elaborated from Benjamin's "perception of perception" is a fundamentally rearranged constitutive position of any artistic *praxis* and the big impact of this *praxis* on the *praxis* of the social reproduction. Undoubtedly, from Benjamin's time these rearrangements only intensified. The age of the increasing role of technology brought about very complex changes of the functioning of minds on a massive scale. Simultaneously entering the mass perception, new forms of aesthetic *praxis* overturned the whole functioning of the arts in the social imaginary. Of course, it is possible to elaborate extensively on the structure of these interdependent practices, and on their complex transformations especially through the period of the second half of the 20th Century. Such elaborations exist in various fields, such as film and media studies, cultural studies and so on. However, I only want to make the point that Benjamin himself marked a moment, in which the big cumulative restructuring of society and the changes in people's minds became apparent, and he could more or less guess about the "prognostic value" of his discovery

As opposed to printed materials of previous centuries, the representations of global culture are devising a visual field where, above all, the moving images are decidedly determining a range of modes of perception. Today's media, the digital interactive ones included, are representing a changed and changing reality marked by an expansion of culture, which is driven by the strong artistic production. Museums and galleries, among other "traditional" institutions, are turning into laboratories of a continuous production of variations of meanings and interpretations, sometimes broadening the public's view on culture and sometimes confining it to some mystified canonical signification of whatever they are presenting. However, these institutions are no more (if they ever were) "neutral" places of exhibitions of works of art, but they are, as Mieke Bal would say, agents of exposures, not so much of artists and their work as such; much more however, of how they expose someone's conceptualised view of art or cultural goods. Artists "outside" these institutions became an extinct species. In the view of this institutionalised world, culture is actually the reality. Of course, there are many sophisticated and critical reflections upon this culture, such as Jameson's theory of reification or explanatory attempts by many authors, who make use of the notion of the *simulacrum*. All these reflections help us to come to terms with the complexities of social reality, which is highly saturated with multiple images, representations, and all

kinds of other messages. This is happening on a level that is comprehended as "global". Never before has the international exchange of goods been so "culturalized". This includes not only material goods, but also the nomadism of so-called "spiritual" ones in a very broad spectrum of cultures, spaces and times. There is a phantasmal universe in which icons are produced to feed any individual imagination almost anywhere in the world. These icons support a stream of individual identifications with celebrities, with their patterns of behaviour and their performances of life-styles on a global level. The Freudian unconscious has never before been turned "inside out" to such an extent. The Babylon of the 21st century is a global stage, where an immense plurality comes forth. What is perceived in many texts in the field of cultural analysis as the colonial look is being increasingly dislocated, although far from being erased. However, inevitably the plurality comes forth only to be reduced in its scope. Abstractions and common denominators are absorbing it, as different particular representations in unity with interpretations are being selected and deselected, according to a self-generating rule of "recognisability". Still, one may observe that the global market lives on an exchange, which comprises of everything from food and drinks to the educational services, and of course, the flow of capital, which with its first looming crisis of the global economy is becoming somewhat problematic. The signifying elements within these global exchanges are precisely different identities, which could be illustrated in an immense number of culturally marked items. It looks as if the notion of identity deprived of its elusiveness, and fixed as the supposedly most basic cultural category, is increasingly used as a counter-concept for a mobilisation against the plurality of the global intercultural influences. The politics of identity represents the potential of post-modern hegemony, which may become dangerous in some political profiles such them as simulacrum of fascist politics. Luckily, it appears that the stressing of such fixed identities tending to exclude anybody who refuses to be "included" brings forth the dispersing tendency of the politics of difference. Hegemony as a tool of democracy in a Gramscian sense, served well to open the minds of modernity.

Extremism, Perceptions, Transformations and Sexuality

The second part of the book makes a turn to some politically marked concepts and phenomena and it starts with a reflection on the notion of extremism. The political extremism is only possible in a context, where moderateness, normalcy, common sense, some dominant representations of

reality, civilization, etc., constitute a core of set of values and common ideas within a given political culture. Summarily, we might say that such attributes of political culture mostly may be ascribed to the so-called Western world, and increasingly to some countries, which in recent history have entered into the universe of democracy. Although very significant differences between the features of specific political cultures in different regions and countries could be cited, it seems that a general apprehension of the term of extremism does not differ across the boundaries. Therefore, it appears that the political extremism represents a breach of a consensus on a broad combined definition of democracy and civilization.

