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ISLAND INSULATED IN MUSIC. DECONSTRUCTING THE ISLANDING OF *OTOČKI ROCK*¹

Author's interpretation of the phenomenon of *otočki rock* rests upon the attempt to read the islandness constructed by music and music constructed by islandness through the texts of *otočki rock* – its music, its lyrics and multiple levels of its verbalization in extramusical texts that it is encircled by. If we can talk about islandness as a cultural fact and individual experience, can it be, and how, (re)constructed in music? How does, then, this “message” sent from the perspective of the “island” musicians grasp the receptors of its coastal and continental – non-island – listeners and interpreters? Can their islandness itself, and through which mechanisms, serve as a guarantee to the *otočki rock* musicians to rise up above the sea of non-islandness of the rest of the domestic popular music scene? On the existence of which imagination precisely does this category count on and which Island does it create and invoke through its promotional discourses? And finally, is there a non-island part of the *otočki rock* and how is it poeticized and set to music? – these are some of the starting questions of the interpretation of the *otočki rock* phenomenon presented in this article.

Key words: *otočki rock*, music, islands, islandness, islanding

... *no island is an island...*

(Ellis 1998:55)

In July 2007 *Aquarius Records*, a Zagreb based record label, released the album *15 slanih. The best of otočki val 1999-2007* [15 Salty Ones. The Best of Island Wave 1999-2007]. In “seventy minutes of hot summer island music” the album was supposed to (according to the promotional material) present “fifteen best songs of *otočki rock*” – “a completely autochthonous expression within Croatian rock” which has in nine years of its existence “resulted in eight albums, hundreds of concerts on islands and the coast, along with a completely new musical perspec-

¹ This article is an expanded version of the text published in the collected papers *Destinacije čežnje, lokacije samoće. Uvidi u kulturu i razvojne mogućnosti hrvatskih otoka* (Piškori 2009).

tive”, which thereby “has no antecedents nor role-models, but has been patented by Žan and Max of *Šo!Mazgoon*, continued by Gego and perfected by *Kopito*”.² In the accompanying liner notes, besides the basic info on the musicians, discography of *otočki rock* and the songs of the album, a text by Siniša Bizović can be found which, in the narrow space permitted by the format, summarizes and poeticizes the *otočki rock* phenomenon as follows:

Each island is a continent to itself. With its bays, beaches, cliffs, ports, salt pans, dialects, funerals, lighthouses... And music.

And as on islands *literally everything is different* than on land, so the island music is *music different and other*, music that follows the island extremes, passions and eccentricities.

For centuries islands have been the outer limits of civilization accessibility, for many the end of the world. Therefore, it is not hard to understand that *the music from the end of the world, the music surrounded by the sea*, simply must be *different* and *charmingly contorted*; washed by the wind, purified by the isolations, immersed in waiting, filtered by the different smells and fears – and certainly salty.

This compact disc offers fifteen salty musical moments, healing island spices from three ends of the world: the islands of Brač, Hvar and Vis. (Bizović 2007; emphasis M. P.)

To the uninformed reader/listener this text might serve as an introduction of a kind to the musics I am dealing with in this article, but the reason I chose to open with the album *15 Salty Ones...* is the fact that in only several sentences of the “promotional” discourse singled out here, the key issues of my interpretation of the phenomenon in a wider context of the attempt to consider the nexus of space and music are refracted. Even a superficial glance on the singled out verbalizations of the *otočki rock* phenomenon reveals existing terminological insecurities (is it *otočki rock* [island rock] or *otočki val* [island wave]?) and classificatory discomfort (is it an “expression”, “movement”, or “perspective”?), but also the outlines of some typical places of its poetization (it is not just rock music, but “music surrounded by the sea”, music “different” and “other”) i.e. the kind of the seemingly safe haven which in the case of need for a definition is offered by immersing into the supposedly unambiguous metaphors of islandness – this “clear” sign of Different and Other.

My interpretation of the phenomenon of *otočki rock* rests upon the attempt to read the islandness constructed by music and music constructed by islandness through the texts of *otočki rock* – its music, lyrics and multiple levels of its verbalization in extramusical texts that it is encircled by. If we can talk about islandness as a cultural fact and individual experience, can it be, and how, (re)constructed in music? How does, then, this “message” sent from the perspective of the islanders grasp the receptors of its coastal and continental – non-island – listeners and

² <http://www.aquarius-records.com/izdanje-opsirnije.php?PID=753> (accessed March 19, 2010).

interpreters? Can their islandness itself, and through which mechanisms, serve as a guarantee to the *otočki rock* musicians to rise up above the sea of non-islandness of the rest of the domestic popular music scene? On the existence of which imagination precisely does this category count on and which Island does it create and invoke through its promotional discourses? And finally, is there a non-island part of the *otočki rock* and how is it poeticized and set to music? – These are some of the starting questions of my interpretation of the *otočki rock* phenomenon.

Directon – *otočki rock*

The “official” initiators of one of the newer “waves” of the Croatian popular music scene, which the promoters of its home label,³ music critics and only rarely and rather reluctantly the musicians themselves, have labeled as *otočki val*, are considered to be the musicians gathered in 1999 into the band the *Šo!Mazgoon*, that at the end of the year released its first album by the same name. Compared to other discographic categories, a relatively small label of *otočki rock* was joined in the period from 1999 to 2007 by two more names – the *Gego & Picigin band* and the *Kopito*, and since 2009 also by the *Žan i Mazguni*.⁴ The curiosity of *otočki rock* is a kind of “migratory” practice of musicians moving from band to band and performing/producing the music of different bands at the same time, while the central “basic lineup” – when it comes to the authors of music and lyrics which comprise the majority of the *otočki rock* corpus – consists of only three musicians: Žan Jakopač, Stipe Barišić Gego and Pavle Sviličić Svila.

Although the number of eleven albums might seem too small for a separate label, *otočki rock* was indeed constructed, and then also recognized as a different, distinguishable, recognizable, and specific segment of the domestic popular music scene. Within the framework of this scene *otočki rock* and *otočki val* are almost inseparably linked to the *Šo!Mazgoon*, the *Gego & Picigin band* and the *Kopito*, and only rarely other names, and then only in the more local context. The syntagms *otočki val* and *otočki rock* are often used as synonyms, although from their appearances in the texts that discursively construct this phenomenon it might be concluded that the former is more often used by the critics, producers and journal-

³ The record label that released all of the *Šo!Mazgoon*'s, *Gego & Picigin band*'s and *Kopito*'s albums is *Aquarius Records* from Zagreb. Since it is a label that was actively involved in the creation of the *otočki rock* in several levels, I consider it justified to refer to it as to its home label.

