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IN SEARCH OF POST-SOCIALIST SUBJECT

The work discusses narrative models of interpretation of the crisis aspects of transitional societies, with emphasis on differences and similarities between the insider and outsider insights. The analysis deals with the following questions: why are both groups dominated by pessimism (although of a different kind); what is behind the research empathy or scepticism towards the human protagonists of transitional project; why the exegesis of Croatian transition inclines towards the overstatement of *socialist mentality*, surviving the moment of transition and spoiling its "normal" progression; and finally, what symbolic strategies and everyday practices mark individuals' efforts to cope both with social changes and lofty developmental narrations?

Key words: post-socialist subject, internal orientalism, practices of normalization

All this is ephemeral. Those people will get off. Healthy passengers will come. And the train will certainly leave for Kozmopolis.

M. Krleža, *Croatian Rhapsody*, 1921

Being incomplete and hesitant, the social-cultural analysis of Croatian post-socialism particularly lacks an insight into the people's *state of consciousness*, the utterances which will show their clear political convictions – not pertaining to *democracy, globalisation, civil society, free market, entrepreneurship, European Union* or *NATO*, but to what is the post-communist transition "actually about" – the very shift to capitalism, with all the consequences of the supposed cognitive-ideological break with the previous system, historically and symbolically "authorised" to present its radical difference. The political-scientific disinterest in such a core matter of transitional transformation is surely a result of the surprisingly hushed and efficient public character of the post-1989 happenings. As suggested by Outhwaite and Ray, behind "the rapid adoption of fairly 'standard' political and other social forms throughout the former bloc was no doubt the

widespread sense that the whole telos of postcommunist transition was indeed to return to 'Europe' and 'normality'" (2005:3).

One of the results of such conditions is the perception of *incontestable nature* of the world "social-evolutionary" project¹ – the presumption dominating the majority of transitional narrations – no matter how contestable realities it may "temporarily" leave behind. As analysts, we are allowed to be occasionally stunned by its outcomes, but in order to interpret what now appears to be a *local problem* we need to employ the lower levels of explanations. To situate the "subject of transitional hardships", representing different societies undergoing transformation, thus emerges as the basic occupation of the anthropology of post-socialism, differently articulated, as usual, in the outsider and insider insights.

Again, both sides seemed to be "taken by surprise" by the transitional moment (cf. Outhwaite & Ray op. cit.), not because of its likely "spectacular" elements, but, as said, just on the contrary. The unpredictably smooth *fall of communism* produced a grave "missing link" in detecting signals of what was expected to be a grand historical disclosure – like we have somehow overlooked "the very beginnings" of its observable announcement.²

When it comes to outsiders, their viewpoint that descended from the clearly set expectations to the field certainty of post-socialist societies has resulted in a considerable re-examination of principal hypotheses (cf. Burawoy & Verdery 1999). The examples of dispersed locations of "socialist legacies" largely modifying, re-inventing or refraining the core scenario of social changes have finally brought into the question the model itself – the transformation set as the application of "already proven" forms of the required social status.

We challenge those analyses that account for the confusions and shortcomings of the transition process as 'socialist legacies' or 'culture'. Repeatedly, we find that what may appear as 'restorations' of patterns familiar from socialism are something quite different: direct *responses* to the new market initiatives, produced *by* them, rather than remnants of an older mentality. In other words, we find that what looks familiar has causes that are fairly novel (Burawoy & Verdery 1999:1-2).

Along those lines, an attempt has also been made to approach the problem of pessimism, which floods the texts of post-socialist studies of the Western

¹ As Dahrendorf indicates, there is a total lack of contemporary intellectual and political debates on the general conception of the social order (1996).

² The so-called momentalism of transition is a concept which tries to provide the narration with an accurate historical date of beginning and the place of "spreading" (see more on this further on).

academia (Kurti 2002),³ including the frozen elements of post-socialist *state of art*, stuck in an indefinitely extendable process of its "growing up".

"How many roads must the post-socialist countries go down, before you call them non-post-communist?" Captured into discourse of "escaping socialism", "joining Europe", "building democracy", and "establishing free markets", people both in the West and in the former Soviet bloc, perceive the region, stretching roughly in the triangle among the Baltic, Black and Adriatic sea, as the "land of transition". It is still a kind of mysterious Bermuda Triangle for many in the West" (Buchowski 2001:9).

And the mystery, as learned, consists basically of the truth about their "not enough mysterious" move to all of the noticeable hall-marks of the social-cultural-economic-political "normality".

After the initial and enthusiastic approach to transitional societies, in the manner of "discovery of the new world",⁴ the *pessimism* of Western researchers has turned out to be an obstacle, suspected to be related precisely to the position of external observing and reporting. Would, then, a stronger dialogue with local anthropologists bring some other quality into the insights which absorb and convey the feeling of disappointment and forlornness from the post-socialist field? Do the foreigners, due precisely to the strong empathy to the locals, miss a certain in-depth dimension, a "secret" cultural code which transforms a negative social experience into acceptable, normalized levels of local knowledge? Not that insiders should now at any cost clear the sky above this huge and agitated field of Western anthropology through "guided optimism" and ironic "financed difference" (Pleșu 2002).⁵ But, there is

³ "I am left wondering why western anthropologists always focus on the mistakes, mishaps, and the failed projects rather than highlighting the successes, the positive results and the major achievements. (...) Constantly bemoaning the failures provides only a one-sided point of view of any issue" (Kurti 2002:181).

⁴ I wrote in more detail about the beginnings of the Western anthropologic research of the Eastern-European societies within the metaphoric framework of "heart of darkness" in Prica 2004.