Reflections and representations of extremism, which make it omnipresent, and at the same time shown so as to be more or less on the same level as natural and other disasters, may raise doubts about the simple distinction between "normal society", politics as usual and a political extremism. The manifestations of especially some kinds of extremism – more than others less recognisable as such – are usually amongst the more prominent news that attracts the media interest worldwide. We can remember some advice about a necessary and needed reduction of the scope and emphasis of news on events attributed to the work of political extremism. Nevertheless, so far the media, especially television, have not resisted the opportunities to add dramatic features to an attractiveness of their news programmes. According to the distinction elaborated by Richard Rorty (Rorty 1989: p. XVI) in a context of the question of how the media might contribute to the building of solidarity, the violent manifestations of political extremism are more or less strictly treated as a doing of "them", a kind of *aliens*. The drastic representations of the manifestations of political extremism, i.e. terrorism, are simultaneously objects of a mass voyeurism and the demarcations within the established society. The very term "extremism" therefore functions as the demarcating discriminatory gesture: not only neutrally marking the difference between "normal and insane", but also inducing a sense of radically total "otherness" of those who commit extremist acts. Hence, extremism is re-produced into a mystically self-generated threat to the entire society. Almost day after day in the media representations of the extremist manifestations, the established society is acquitted from its complicity in the causes of the phenomenon. Far from asserting that the media are masterminds behind extremism, they certainly at least present the state of affairs, expressing and propagating the dominant views and attitudes, in other words, the ideology. As such, the functioning of the media importantly

reflects a collective historical experience of which the media as agents and mediators of "truth" themselves play a part.

Speaking of extremism of today and its ideology, we can certainly assume that any kind of discourse of extreme ideology will respond to the state of affairs in the global society and to its effects in a local environment. Therefore, it will be addressed to the subjectivity, which is becoming moulded in the process: not only – sociologically speaking – to all kinds of threatened layers of a society (such as the unemployed, uneducated, youth, etc.), but to a larger society envisioned in a scope of separate identity. To understand this better, we can use terminology introduced by Martin Seliger, who may help us to avoid the sophisticated theoretical controversy concerning the definition of the notion of ideology in general. "/.../to whatever degree policies conform to fundamental principles, 'operative ideology' denotes the argumentation in favour of the policies actually adopted by a party. It is 'ideology' because it devises, explains and justifies action. It is 'operative' inasmuch as it is predicated on what is actually done or recommended for immediate action" (Seliger, 1976: p. 175).

In the realm of mass culture, socialism favoured traditional folk art, although as it was producers and authors who created some productions of entertainment in music and in cinema that tried to compete with Hollywood and Western pop music. In 1960s, the system in most socialist countries, especially in the central European ones, could not prevent urban youth from listening to rock music nor from forming some very provocative rock bands' as well as matching worldviews. Still, such phenomena – no matter how visible and aggravating they were – tended to be more or less sub-cultural exceptions. Hence, Giddens noted: "Paradoxically, state socialism, which saw itself as the prime revolutionary force in history, proved much more accommodating towards tradition than capitalism has been" (Giddens. 1996: p. 51). Many efforts of political groups, and characteristically the Catholic Church, to cancel or limit women's rights have become a boring fact of daily life in most former socialist countries. On the phenomenal level something very similar to what has taken place in the USA in 1980s occurred. Questions of abortion, along with the neoliberal concepts of economy, became a constitutive element of a new variance of conservative ideology. Although the underlying social circumstances are plausibly

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1   One of the rare and very instructive books about the role of some radical movements in rock music is a collection of texts, newspaper articles and other documents, published in 1985 in Ljubljana under the title *Punk pod Slovenci* (Punk under Slovenians – Mastnak, Malečkar, 1985).

totally different, American slogans and pointed phraseology entered the ideological discourse of various traditionalist political groups. Among such slogans we can find the "right to life", coined by the Family Division within NCCB (National Conference of Catholic Bishops) in USA in 1970. (All references to the American anti-abortionism are to be found in Petchesky, 1986.) Later on, when the front against abortion broadened, miscellaneous forms of the protestant fundamentalism, groups of the orthodox Jews, Mormons and black Muslims entered in to its ranks. This strongly religiously marked social bases of the New Right was joined by a number of various organisations of far Right such as Young Americans for Freedom, John Birch Society, and World Anti-Communist League to name just a few. Interesting connections to the Republican Party were visible. On the way to power the Republicans made use of zealots in this groups and organisations, but in spite of a degree of anti-abortionist rhetoric and some legislative set-backs concerning women's freedom of choice, the actual politics under Reagan did not totally succumb to all aspirations of the far right. The problem of abortion appears to be a politically mobilising issue by being always caught in a series of equivalences, which visibly mark the field of the conservative discourse: to advocate "life" means to support "the family", which further on means to uphold "morality", that under a historical signifier is identified as adherence to "America". The logic of such discourse is a reduction of differences: "/.../ the logic of equivalence is a logic of the simplification of political space, while the logic of difference is a logic of its expansion and increasing complexity" (Laclau, Mouffe, 1985: p. 130).