⁴ I consider the band *Žan i Mazguni* a derivation of a kind of the *Šo!Mazgoon*, primarily because its centre is Žan Jakopač, the main author and founder of the *Šo!Mazgoon*. With the exception of a few references, the repertoire of the band *Žan i Mazguni* will not be dealt with in the rest of the text – mostly because their repertoire was created after *otočki rock* has already been established as a separate category within the framework of the domestic popular-music scene, i.e. after its construction process – which is followed by this text – was in its main part over.

ists when trying to grasp the entirety of the phenomenon. However, it seems that there is no valid terminological consensus on which syntagm to use, not even among the musicians themselves. Namely, while Max Juričić when asked what in fact the *Šo!Mazgoon* play – is it reggae, rock, pop, or world fusion – answers with “very briefly – *otočki rock*”,⁵ and Žan Jakopač, rejecting *otočki rock* as a “silly formulation” that was “invented by some people to make it easier to put it in a box” chooses *otočki val* as a lesser evil;⁶ Gego calls his music “*gegizam*, because it is cheerful, serves for fun, and it looks like swinging in rhythm”,⁷ while *Kopito* invents the syntagm *otočki raspašoj* [island debauchery].⁸ The “discomfort” of the *otočki rock* syntagm partly derives from its narrowness, especially if we take into account that in the repertoires that fall into the category there are elements which could not easily be categorized as rock music. It seems that the syntagm *otočki val* offers a wider field of meaning and opens the possibility of thinking about this phenomena as of a “movement” which is, besides the music, comprised by some nonmusical aspects, like for instance, the *Otoče, volim te* [Island, I love you] initiative.⁹ Beside that, the *otočki val* syntagm encapsulates a reference to previous “wave” phenomena of the Croatian popular music scene – the New Wave of the 1980s, in the forming of which Max Juričić,¹⁰ one of the key musicians of the *otočki val*, participated; as well as the *ča-val* of the 1990s, whose key characteristic, among other things, was the affirmation of the local dialect.¹¹ A reconciliation of a kind of the two syntagms was brought by the 2006 *Best of Šo!Mazgoon: Otoče, volim te* album’s promotional material that says: “the *otočki rock* syntagm – which was mostly used to describe its music [of the *Šo!Mazgoon*] – has, thanks to the affirmation of the similar genre bands such as the *Gego & Picigin band* and the *Kopito*, been transformed into the *otočki val* as the currently prevailing common denominator for the musical movement led by the *Šo!Mazgoon*, whose protagonists are inspired by the ‘island state of mind’”.¹²

⁵ <http://www.rockexpress.org/arhiva/rex2324/232407.html> (accessed March 19, 2010).

⁶ <http://www.javno.com/hr-scena/zan-jakopac--neizljecivi-sam-azroholicar/243832> (accessed March 19, 2010).

⁷ <http://www.aquarius-records.com/tekst-kratak.php?pID=678&pkoji=0&ptip=vijest> (accessed March 19, 2010).

⁸ <http://www.aquarius-records.com/tekst-kratak.php?preludeID=431&pkoji=0&ptip=izdanje> (accessed March 19, 2010).

⁹ More on *Otoče, volim te* initiative in Piškor 2009.

¹⁰ Mladen Max Juričić was a member of the new-wave band the *Film*, and later the *Le Cinema* and the *Vještice*. With Žan Jakopač, he is the key person in the *Šo!Mazgoon*, and after their break-up he founded the *Gego & Picigin band* with Stipe Barišić Gego. He was the producer of the *Kopito*’s first album. In the summer of 2009 in Postire (on the island of Brač) he founded the *Ljetno kino*. Another “new-wave” name of the *otočki val* is Boris Leiner, the drummer of the new-wave band *Azra*, later also member of the *Vještice* and the *Šo!Mazgoon*.

¹¹ For more on *ča-val* see Čaleta 2003 and Kalapoš 2002.

¹² <http://www.aquarius-records.com/tekst-kratak.php?partistID=6&pkoji=0&ptip=izvodac> (accessed March 19, 2010).

Another controversy or another of *otočki rock*'s “eternal questions” doubtlessly testifies to the recognizability, specificity but also of the importance of *otočki rock*, and that is the issue of its founder. The release of the first album by Gego, a musician from the island of Hvar, and his the *Picigin band* – where, after the *Šo!Mazgoon* break-up Max Juričić and Stanko Kovačić settled – initiated the seemingly unimportant discussion of authenticity, primacy and copyright of a kind over *otočki rock*. The *Gego* album was actually released six years after the first, and two years after the last studio album of the *Šo!Mazgoon*. It appeared as such before the wider audience after the *otočki rock* category had been given its outlines and a recognizable sound through three studio albums by the *Šo!Mazgoon*. However, Gego's album was “awaiting” its release for nearly eleven years, what does give it some kind of a chronological advantage. In minute evaluations of “authenticity” Gego was, according to some, more “islandesque”, “earlier”, “more authentic” than Jakopač. During informal conversations on the topic “Who is better – Gego or the Mazgoons?”, people whose answer was “Gego” nearly always included into their argumentation, besides personal preferences, the issue of “chronology” of the *otočki rock* itself (“Gego was the first one”... “Gego was playing it long before it even occurred to Žan”...) and the issue of authenticity of the musicians themselves, whereby the evaluation of the level of their “islandness” played a significant role. The echoes of such quest for authenticity could also be read from the following extract from the review of one of the *otočki rock* albums:

Before that, Gego had for 10 years been a *local Hvar secret*, whose *homemade recordings*, thanks to ‘hand to hand’ distribution and the student population, nevertheless managed to spread throughout Dalmatia and Zagreb. When he finally got an exceptionally skilled and routined band, the stage had already been set for a small explosion caused by his first album in 2005. It contained mostly Gego's cult hits, though now in full-blooded arrangements (*naturally, on occasion it caused the loss of some of their primitive charm*). (Vukušić 2007, emphasis M. P.)