Art and Society

Part three of the book turns to art and its social signification. Are we nowadays abandoning all links between art and human happiness? It looks very much so that one can never get rid of ethics. The perspective taken by Bourdieu – and not only him – does not abolish all these aspects; it actually puts a stronger emphasis on them. However, one question remains pertinent in its radical articulation in the last instance: have artists ever really existed, or were they just figments of theoreticians' and critics' imagination? The answer depends on historical moments and on social changes as well as on the shifts in economic and political (power) structures. On this background, another question arises as well: who believes that art has ever been truly defined and clearly determined? This, on the other hand, does not mean that art "functions" without definitions. On the contrary, one can

say that an ever recurring redefining of art represents a part of any "generative formula" of art along with aesthetic theory. The whole history of reflections on art – from Plato's and Aristotle's concepts of mimetic function at the core of the meaning of art to the many explicit negative and positive definitions of art in relation to the sensual experiences, insights, truth and social action in avant-garde manifestos – one way or the other – exposes various aspects of manifestations of *subjectivity* through artistic practice. It is important to stress an innermost determination of subjectivity, which in spite of all efforts by philosophers such as René Descartes, Johann G. Fichte or Jean-Paul Sartre, makes any total reduction of the *duality* as an inevitable attribute that determines the subject impossible. As we know, especially from the times of German idealist philosophy in the period of romanticism, this *duality* as a determination of the notion of the *Subject* can be discerned ontologically, epistemologically, ethically and, very significantly, also aesthetically. What I basically have in mind is the *opposition subject-object*, which in the relevant articulations finds everything from Kant's epistemology to Hegel's dialectics. However, this duality bears importance for aesthetics because it differs from just "simple" duality of empirical sciences, since the activity of the subjective side makes the opposition decisively asymmetrical.

Art is taking positions in the symbolic universe by affirming singularity, which by virtue of being always some *artefact* transcends any particularity of the singular as such. Agamben's observation of art that "recognizes itself in the 'golden ball' of the will to power" could be clearly joined with Benjamin's hint that actually the instance of *l'art pour l'art* achieves the total opposite of the intent, which is inscribed in it. Still, as Benjamin remarks, the theory "(...) must do justice to these relationships, for they lead us to an all-important insight: for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual". The principle of montage in pluralist settings in today's world of interplay between constructed realities operates not just through artistic practices, but also through a whole complex of various communication, information, and presentations.

The triumph of the museum as the institution in the sphere of art is paralleled by some other such triumphs like University in the area of education. However, historically and socially such triumphs tend to have a transitional and mediating role. Therefore, for example, the institution of University keeps determining levels of education as well as a global academic

space and the notion of knowledge itself, but at the same time, knowledge is increasingly being produced and becomes available elsewhere as well. Still, the University ultimately keeps being the instance of verification of knowledge as well as museum and/or gallery functions as a safeguard that verifies 'art,' no matter where different artefacts happen to be shown or exhibited. Therefore, the institution of the museum should be taken as a specific materialization of a metaphor of itself, which became universally recognised through the course of time of modernism and even more emphatically in the time-space of post-modernism.

The advent of digital technology has had a huge impact on a wide range of conditions for production of visual representations in artistic and all other known senses, commencing already at the time of "analogue" television as a "mediatic *flow*" in Raymond Williams' (1974) words (see especially chapter four of his book). The impact of ICT on the form of written documents, diverse genres, including aesthetically marked narratives, necessitates a rethinking of the relationship between literature and moving pictures, now appearing in many other shapes and on other ubiquitous screens than just on celluloid film and on silver screens in cinemas. However, one must take into account the fact that any thinking about this relationship already implies ongoing changes of both occurrences of culture: literature and the media. In new settings of communication, some forms and phenomena of (re)presentation with a vast number of combinations of means of narration have yet to be recognized as a kind of, say, literature or at least documents of reality within virtual reality and *vice versa*. As Manovich observes in his last book, *software* is at the centre of these new realities and, by virtue of being used by hundreds of millions of people, software becomes "cultural software" (Manovich, 2013). What one should look for, especially considering the field of literature and new very "democratized" uses of moving pictures, are therefore not so much some very complex phenomena of so-called computer art, but mass usage of interactive media. Within them some forms of narrating, taking different views, commenting, expressing anxieties, accumulating memory, playing with identities, and disrupting many notions of objectivity are taking place. In transcending the boundaries between text and pictures, and between static and moving pictures, narration in the digital media results from de-montage of reality, which becomes more real rather than a forever-lost "external reality" by virtue of the virtual.

Questions of Cinema

Part four deals with the specific region and its cinema: the Balkans. The chapter on Robar-Dorin's film Rams and Mammoths (1985) deals with a prophetic anticipation of the looming nationalist upsurge in former Yugoslavia, which was unique as a communist country in which modernist art in all areas was tolerated and even promoted so long as the ruling bureaucracy did not see any political provocation in artistic products or events. The place of modernist Yugoslav films in any classification or in aesthetic terms has yet to be determined.

The next chapter takes a wider look on Balkan cinema. No matter what one may or may not know about the period of communism in the Balkans, we can say that this period coincided with the pattern of organisation of film production in a framework of national cinematographies, which were at the time universal. In this period the activity of filmmaking, especially in countries like Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and Yugoslavia, developed in its top products a mode of *auter* cinema. We can generally assert that aesthetics, topics, approaches, and so on, of these cinematographies did not differ much from what we have known as *nouvelle vague* type of cinema in Western Europe. Even after some setbacks following the year 1968, when the political executive and ideological powers of the time rudely interfered with accusations and exclusions of some authors or whole cinematic currents, this kind of cinema persisted in a somewhat softened form until the fall of the Berlin wall and Ceaușescu's departure. In the period after these events, cinematographies in the Balkans had to re-invent themselves due to a double (or even triple) impact of political, cultural and technological changes. More recently, political, economic and social changes have made an impact in the area of culture, that utmost affects cinema. Many changes of circumstances and conditions of film production and distribution, technological ones being especially important, merge with the symbolic transfigurations and new agencies of social imaginary within trends in the Balkan cinema, now shaping itself as a part of world cinema. In the sense of Manovich's (2001) conceptual inventions, the "language" of visual media interferes with the formation of local cultures, where new inventions of traditions and modernising tendencies mingle with one another. Furthermore, digital technologies work not always only in favour of democratisation, yet the accessibility of contemporary visual media is modifying perceptions and modes of appropriating cultural traditions. In such framework, aesthetics become interlaced with the social context. The political

statements in films now display a wide range of plurality and variety of different levels of exposing social issues that get uncovered or emphasised. It should be understood that Balkan cinema keeps the attitude and in political terms does not succumb to any apology for the world after the transition. Therefore, the aesthetics of such cinema cannot be so transparently formulated as it could have been in times when it made use of visual and verbal metaphors and "hidden" messages to point to existential problems or to expose a spectrum of repression within political and cultural systems of the Balkans. Small cinematographies of the Balkans now, nevertheless, enter the world cinema as rather "readable" to global audiences and especially to those, who attend many film festivals. It would require a lot of systematic research to underpin such generalization with facts and analysis.

The political signifiers within the structure of film narratives are generally shifted so that they project a perspective of a pluralistic democratic future, but in some instances, as mostly narrative arts always have been doing, present insights and warnings concerning social and political realities. The recent film, directed by Béla Tarr, a well-known and accomplished Hungarian author. *A Torinói ló* (The Turin Horse – 2011) proves my point exactly because of its elementary cinematic approach to the film narration and its topic. The uncompromising aesthetics of long takes and slow rhythm sequences compose a film, which could be apprehended as a philosophical essay or even less: as an alignment of reflexive visual aphorisms. Of course, the film makes no secret of its indebtedness to philosophy since the voice-over initiates the movie by telling the anecdote about Nietzsche and his attempt to help a horse submitted to an ill-treatment by his owner; the voice then directs the audience's attention to the horse and its fate. This introduction gives way to a repetitive visual contemplation pointing towards the ultimate problems of ontology and human existence by following the gloomy miserable routine of father and daughter, exposed to a common life with their old horse in an unceasingly windy steppe. This black and white film, it could be said, echoes recent contemplations by authors from Deleuze to Donna Harraway concerning the decentring of subjectivity in view of recognising environmental positioning of living creatures, including animals and humans on different registers of knowledge and science. As much as any political signifier seems absent from this meditative film, it is exactly this absence, which marks the problem of a transformation of the Balkans in accordance with its best reflexive traditions in the antiquity. Therefore, a possibility alone for such a film to be created in one of

the Balkan countries, otherwise known for its rich cinema in the context of its middle European cultural position, is a statement of the inner strength and a potential scope of the small cinematographies of the Balkans.