Similar kind of speech of authenticity was pointed to by Tim Taylor in his book *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets*. According to his interpretation “consumers at the traditional metropolises look toward the former margins for anything real, rather than the produced. They want ‘real’ gangsta rap musicians – black, poor, from the hood – not middle-class ones, and certainly not white ones. (...) The most important criterion... in listening to a band isn't whether they are good, meaningful, or interesting, but if they have sold out to money, to commercialism” (Taylor 1997:22-23).

From the body of numerous texts that have presented, described, explained and constructed *otočki rock*, three standpoints are singled out, that will serve me in what follows as the starting points for the interpretation of *otočki rock* – the island metaphor; the formative role of the dialect (“island” dialect?); and insisting on “flauntingness”, “smoothness”, “cheerfulness”, “fun”, “unpretentiousness”,

“summeriness” as the formative characteristic of the islandness upon which the *otočki rock* promotional discourse rests.

Possibility of (imagining) the island

Coming to the island I am stepping into the mythical homeland of my ancestors. Into the layered dimension of time and space. There everything consists of transience, fast changes and tough survival. Everything is intertwined, the dead and the alive, the absent and the present. Salty air streams over the ruins and tombs impregnated with the scents of Broom, Fennel, Salvia. This is not, however, a feeling of general disappearance and absence, but a fertile circulation of energy that radiates from the abandoned houses, worm-eaten objects, chapels. Remnants of the material, the tangible are projecting a shadow of their absence. (...) Everything on the island is upside-down. Echoes are different, feelings are denser. The darkness, the starry skies take on a magical power. Fig trees, olive trees and almond trees are not just readable in their outer fruit, but also in their insides. And the insides are just time crowded with absences of all kinds. The absence of water, the absence of sun, the absence of shelter. Time wears things out, invokes the voices of the absent. This is a space with recognizably inscribed traces. Nothing is annulled beyond recognition. It only takes on a different form. (Škunca in Džebić 2003:17)

“The island as metaphor”, concludes the poet Andriana Škunca, “is a cosmic notion”. The island is also a *topos* of the duality of the poetics of margin and politics of belonging. Its limits seemingly facilitate the identification of those that belong to it and those that do not and could not belong, creating at the same time two longings, or even two levels of legitimacy of island longing – the longing of those that belong and the longing of those that do not belong. While the physical space of the island perhaps can – according to the land registry or genealogy – belong to some and not belong to the others, the belonging of the imagined island, as well as the belonging to the imagined island slips away from the simple establishing of the insider and outsider categories. So powerful is the metaphorical idea of the island that it can be deployed in the absence of even the slightest reference to the reality of islands, says Pete Hay (2006:30). An island, in fact, is not just land surrounded by the sea, charted in the geographical and navigation maps, which can be reached by sea or by air, but it also is an “island of the mind” (Gillis 2004), an island as a cultural construct that can be reached by imagination. The desertedness of the deserted island for instance, according to Gilles Deleuze, is not abolished by the banal fact of its real inhabitation because:

The island is deserted more than it is a desert. So much so, that in itself the island may contain the liveliest of rivers, the most agile fauna, the brightest flora, the most amazing nourishment, the hardest of savages, and the castaway as its most precious fruit, it may even contain, however momentarily, the ship that comes to take him away. For all that, it is not any less a deserted island. (...)

This is to state once again that the essence of the deserted island is imaginary and not actual, mythological and not geographical. (Deleuze 2004:11-12)

An island could be conceived as one of the “mindscapes” referred to by Owe Ronström – through the concept that “urges us to understand a site... as both a mental and a physical entity – ‘mind’ for the former and ‘scape’ for the latter. Mindscapes are established by certain perspectives or gazes that make us see some things and overlook a whole lot more” (Ronström 2008:4-5). Yi-Fu Tuan, on the other hand claims that “four natural environments have figured prominently in humanity’s (including non-Western) enduring and endearing dreams of the ideal world. They are: the forest, the shore, the valley and the island. Combinations of these – such as the island shore – become even more powerful symbolic imaginaries and reference points” (Tuan, according to Baldacchino 2008:40).

The escapist image of the “paradise island” is therefore often based on the sand beach scene, which – if we were to go back to the music – from the 1950s, when record covers become colourful and descriptive (Connell and Gibson 2008:52), has often been chosen for the album cover that lures the potential buyer to pick one of the island musics from the wide span of record releases. Endless possibilities of imagining the island that could be offered by “vicarious journeys” (Connell and Gibson 2004a) through recordings of “island” musics are thus being reduced to a narrow repertoire of general places of visualization of the essentialized paradise island – the sun, the sea, the intact nature and the promise of a completely different experience.

Even though the island and islandness, according to Ines Prica, primarily imply a “spatial, temporal or empirical duality” and a “multiplicity of perspectives, adventures and experience” (Prica 2009:6), the possibility of the island to intervene in the field of the “simple, fixed understanding of the cultural identity” is often pushed to the margin of the island imagination, losing the fierce battle of competing in cost-efficiency which is won by the island as a destination of the essentialized otherness and differentness. The island thus becomes even more distant, more isolated. It becomes additionally *islanded*.¹³ Even when it is the antipode of the “paradise island”, the island as a “symbol for concentrated evil” (Hay 2006:27) the possibility of its being “wrapped” in an attractive islandness – this time the quintessence of isolation – is in no real danger.¹⁴ Some islands, like for

¹³ Owe Ronström uses the term *islanding* to describe the production of places far and *islanded*. In the cities of the mainland there is the new modern life, progress, and development. In islanded places, such as islands, but also villages, continental communities where retired people move to in order to spend their old age there – “relict areas”, are the “good old days”, a slower pace of life, roots, links to nature, individual and collective histories (cf. Ronström 2008:14-15).