The last part of the book is focused on cinema and the process, which suggest the coming structural changes in the way cinema is about to "transcend its existence" as well as its aesthetic codes and social relevance. It would probably be an almost impossible task today to classify all meanings and uses of the notions of identity, especially considering all the controversies and contributions of the many broad debates within the context of post-modernity. Within the more practical realm of social events, different perceptions of identity, and the uncontrollable interplay of all symbolic signifiers that have come with them, indicate sometimes grave conflicts, especially with regard to an ethnic identity. As the bourgeois class society developed new forms of representation of a socially constructed reality, and a special place and role for aesthetic practices (usually known as art) in this reality, identity became a denominator of a lot of different uses and meanings. On the other hand, the term itself lost its "innocence" due to complex impacts of new forms of representation, which (as a necessary intellectual addition) contributed to the reproduction of the public. The role of photography and film in this sense was immense. Maybe we could say today that film after a period of developing different formats in different registers reached a point, when we could almost determine subjectivity (in a psychological or sociological sense) in the social reality as a kind of "representation of representation", meaning that the "real subjectivity" represents an imagined or a conceptual representation of subjectivity. In any case, in the age of television and digitalisation, images, gestures, recognition patterns, representations of bodies and so on, are all bringing us closer to such consequences. However, as much as such suppositions seem intellectually attractive, they should not be taken too far, but they should serve as an indication of some of the complex effects of audio-visual production, which is woven in the fabric of society. Here we are talking, of course, about symbolic exchanges within any society. Therefore, there is no doubt that the identity in the framework of culture by and large functions as a recognition scheme, within which the audio-visual production provides many particular views, angles, objects, gazes, suggestions and so forth, which modify ways of seeing things and also ways of "being seen". It should be added that the instance of "being seen" involves the *being* as such, which is the category of existence and of the existentialist philosophy.

Modernist movements of the 1960s and 1970s addressed the theme of identity in an ideologically subversive manner. Among many definitions of ideology, we are choosing here a very minimalist one, which joins a representation of reality and a system of domination. This subsequently means that a subject (person, citizen, man, woman, etc.) is defined within an order, which includes economy and morality, culture and education, politics and media, sports and traffic, language and religion and many more such conceptual pairs or oppositions. As the period of post-war prosperity on the both sides of the iron curtain opened a space for a new self-definition of younger generations, a great number of the European films of the period addressed the position of individual in a society in a manner, which uncovered the illusory stability of the world. These films addressed the so-called alienation, they opened a view on social inequalities and poverty in a world supposedly without poverty, and they contributed to the decentred ideas of order in a manner that ironically paralleled the absurdist theatre. All these messages and meanings wouldn't be observable without inventive approach of film-makers, who worked a lot on the aesthetic and communicative form of films, which means that they were exploring possibilities for new ways of visual narration and new ways of operating the look of a camera. In the midst of this the European cinema of the time gave way to a new definition of authorship, which, as we all know, followed from the *nouvelle vague*, but it can be argued that it was embraced all over Europe – both in the Western and the Eastern Europe – and at least in the independent American cinema. No matter how the perception and definition of *l'auter* changed later, a degree of a specific understanding of the role and autonomy of the film director survived until now.