¹⁴ Speaking about the island as a symbol for concentrated evil Pete Hay refers to the metaphorical strength of the island as a prison and as a quarantine. It is possible to read in the same way the attempt to “wrap up” the Goli island, referred to by Branko Cerovac (Cerovac 2009) in the collected papers *Destinacije čežnje, lokacije samoće. Uvidi u kulturu i razvojne mogućnosti hrvatskih otoka* (Prica and Jelavić 2009).

instance the Maldives and Greenland, have taken hold in the framework of tourist advertising with a note of catastrophe that invites guests who want to experience the paradise island to do so before it is too late (cf. Baldacchino 2008:46). If the two big industries – tourism and heritage production – continue to develop at the same pace as during the last decade, warns Ronström from the perspective of the inhabitants of the Swedish island of Gotland, many of the islanders will find themselves employed as a kind of live role players, playing themselves as islanders in one of the worlds' biggest open-air museums (Ronström 2008:15). That such predictions are not very far in the future, i.e. that to some extent they are already taking place is poignantly testified by the lighthouse keeper Zakarija Begić, who is referred to by Marija Živković in her article of an indicative title – *Ethnography of Solitude* (Živković 2009). The modernization of lighthouses has taken a large part of Zakarija's duties away from him, duties that he had in the past, when he, together with his wife and children and another lighthouse keeper's family took care of the island lighthouse where they lived. In the "transition" caused by automatization he lost his former cotenants and a large part of the lighthouse keeping tasks, and he got excess free time and solitude, but also new, occasional and temporary cotenants – tourists who spend their vacations on the lighthouse. The rooms in which the lighthouse keepers' families used to live are now tourist accommodation, and although a tourist annuls to some extent his solitude, "a tourist is a tourist. He wants peace, what he paid for, and we need to tend to that, to comply with that" (Begić in Živković 2009:97). Besides playing himself in a way, it seems that Zakarija is forced to occasionally play his own absence, which makes him potentially "erasable". The unease that derives from the fact that the option of resistance to such instrumentalization is not really an option for him, emerges from his narration about the island, the lighthouse reality and grows if put it in a wider context formed according to the "increasingly capricious 'economy of longing', the wish for temporary belonging that alters with the tendency or coercion to leave, while the cyclical movement caused by the global tourism rhythm inevitably leaves the traces of occasional desertedness and solitude in the background" (Prica 2009:8). This unease at the same time leads to Baldacchino's question of how do islanders confront island texts that are often written by non-islanders, where they become "stereotypical Lilliputians who only exist through the eyes, and texts, of an equally stereotypical Gulliver, and whose interest in island matters is fleeting and superficial" (cf. Baldacchino 2008:42). Baldacchino offers the possible answers to this question by identifying the islander that is in no way involved in the industry of his representation and remains perplexed by the fact that he manages to survive even though the continental science has long condemned him of 'the death of race', then 'non-viability', and later still 'chronic vulnerability'; the islander confused by the fact the non-islanders persistently consider the island as paradise while in this

paradise she is constantly struggling with unemployment, aid dependence, loss of talent, waste mountains, eutrophied coasts and lagoons, sewage overflows, drug running, money laundering, soil erosion, drinking water shortages, depopulation or overpopulation; the islander who accepts the non-islanders' obsession to claim, objectify, turn into a deceiving metaphor as a mythology to be endured, encouraged and refreshed since the charm and the mystique of her island as a tourist destination depend on it, while on the other hand "living the lie" has a bonus – it distances her from the necessity of confronting her own demons; the islander who protests, demands that his distinctiveness be acknowledged, as well as his right to a particular counter-identity indigenously rooted and positions the island as a bastion of biological and cultural diversity, i.e. the opposite of the numbing sameness produced by globalization; and then again the islander who, confused by the statements about the bio-diversity and endemisms which are meant to redefine the value of everything that in fact she knows well – common, trivial, local species of fish, flowers, trees, animals, insects, land, sea, and even cultural heritage; then the islander who will develop and hone the skills that enable her to deal with the continentals, to manipulate their resources, to humour their ideas, to fuel their fantasies and thus, finally, manage the very figurations of the island and the island life that intend to type her, surviving comfortably as *glocal* inhabitant in the split and schizoid world with (at least) two parallel sets of values, languages and practices; and finally the islander who will with no remorse burst the bubble of incorrect island metaphorization and point out the irreconcilable juncture between continental fantasies and island life (cf. Baldacchino 2008:42). It is possible to find traces of all these island readings of non-island texts about the island in the opus defined by the *otočki rock* syntagm. Traces of all the sketched non-island imaginations of the island can, on the other hand, be found in the promotional discourses which produced texts that constructed *otočki rock* as other and different segment of domestic popular music scene.

Islanded island of the *otočki rock*

By means of the fact that they reconcile the duality i.e. the multiplicity that fights the idea of monolith and fixed identities deconstructable into "basic" elements, as well as – although only rarely in an explicit way – by means of the lyrics, *otočki rock* authors offer a possibility of reading the islandness of their music apart from the insulation in an islanded Island. However, such a reading is – if we are to judge by the texts that construct *otočki rock* as a separate category of the record industry – alien to the promotional logic that seeks a limitable, tangible and unambiguous otherness and distinctiveness. Not even the essentialized, islanded island has sufficed, it seems, for that kind of otherness. Therefore, in the promotional

perpetuation of the known and recognizable island scenes a dimension of “summeriness” has systematically and continuously been added with the aim of making *otočki rock* more attractive, primarily to the continental audience trapped into the non-islandness and non-summeriness.

The release “Forski škoji” brings three singles, nine recordings from concerts held in Zagreb, Split and Vodice, and two videos. *Seventy minutes of summer!* More than that does not fit into a CD. [emphasis, M. P.]¹⁵

With its positive reviews, this album is an *unavoidable summer soundtrack*. [emphasis, M. P.]¹⁶

The album *Gego & Picigin band* was praised by the critics, who called it an *unpretentious soundtrack for good summer fun and autumn parties*, i.e. *this summer's obligatory listening*. [emphasis, M. P.]¹⁷

... *summer dance atmosphere*, the joy of musicmaking, *unburdenedness* and genre *variety*... [emphasis, M. P.]¹⁸

... on his first album put together a *flaunting, charming* and foremost *smooth* collection of songs that completely justify the syntagm of ‘*island raspašoj*’. [emphasis, M. P.]¹⁹

Teotar akvarelo with its twelve new songs from the heart of the Ecological and Fisheries Protection Zone *is an album with which the summer lasts all year long*. [emphasis, M. P.]²⁰

... navy T-shirts, rolled-up trousers and sandals have become their trademark that goes great with the energetic music with a *island aroma*, thus creating an *authentic summer atmosphere*. [emphasis, M. P.]²¹

Great music that will make the most sensitive to cold dance and *create a warm summer atmosphere* during these cold winter days. [emphasis, M. P.]²²

¹⁵ <http://www.aquarius-records.com/tekst-kratak.php?preleaseID=585&pkoji=0&ptip=izdanje> (accessed March 19, 2010).

¹⁶ <http://www.aquarius-records.com/tekst-kratak.php?pID=678&pkoji=0&ptip=vijest> (accessed March 19, 2010).

¹⁷ <http://www.aquarius-records.com/tekst-kratak.php?pID=660&pkoji=0&ptip=vijest> (accessed March 19, 2010).

¹⁸ <http://www.aquarius-records.com/tekst-kratak.php?pID=655&pkoji=0&ptip=vijest> (accessed March 19, 2010).

¹⁹ <http://www.aquarius-records.com/tekst-kratak.php?preleaseID=431&pkoji=0&ptip=izdanje> (accessed March 19, 2010).

²⁰ <http://www.aquarius-records.com/tekst-kratak.php?preleaseID=1000&pkoji=0&ptip=izdanje> (March 19, 2010).

²¹ <http://www.aquarius-records.com/tekst-kratak.php?pID=841&pkoji=0&ptip=vijest> (accessed March 19, 2010).

²² <http://www.aquarius-records.com/tekst-kratak.php?pID=776&pkoji=0&ptip=vijest> (accessed March 19, 2010).

... we suggest the album as a *perfect warm-up for the spring/summer months* to come. [emphasis, M. P.]²³

... most of the bands that belong in this “wave” [island wave, N/A] *are not about being serious*, they’re *charming, flauntingness, casualness*, and that is probably what won the audience. (Sviličić in Rudar 2006; emphasis, M. P.)

The same logic that usually makes temporary and mostly summer guests to the island terrified of the possibility to permanently connect the island with the mainland (by building tunnels, bridges or by establishing air-line connections) because the island would lose its unavailability, limitedness, rotundity, distance and exclusiveness they long for, (cf. Ronström 2008:13; Baldacchino 2008:47), annuls i.e. deprives *otočki rock* of its multiplicity (a part of which is its non-island dimension) by insisting on “islandness” as “fun”, “frivolity”, “charm”, “lack of obligation” and “unpretentiousness”. Out of the multiplicity of its outlooks the one is preferred that is fun and overlaps with the “mainland” view of the “island”, the “winter” view into the “summer”, verified, of course, by the participation and island belongings (“autochthony”) of its makers. An important part of this “autochthony” are the lyrics which are, apart from several exceptions, usually in a dialect.

“*Mazgun’s positive outlook, different music styles, top performance, dance rhythms, picturesque lyrics and preserving the tradition through singing in island dialects as well as participating in island festivals...* still remain the characteristics of the band”,²⁴ can be found on *Aquarius Records’* web-site about *Velegradele*, the last studio album by the *Šo!Mazgoon* from 2003, while about the album *Mazgune ponovo jašu...* by the *Žan i Mazguni* from 2009 the *Menart* label’s web-site says “catchy dance songs in which various music styles are intertwined, along with great performance, picturesque lyrics and *preserving the tradition through singing in island dialects* still remain the characteristics of the band”.²⁵ Although this is obviously just an ineptly changed text used after a six year gap, the fact that the construction “preserving the tradition through singing in island dialects” remained unchanged seems indicative. Besides pointing to an obvious lack of inspiration, it partly testifies about the importance of the dialect as a recognizable element in constructing the *otočki rock* category. The local idiom – regardless of whether it has been identified as “island dialects” of the *Šo!Mazgoon*, as “Hvar dialect” of the *Gego & Picigin band* or as “Vis/ancient Vis dialect” of the *Kopito* – has doubtlessly provided the *otočki rock* with the auditory signal of the legitimated and unquestionable otherness that the marketing logic craves.

²³ http://www.menart.hr/index.php?news_id=4915 (accessed March 19, 2010).

²⁴ <http://www.aquarius-records.com/izdanje-opsirnije.php?pID=58&ptjedan=0> [emphasis M. P.] (accessed March 19, 2010).

²⁵ http://www.menart.hr/index.php?album_id=4196 [emphasis M. P.] (accessed March 19, 2010).

The genre and stylistic mixture of the music itself which various critics and promoters read from and into which they inscribe various elements and influences, could not guarantee that *otočki rock* will be completely unambiguously linked to the island and islandness, because “mixtures” have been known in other musics on the domestic scene. It could have, perhaps, been directed towards the island through the fact that some of the musics detected within *otočki rock* have the island prefix – like, for instance, calypso, or even more recognizable, reggae – but, since the melodies themselves rarely included references to Croatian islands’ traditional musics (maybe only slightly more often the quotes of the well known songs of the so-called *zabavna glazba* which carried the prefix “Dalmatian”), an unambiguous sign of “islandness” had to be found elsewhere. Besides the island descent of the authors themselves (for what the knowledge of their personal biographies is required) this role was flawlessly played by the dialect.

Song lyrics are not to be considered as “free-floating cultural signifiers with no relationship to the context of their production or consumption but they do require a serious and in-depth analysis to make claims on their social significance” (Kalra 2000:82). Besides the associative power counted on by the promotional discourses and their contents, it is possible to read other aspects from the lyrics. Songwriting in the local dialect could be interpreted as a reflection of the syncretic dynamic which critically takes elements of dominant discourses to creolize them, disarticulating given signs and re-articulating their symbolic meaning, which Kobena Mercer recognizes as the subversive force of hybridizing tendencies in numerous cultural forms, but the clearest on the level of the language itself where patois, for example, “decentre, destabilize and carnivalize the linguistic domination ... the nation-language of master -discourse – through strategic inflections, reaccentuations and other performative moves in semantic, syntactic and lexical codes” (Mercer, according to Hall 1999:8). Still, when it comes to *otočki rock*, it seems that it would be more appropriate to look for such a reading in its musical aspect, i.e. on the level of “referencing”, “appropriating” and “(re)interpretation” of the established styles and genres. The presence of the elements of other musics that music critics did detect in the opuses of authors of *otočki rock* is not giving away the mere compiling urge of collecting and sampling global musical patterns for their own local use, but a kind of a “legal download” into their own composing aesthetics, where it is not just a spice of otherness but a formative element of the artistic expression, which this way gains its disarticulation and a kind of a new re-articulation.²⁶