There are some typical topics, which can be found in the European cinema. The motive of youngsters, who were delinquent or alienated or lost, is probably the clearest presentation of problems of identity as the central element in the modernist period in Europe. Truffaut, starting with his 400 Blows (*Les Quatre cent coups* – 1959), contributed a whole series on a character, played by Jean-Pierre Léaud, whom he named Antoine Doinel. Truffaut signalled the traumatic aspect of this character by pointing out the historical and social context: "A short time after the war there was a fresh upsurge of the juvenile delinquency. Juvenile prisons were full. I had known very well what I showed in my film" (Truffaut, 2004: p. 26). The environment of the socialist societies proved not to be at all that different as soon as some film directors started to work on themes of so called daily life,

which almost in a manner of aesthetics of home movies differed from the ideologically marked "reality" of the political and economic context of societies with the one political Party rule. So another well remembered adolescent character was Milos Forman's Black Peter (*Cerný Petr* – 1964). Forman made a point on incomplete identity also in his film A Blonde in Love (*Lásky jedné plavovlásky* – 1965). Of course, we shouldn't miss also Andrzej Wayda's Innocent Sorcerers (*Niewinni czarodzieje* – 1960), which deals with the topic of the "alienated youth" and ads quite daringly, considering the times and the catholic socialist environment of Poland, an anthological explicit erotic sequence of a strip poker game. Ingmar Bergman's film, which addressed the young proletarian frustrations, and at the same time brought up a new focus on female characters, *Summer with Monika (Sommaren med Monika* – 1953) should be "classified" as an early case among such films. On the other hand a giant of the European modernist cinema Michelangelo Antonioni with his sophisticated, doubting, intellectual communication loosing characters, who seem psychologically and socially deprived of the sense of identity, is in a class of his own. Characters in his films are approaching the limit of the constitution of subjectivity through desire in the psychoanalytical terms, as they seem to be without an idea of the true object of their desire, of course, apart from Antonioni's own manifested desire to see through the eye of the camera, what is very difficult to see otherwise. Following the trace of identity as a topic in the European modernist cinema, we could of course go on and on citing and analysing many films, which were shot in the period also in Great Britain within the movement of free cinema, and of course in Germany within the Young German Cinema.

Nowadays we must often specify what we mean exactly when we talk about memory: do we mean the memory, which we keep in our brains or do we mean some digital data, which is stored on a hard drive somewhere in cyber space? Although in probably all languages the figure of speech "I remember" is still widely used, it is meant increasingly more often as an inscription into a memory, which is uttered in some recollection residing somewhere "outside" of our brains. In our digital era, when implications of such an assumption have become obvious, we should look back to understand the genealogy of this state of affairs, and to be able to analyse a structural composition of our so-called post-modern reality. The complexity of meanings regarding the notions of memory has become more complicated and yet simpler at the same time from the beginnings of the development of the first photography and then film, as it entered human history and the

lexicon of ordinary language already in very early popular culture. Images, which represented the visual world more convincingly than any artist's work – not because they were better as images, but because they were recognised to be "truer" – have forever changed human perception. How was human perception organised and how it functioned before this process of change started, we are unable to say in detail, but we can take into account many such written records as various philosophical texts, especially those on epistemology, which demonstrate many troubles in explaining the perception and the true value of a reality outside ourselves. As soon as we mention a concept such as memory, many people are quick to associate it with psychology as the science that can supposedly define and describe the concept. True, apart from neuro-science, psychology (no matter which of many different doctrines) deals a lot with the concept of memory. The psychological concept of memory, as much as it serves its purpose within the limits of psychology as a science, seems to be insufficient as an answer to a range of questions. Problems associated with memory have nowadays become a matter of cross-related issues and various types of knowledge and research. No one expects psychology itself in isolation from other research to deliver much more knowledge than it already does in the field, which is designated by the concept of memory. This divergence between psychology and other humanities started to come into view within the work of Henri Bergson. Gilles Deleuze brought this historical fact to our attention in 1983, when this great philosopher of the 20th Century stunned the intellectual community with his first extensive study on cinema. Bergson's works displayed many features of a great foresight, when he, in his discourse, revealed the full meaning of the concept in a nascent context, which fully developed later. By "this context", I mean not only aesthetic developments as such, but these developments as they were seen through the interactions with education, cinematography, and cultural institutions, which all contributed to a change of the perception of human perception. It is of the utmost importance that along with the concept of *movement* Bergson not only emphasised the notion of memory, but also the concept of image. It is not as important how exact or wrong Bergson's observations, assertions and statements were in view of, for example, modern physiology and the psychology of perception, since we are talking about the philosophical building of concepts. Thus, maybe – due to the fact that Bergson's book on memory was first published in 1896, roughly at the same time when the brothers Lumieres' *cinématograph* started film history – we can shed light on the prob-

lem. We can now better understand that the interaction between moving pictures and the changes of the meaning of the concept of memory was an immediate one. As such, it has been uttered in Bergson's discourse. Therefore, Bergson's text still reminds us that a presumably scientific explanation of perceptions of images lacks a grasp of complexity.