²⁶ Reggae in the music of Žan Jakopač could serve as a good example. Jakopač was for a number of years a member of the band the *Naturalna mistika*, which was, since it was founded at the end of the 1980s, the most visible representative of the Croatian reggae scene (cf. Perasović 2007). Reggae gradually “flew over” into the opuses of bands which did not play exclusively reggae music, and thus became one of the legitimate sounds of the domestic popular music scene. Choosing reggae as

In the mediation between the authors and the audience which takes place in the promotional texts, the dialect is primarily used as a hint of “islandness”, similarly as the “island” constructed through these texts is more a figment of imagination than a fact of geography.²⁷ However, if we set aside for a moment the self-appointed mediators, a possibility presents itself to read the mechanisms of divergence and convergence of *otočki rock*’s island authors and its non-island audience from the dialectality of the *otočki rock* lyrics. The place where such policies of (not) belonging are discerned from are the pages of the liner notes of the first *otočki rock* albums, where, besides the song lyrics, glossaries of “island” words – words potentially unrecognizable to the non-island eyes and ears – appear. Such glossaries irresistibly remind of the glossaries that appear in some collections of ethnomusicological transcriptions of traditional tunes, but also of the texts by experts or connoisseurs which have become an almost obligatory part of numerous world music albums,²⁸ which thereby reveal the assumption of the necessity of approximating what they represent to the potential – not sufficiently informed – consumer. The fact that such glossaries do not usually appear in other domestic releases – not even in the albums of *klapa* singing or other releases of regional (dialectal) prefix²⁹ – points to the immanent wish for “translation”. But, at the same time it could be read as pointing to the necessity of translation, to their otherness, foreignness, and possible unintelligibility – to their need for approximation, relocation. From the perspective of those for whom this translation, convergence, relocation is intended for, its existence itself could be interpreted as

a part of his music expression for Jakopač was not, I think, just a matter of subsequent “sampling” of attractive soundscapes, but a logical sequence of his musical preferences and composing aesthetics. The audience outside of the Caribbean (especially the “native” and “immigrant”), according to Steven Feld, usually perceived reggae as an opposition form and therefore often adopted it and reinterpreted in their own musical expressions (from Europe and (native) North America, through native Australia, Papua New Guinea to South Africa and Southeast Asia), while at the same time reggae in the framework of the discographic market was taking on genre connotations, in which the political engagement prefix was usually lost (Feld 1994:273). Although in an (over)interpretation, from the fact that he uses reggae as an idiom in his songs hints of subversion could be read, it is, as it seems to me, more of a “download” of the other – nonpolitical connotation of reggae. More on reggae in the Caribbean and Extra-Caribbean contexts in Lipsitz 1994; Bohlman 2002; Alvarez 2008 and Manuel 2006.

²⁷ Similarly, for the new generations of Indian inhabitants of Trinidad, Hindi – a language deprived of its usage function – is nowadays becoming increasingly only a spiritual and poetic medium of the hint of Indianness as India itself is more of a fictitious and mythical place than a real one (cf. Manuel 1997/98:20; Ramnarine 1996:20).

²⁸ Songs of the *Šol!Mazgoon*, the *Gego i Picigin Band* and the *Kopito* have from 2008 found their way into compilation albums intended to represent Croatian musicians on the world music market, on WOMEX, the biggest world music fair. These are compilations *WOMEX 08: 19 Good Seeds from Croatia* released by *Aquarius Records* and *Earthplugged: Croatian World Music – WOMEX 08* released by Croatian Musicians Union. The producer of both compilations was Siniša Bizović.

²⁹ The only example that I can think of are the releases of the so-called *ča-val*.

opening up and letting into the world of “islandness”, but also as a place where a word whose meaning they know even without using a dictionary serves as confirmation that they have made a tiny step out of their “non-islandness”.

“*Benarivoali, šur poveri ... Benarivoali noa Tretjitj, uvi stoun tir, ovu lakrimu oj kamika!* [Welcome, Mr. Commissary ... Welcome to Tretjitj, this *stoun tir*, this tear made of stone!]”, the inhabitants of the imaginary island of Trećić welcome the Government Commissioner exiled from the comfort of his (private and political) life in the capital to the island “on the edge of the world” with the mission of organizing local elections in *Osmi povjerenik* [The Eight Commissioner], a novel by Renato Baretić. Understanding from the tone of voice, and not from the (dialectal) words spoken, that this is a “courtesy welcome”, the commissioner answers: “*Hvala lijepa. Čini mi se da ćemo se mi odlično razumjeti.* [Thank you very much. It seems to me that we will understand each other well]” (Baretić 2003:29). A few months later the commissioner talks to his (semi)official Trećić interpreter:

- And, what, they live in the same house and don’t speak to each other?
- Not a single word. However, they exchange messages through poor Paulina.
- That’s *Anrikotova žena*?³⁰
- A smile smeared over Tonino’s face.
- Now what, why are you laughing? – asked the confused Commissioner of the Government of the Republic of Croatia.
- You’ve started speaking the Trećić dialect!!!
- What?!
- Sorry. You said *Anrikotova* instead of *Anrikova*. You’ve started speaking the Trećić dialect. That’s a good sign, this means that you are starting to accommodate, to take roots. (Baretić 2003:66-67)

The move from recognizing the Trećić welcome merely by the tone and context in which it was spoken to “*Anrikotova žena*”, as well as the move from the first meeting of a “non-islander” with *otočki rock* lyrics to the moment of “recognizing” their meaning – clearly point to the fluctuation of the edge of the “island”, i.e. to the possibility that, by means of the simultaneity of convergence and divergence the island and islandness be constantly (re)defined, deterritorialized and reterritorialized, deconstructed and reconstructed. The island in *otočki rock* is thus being constructed by both its “islandness” and its “non-islandness”.

³⁰ Here “*Anrikotova žena*” – meaning the wife of Anriko – represents a dialect form of what in the standard language would be “*Anrikova žena*”.

One of the important, though not the most visible characteristics of *otočki rock* is the deliberation of the experience of dislocation. This experience has for most musicians placed under this label been double – the experience of belonging to the island which implies a physical and a metaphorical separation, has additionally been split by the subsequent relocation, their leaving and returning. They no longer live on the island³¹ and although they still might have their island addresses in their ID cards, their experience of the island is no longer the experience of everyday living. They replaced their island, the one where they grew up (or spent a part of their childhood) by land, by a continental city – a sealess city, deep in the inland and fundamentally non-island. This city, as their current “stage” has had the power to perceive the “islandness” of their music, to recognize and/or construct *otočki rock* as being of “island”. This city, as the location of their current everyday lives, has on the other hand contributed to the possibility of considering and compressing the island into their authors’ poetics. It has in a way offered a possibility for confronting the island roots and the island routes, the kind of refuge for the craved distance from the island, a space of investing in connectivities, searching of a sufficiently removed perch from which to “observe one’s island and manage the pain” which comes with the separation as a forming characteristic of island life (cf. Baldacchino 2008:47). To them this city, however, is not an idealized place of unconditional possibilities – it is definitely placing them into the nostalgic longing for the island which without distancing themselves, without relocating from the island they probably would not experience, nor become aware of it. Like Paris for Simon Njami’s characters,³² Zagreb is to the authors of *otočki rock* simultaneously known and unknown; close and distant; a dual space of their exile and their homes; a place of escape from the island and a place of return to the island (cf. Lipsitz 1994:122-123). It is a city of their university education, their non-summer free time, their new families, their non-island friendships, their own non-islandness. It is the city unsung and unset to music where they live at least partially, thinking about the return made possible by their two-way tickets as well

³¹ The exception is Stipe Barišić Gego, who is the only one of the “island” musicians who still lives on an island, leaving only to record new albums in non-island studios and to perform in concerts in non-Hvar and non-island locations. When trying to summarize the essence of the chorus of his hit-song “Jamajka” he explains: “I don’t feel like going away [from the island], when there is no sea down the hill, I am crazy, you understand, the third day in the city I am useless ... that’s the essence of this slogan (*For je nami mila majka* [Hvar is like a mother to us])” [<http://www.gego.hr/index2.php?stranica=press&id=3> (accessed March 19, 2010)]. The other exception are the musicians who play in *otočki rock* bands but are not connected with the islands by descent and/or residence.

³² Simon Njami is a French writer and art critic, co-founder and editor-in-chief of *Revue Noire*, born in Switzerland, where his parents moved to from Cameroon. More on Njami and Paris in Walters 2005:86-110.

as thinking about the island – sung and set to music – which is both the starting point and the final destination of their journeys. From this experience of living in Zagreb and cherishing the return ticket diasporic dimensions of their belongings, their loyalties, their duality and their separation emerge.

From the Zagreb perspective, their island is in a way becoming much closer to the non-island imagination of an island. The island that has been sung and set to music in their songs becomes islanded and therefore close to our mainland visions. This kind of relocation which is poeticized in their lyrics at first sight is the one linked to the idealized vision of the island as a place intact, unburdened, flaunty, dislocated and removed from the bleak quotidianity of continental life. This summerness of the island in the lyrics has additionally been emphasized by mostly island, but also exclusively summer tours, and by the fact that their albums are almost regularly released just before the summer begins. The fact that *otočki rock* albums are released precisely then partly diminishes the seriousness of this music, and certainly – in accordance with the market laws of summer “literature” as well as by the ever new possibility of quick season earnings – erases the burdening traces of diasporicity read from it or inscribed into it by my interpretation.

Only rarely the authors of *otočki rock* testify their non-islandness explicitly, i.e. the non-islandness of their everyday life experience – their diasporic moment. On the *Kopito*’s last album *Teotar Akvarelo* this re/dis/translocation is pointed out by the song title bylines in the album’s liner notes, which carefully state the places where the songs were written – the Duboka bay, the island of Vis; Room 109, Student Dormitory Moša, Zagreb; the Srebrna bay, the island of Vis; Komiža, the island of Vis, the Brna bay, the island of Korčula; the Rukavac bay, the island of Vis. The student dormitory room therefore becomes a possible translation of the island bays into the continental student, non-summer time and space of the quotidianity of non-island life. In the promotional texts there are only marginal references to the student days which have displaced the authors of *otočki rock* from their islands to Zagreb, while in the context of club performances specific “moments of recognition and identification” testify to the non-islandness of *otočki rock*. Herby I am referring to specific moments and concert atmospheres, like the moment when during the January concert of the *Žan i Mazguni* in the Zagreb club *Purgeraj*, before performing the song *Zatočen* [Trapped] Žan addresses the audience and greets all the students among them. By apostrophizing precisely this segment of the audience he, of course, aims at those “students” for whom their own experience of displacement can guarantee a special kind of identifying with and participating in the lyrics “*jer sa zagrebačke gore nikad ne vidi se more...* [because from the Mount of Zagreb you can never see the sea...].” All of these hints, moments and traces of dislocation/displacement are held back by the promotional constructions of *otočki rock*, choosing to base their unquestionable otherness exclusively on their doubtless, stable and encircled “islandness”. The

non-island, diasporic dimensions of *otočki rock*, it seems, were never usable in promotional terms.

Although it is possible to look for the traces of the experience of displacement – the duality of islandness and non-islandness – and also to find them to various extents in the songs of all the *otočki rock* representatives (even in the songs seemingly unburdened by “great” topics), the interpretations i.e. the attempt of reading (but also inscribing) the diasporic dimension of the *otočki rock* that I am giving in this part of the text, are the most visible and the most audible in music of Žan Jakopač, who singing about the island ends up singing about Zagreb as well – most explicitly on the last album of *Šo!Mazgoon*.

“Islands are not only physical places; they can also be metaphorical spaces for connecting with cultural and social origins, especially for diasporic populations separated by time, place and situation from their origins”, write Chris Davies and Karl Neuenfeldt in their study on expatriate songwriters from the Australian Torres Strait Islands. “In some cases they may become ‘magical islands’ – that is, more imagined than real, more idealized than objectively examined. (...) Music is one means of artistic expression that can help construct such magical, metaphorical spaces” (Lawe Davies and Neuenfeldt 2004:137). Like Lawe Davies-Neuenfeldt’s songwriters, the *otočki rock* songwriters – separated from their place of origin by time, space and situation – through their songs and the process of song creation create and celebrate their connection with their island homes. Although they sing about the places they have abandoned, temporarily or permanently, their connection with the island, (re)constructed and objectified through songs contributes to their self-definition, their otherness, their difference, their recognizability. My or anyone else’s “continental” longing for the island in comparison with theirs somehow becomes less legitimate, more profane, more northerner and more tourist. It is not convincing from such form of longing to grieve that “*sa zagrebačke gore nikad ne vidi se more*” like in the *Šo!Mazgoon*’s song *Zatočen*, one of the rare songs with non-dialectal lyrics. The possibility of singing the islandness, of setting to music the distance, and even the entire appeal of longing immanent to the musical expression, falls under the severe exam of “authenticity”, at least in the conditions of fierce local competition.