In the last twenty years or so of the 20th century cinema as art has become increasingly an object of an expanding interest for philosophers – of course, not only French ones. However, French philosophers are principal references when a wide range of questions concerning film and thinking are discussed. French film theory from its early days on, as it is visible in the case of Epstein, amply borrowed ideas, notions and logics from philosophy and aesthetics. Our contemporary colleague Jacques Rancière is undoubtedly a major thinker, who in his huge *oeuvre* pays an important tribute to cinema and very noticeably intervenes into the field, which recently has been globally identified as *philosophy of film*. In the chapter 11 (The Machine and Its Shadow) of his book *Aisthesis* he comes up with the notion of *immediacy* linked to the notion of cinema: "Immediacy is what the art of projected moving shadows demands. Since this art is deprived of living flesh, of the stage's depth and theatre's words, its instant performance must be identified with the tracing of a writing of forms" (2013). Rancière discovers "immediacy" when he is trying to point out how cinema organises within its capacities a "distribution of the sensible" and he takes Chaplin not just as an example, but also as a decisive figure in the time, when film was becoming art form and defining itself as such. Of course, as a philosopher, who cannot but draw on texts – in this instance on Shklovsky, Meyerhold and, maybe more prominently, on Jean Epstein, Rancière did not miss the question of language in cinema. Therefore, it looks like as if there is an inherent link between thinking through cinema and his notion of *immediacy*.

Although venerable traditional aesthetic considerations on beauty seem mostly obsolete, the concept of beauty cannot be simply discarded considering that it is inscribed in the foundation of the very idea of all aesthetics. The cinematic reality, always one way or the other related to a perception of beauty (or, as it were, its contrast) of images, therefore, cannot be conceived without aesthetics, which in case of cinema transgresses the boundaries of "just" art. Elsaesser and Hagener ascertained and anticipated in their clarification that "/.../ the cinema seems poised to leave behind its function as a 'medium' (for the representation of reality) in order to be-

come a 'life form' (and thus a reality in its own right)" (Elsaesser, Hagener, 2010: p. 12). In a self-reflective turn (meaning cinema theory as the subject) they proceed with their argument, based on the assumption that film theory "put the body and the senses at the centre" of its interest in the direction, which in the age of ubiquitous digital communication does not seem far-fetched anymore. They point out that the cinema is proposing to us "/…/ besides a new way of knowing the world, also a new way of 'being in the world', and thus demanding from film theory, next to a new epistemology also a new ontology'" (Ibid.).

Transcending cinema, at first glance runs rather smoothly. It is taking place almost exactly in a manner of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*. The reason for such an appearance should be sought in the fact that we still have to deal with the frame – no matter in what kind of apparatus, which could be a cinema screen or a range of screens of diverse digital devices. "Theorists of new media have made much of the notion of cinema as the dominant language of culture and of the computer desktop as a cinematic space: 'screen culture' is posited as the hegemonic cultural interface" (Nakamura, 2008: p. 63). To what extent is virtual reality undermined by the effect of immediacy, such as it has been inaugurated by Walter Benjamin and, just recently, in other terms by Jacques Rancière? The problem now obtains the generational historicised framework, within which, curiously, history itself melts in the presence of a form of always accessible "knowledge" that abolishes "old" hierarchies of relevance of historic narratives about events, institutions, people and periods.

Key Words: culture, media, cinema, politics, identity

Povzetek

Več člankov za revije, podlag za predavanja in referatov za konference so bili podlaga za to knjigo pod naslovom *Od Walterja Benjamina do konca filma*. Ker se v večini tukaj zbranih zapisov ukvarjam z umetniškimi, kulturnimi in političnimi fenomeni, sem jih lahko razporedil v različne dele, ki so osredotočeni na nekatere posebne teoretične probleme ali posebna področja in pojave. Čeprav ta besedila, ki so bile napisana v obdobju skoraj več kot dveh desetletij, niso organizirana strogo po kronološkem vrstnem redu, sem skušal upoštevati trajektorijo svoje lastne konceptualne evolucije.