Island outside the island

My last stop on the route of writing the interpretation of *otočki rock* in the context of questioning the music-space nexus is the musical and poetical complex that connects two experiences/conditions – the experience/condition of islandness and the experience/condition of being captive, as seen through two songs written by Jakopač. These two songs engird his third album *Velegradele* (2003) – in my

opinion the most important album when it comes to diasporic experiences of dislocation in *otočki rock*, which at the same time is (incidentally?) the last album of *Šol!Mazgoon* – the opening song *Otoče* [Oh, Island] and the closing song *Zatočen* [Trapped]. Although in musically these two songs consist of almost same melodic material, the difference of other musical elements is consciously and intentionally emphasized (the tonalities, tempos, timbres, rhythm, instrumentation).

Arivojen priko mora / slušon pismu od vapura / i u sebi nosin sliku / nad Omišon puce zora. // Bodulka je razapela 'idra / gazi sitno, gingolaje njidra. / Njoj mah-rama pleća krije, / a nožicu kamen topli, / kamen će je sunce popi, / pa se tobi. // Otoče, otoče, lipi moj otoče / Otoče, otoče, volin te otoče // Cutin da mi restu ruke / zagrlit ću se sa škojon / vonjo mirta, arija čista / pisma mistom rebumboje / a partenca sve je bliže / suza kliže. // Otoče, otoče, lipi moj otoče / Otoče, otoče, volin te otoče.

[I'm arriving by sea / I'm listening to the ferry's song / I'm carrying an image within / dawn is breaking over Omiš. // Islander has spread her sails / she treads slowly, her bosom swings. / A scarf covers her back / warm stone cover her foot / the stone that drank the sun / and is melting. // Island, island, my beautiful island / Island, island, I love you, island // I feel I'm growing arms / I will embrace the island / the perfume of myrtle, the pure air / song echoes through the town / farewell is getting closer / a tear falls. // Island, island, my beautiful island / Island, island, I love you, island.]

(the song *Otoče*, album *Velegradele*)

Kako lijepo je na jugu / tamo gdje sam rođen jednom / grljen mirisom i solju / posut zemljom uvijek žednom // teško mi je zaboravit tebe / i svu ljubav koju si mi dao / jer sa zagrebačke gore / nikad ne vidi se more / i još veća bude tuga / koju nosi vjetar s juga // Otoče, otoče, zlatom si optočen / Otoče, otoče, još sam tu. Zatočen.

[How nice it is in the South / where I was born / embraced by perfume and salt / sprinkled with ever thirsty soil // It is hard to forget you / and all the love you have given me / because from the Mount of Zagreb / you can never see the sea / the sorrow brought by the South wind grows // Island, island, you are covered with gold / Island, island, I'm am still here. Trapped.]

(the song *Zatočen*, album *Velegradele*)

While in the first song *islander has spread her sails and treads slowly* while her *bosom swings*, one can sense the *perfume of myrtle, the air is pure*, and a *song echoes through the town*, in the second song only the *sorrow grows* brought by the *South wind*. These could be the two extremes of what Jakopač sings about – the idealized images of islandness, island life, the people, scenes and everyday rituals on one hand and the experience of the (seemingly or really) forced relocation or, more poetically – captivity in non-islandness on the other. They could, if from the songs which on first glance could be put onto the first “heap” the songwriter’s position could not be read, and that is again the position of temporary or already permanent non-belonging – the position of non-islandness. Because even there

where *islander spreads her sails* and you can feel *the perfume of myrtle*, you must *arrive by sea*, and the next moment *farewell is getting closer*, and *a tear falls*. They are not just opposed extremes, the extreme ends of an overstrained spring of the binary understanding of his identity, poetics and composing aesthetics, but the interweaving elements of the rhizome of his identity.

If we start looking for the components considered necessary when it comes to the diaspora, the diasporicity of *otočki rock* could easily become problematic.³³ I am more inclined, however, to choose Clifford's claim that a polythetic field would seem most conducive to tracking (rather than policing) the contemporary range of diasporic forms (Clifford 1997:250), whereby *otočki rock*, due to everything above, could find its place, or at least earn the prefix of the diasporic.

Thanks to the islands *otočki rock* has gained its unquestionable otherness, difference, recognizability in the framework of the domestic popular music scene/production. Thanks to *otočki rock* the islands have, at least temporarily, emerged above the tourist brochures' one-dimensional presentation of a country with a thousand islands. This reciprocity would perhaps function perfectly if not for the song *Zatočen* – to single out only the most visible (i.e. most audible) example. With this song Jakopač raised the question of the diasporic aspect of what is called *otočki rock*, the question of hybridity and multilocation of this musical (and extramusical) phenomenon, the question of the non-islandness of *otočki rock*. I can read out at least two challenges from this song – a challenge to fixed categories, the narratives of separate, homogenous, autonomous (sub)cultures, but also the challenge for those searching for the “cultural expressions as complex as the lives they live every day” (Lipsitz 1994:122-123). This song, finally, is the first one (and for now the only one) clearly speaks (talks) about the entwinement and non-exclusiveness of islandness and non-islandness, location and relocation, roots and routes – and all that (which should not be ignored) not in a dialect, and therefore seemingly without the need for translation. It is an indication of a kind that music, besides to the question “where are you from?”, can offer and answer to the more appropriate question “where are you between?” (cf. Clifford 1992:109). By speaking about the duality of islandness and non-islandness, about more than just the difference in the price of a one-way and a return ticket, about the poetics of the margin and the politics of belonging, it points to the possibility that it is justified and founded to claim that no island is (just) an island.

³³ James Clifford concludes that “whatever the working list of diasporic features, no society can be expected to qualify on all counts, throughout its history. And the discourse of diaspora will necessarily be modified as it is translated and adopted” (Clifford 1997:250).

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