V zgodovinskem kontekstu je množična kultura kot ugotovljena entiteta skoraj v celoti vpisana v 20. stoletje in samo z vidika tega stoletja so njene prejšnje manifestacije vidne že v času zgodnjejšega razvoja in preboja kapitalizma v kombinaciji z industrijsko revolucijo in političnimi revolucijami. Izginjanje *avre* – kot Benjamin poimenuje učinek unikatnosti umetnine – z razcvetom reprodukcije klasičnih umetniških del in še bolj pomembno, z razvojem novih oblik umetnosti, ki jih omogočajo tehnološke naprave, prinaša preobrat v delovanje same umetnosti. Mediji, na primer, predstavljajo stanje stvari, izražajo in širijo prevladujoče poglede in stališča ali z drugo besedo: ideologijo. Kot tako, delovanje medijev pomembno odraža kolektivne zgodovinske izkušnje, v katerih mediji kot dejavniki in posredniki »resnice« sami igrajo vlogo.

Umetnost zavzema stališča v simbolnem univerzumu tako, da uveljavlja singularnost, ki zato, ker je ta vedno neki *artefakt,* hkrati transcendira vsako posebnost singularnosti. Agambenovo naziranje umetnosti, ki »se prepoznava v 'zlati krogli' volje do moči«, se lahko jasno pridruži Benjaminovemu namigu, da instanca *l'art pour l'art*a doseže popolno nasprotje od svojega namena, ki je vpisan vanjo. Vendar, kot še pripomni Benjamin, teorija »(...) mora biti pravična do teh razmerij, saj nas vodijo k pomembnemu vpogledu: prvič v svetovni zgodovini, mehanična reprodukcija emancipira umetnino od njene parazitske odvisnosti od rituala«. Načelo montaže v pluralnih ureditvah današnjega sveta vzajemne igre konstruiranih realnosti ne deluje samo skozi umetniške prakse, ampak tudi skozi celoten kompleks različnih komunikacij, informacij in prezentacij.

V evropski kinematografiji najdemo v različnih obdobjih skupne značilnosti med raznolikimi pristopi k identiteti. Pojem identitete se nanaša na številna svoja izrekanja, ki se dotikajo filozofske subjektivnosti, psihološkega subjekta, etnične entitete, političnega agensa itn. Vsi ti različni vidiki identitete, ki so seveda v večini primerov (vendar ni nujno vedno tako), vpisani v konstrukcije protagonistov, se kažejo v filmih iz različnih obdobij evropske kinematografije. Ne glede na to, kaj kdo ve ali ne ve o obdobju komunizma na Balkanu, lahko rečemo, da je to obdobje sovpadalo z vzorcem organizacije filmske produkcije v okviru nacionalnih kinematografij, ki so bile v tem času univerzalne. V tem obdobju se je dejavnost filmskega ustvarjanja, še posebej v državah, kot so bile Češkoslovaška, Poljska, Madžarska in Jugoslavija, v svojih vrhunskih dosežkih razvila v modusu avtorske kinematografije.

Danes moramo pogosto biti natančni, ko govorimo o spominu: ali mislimo na spomin, ki ga shranjujemo v naših možganih ali mislimo na digitalne podatke, ki so shranjeni na trdem disku nekje v kibernetskem prostoru? V Eisensteinovi filmski praksi, lahko opazimo učinek teh hipotez, ko v značilni in velikokrat slavljeni *montaži* vnaša mišljenje v in skozi podobe v svojih antoloških filmih. Jacques Rancière odkrije »neposrednost«, ko poskuša poudariti, kako film organizira v okviru svojih zmogljivosti »distribucijo čutnega«. Koliko je pojem »film« – čigar »materialna bit« kot celulojdnega traku izginja – v njegovi vse bolj metaforični navzočnosti odločilen za razumevanje umetnosti, zdaj zaznamovane z multiplimi označevalci »virtualne realnosti«?

Ključne besede: kultura, mediji, film, politika, identiteta

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Štrajn's collection of reflections on Benjamin's complex relationship to mass media as a technological, social, and political phenomenon provides a rich and provocative intervention that contributes substantially to the field. The author's authoritative readings of Benjamin's work and philosophical legacy shed important new light on the political role of technologically reproducible art in the age of filter bubbles, fake news, and social media.

DAN HASSLER FOREST

Among the wide range of topics, which the author deals with, the insights into the sphere of cinema and the problems of new media seem most important. Such insights are nowadays especially laudable in the situation of new technological and – therefore – cultural revolution, when the possibilities of the digital reproduction radically transformed modes of production, distribution, consumption and also the modes of reflections especially in the fields of cinema and audio-visual studies. New reality, which is produced and re-produced by new technologies, of course, demands new ontology. I am convinced that Štrajn's work represents a big and important step into this relatively under-researched direction.

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