⁵ "These are researchers who were forced to work on prescribed topics for decades and whom one clearly cannot expect to immediately see that, to gain access to money, scientific interest must be repackaged in orientation toward a new repertoire of topics. Topics, although not commissioned and prescribed, that are still imposed by economic, social, and sometimes even ideological constraints. These are researchers who had to submit to specific methods, languages, and strategies that were decided outside their individual choice. The concrete language (of 'political correctness') may be less absurd than the wooden language (of political conformity), but that does not make it any less standardized and, fundamentally, any more agreeable. And finally, these are researchers who, even during their training, were forced to accept a strict 'canon' of bans and permissions. What they expected from the 'normalization' after 1989 was the freedom of a canon devoid of political sensitivities, and not the limitations of a new canon with new bans and new permissions. These researchers are shaped by the long-lasting pressure of politicization, driven and tormented by arbitrary censors whose sole

certainly room for complementary insights, inscriptions from the position of *cultural intimacy* which is, actually, deprived of the *excess* of social empathy, i.e. the level of initial identification which seems to be necessary for the approval of outsider position. Less paradoxical than it may seem, the position of local anthropologist is stripped of pathos and concern precisely through the long-lasting *crisis training*, and what appears to be his/her true problem is how to occasionally consolidate professional and common life experiences into convincing act of *participant observation*. Thus, the insider is a more "natural" and more authorized representative of cultural competence when different "genres" of life impossibilities, deprivation and cultural unease are in question.⁶ Let's put aside for now completely opposite opinions about the relation between the scientific competence and individual immersion or involvement in the research context, especially when the *Balkan* matters are at issue (cf. e.g., Goldsworthy 1998, Prica 1995, and, also, with regard to "*internal Balkan*" disputes about competence and bias, Prica 2005).

However, if we have distanced ourselves from the propagandistic role of "cheerful domestic insights" into the post-socialist cultures, now it's time to do the same with the mystification of insider's *heroic ethos*. What we have tried to set apart as the *inscription into the crisis code of local culture* implies neither the fact of insider's personal suffering nor the cognitively privileged position unattainable by a "pampered" outsider. It is just a strategically situated and temporarily occupied methodological position that should direct us out of the traps of emotional- political contests between the two, after all, primarily scientific positions. The difference between internal and external knowledge is probably not in the ultimate research outcomes, but in the possibility of making different hypotheses.

And the hypothesis here is that pessimism is not the *grand narrative* of the post-socialist character, but "raw material" of the everyday, mundane cultural processing. The mechanism of cognitive processing of the sedimented social experience which can generally be characterized as "negative" into cultural utterances which can generally be characterized as "positive" – we will call a process of *normalization*. Referring to Yurchak's analyses of defensive-inventive strategies for establishing the subject of the late Soviet

competence consisted in dividing libraries between the permitted books on the one side and the 'dangerous' books on the other side. To approach these minds with new lists of taboos, with fashionable recommendations and regulations, is an approach not devoid of a certain 'mental cruelty'" (Pleșu 2002:12).

⁶ "The field of dictatorship, authoritarian regimes, and transition economies would be studied primarily in the eastern universities, where libraries and 'laboratories', theory and 'fieldwork', so to speak, lie in close proximity. I think it is much more normal to study the physiology of communism and the sociology of poverty in Bucharest, Belgrade, or Bratislava than in Munich or Montreal" (Pleșu 2002:20).

socialism (2003), but also to de Certeau's "theories of art of acting" which he ascribes to general strategies for inventing the everyday (2003), we will try to challenge the scientific narration of post-socialism with its defeating plot, which paradoxically starts with "the end of something" (Watanabe 2002).⁷

As a minimum, we can ask ourselves whether there is any narration of transition apart from the diachronic one, with an imposed abyss between the (historical-political) *ends* and *beginnings*, which would necessarily "halve" the continuity of the individual, but also collective self-perception? Can it be that *pessimism* (which is surely connected with such a "cosmological" instruction on the "new world beginning with the end of the old one) is more obstinate in the academic sense than in the common sense, like it certainly is in the tautological lamentation over the *situation preceding* the transition, persistent in interpretations of transitional detours in the Croatian social science. Finally, isn't it curative to explore the hidden outline of sociological and cultural analyses ending with the shout that the "old-world-refuses-to-die", emphasising the bad predisposition for contemporary changes, from which follows that transition is *such as it is* as a result of "incurableness of the past"?

⁷ Above all, due to the historical complexity of Croatia's transition, what this is about are multiple "ends". The views of the period of socialism, which was in Croatia brought down in the same package with the state community of Yugoslavia in the early 1990's were under strong influence of the positive effect of acquiring a national state (in spite of the war and its consequences). Today, on the other hand, (despite accusations of "Yugo-nostalgia" by which any criticism of the Croatian politics was until recently invalidated as the criticism of the *state itself*, i.e. a national treason), a feeling that "*things, nevertheless, used to be better then*" increasingly prevails primarily as a result of negative economic trends and an increasing social gap. The comparison in terms of labour, social protection and security is devastating for today's situation which is perceived by the majority in terms of fraud, financial scandals and 'handover' of the state to multinational capital. The poll conducted by the *Večernji list* daily (15 January 2007, 'The State and Tuđman Increasingly Appreciated'), in accordance with the 15th anniversary of independence, shows an increasing satisfaction with the general parameters and symbols of independent state, but:

"The standard of living is the main problem, this poll has again demonstrated, and especially too great social differences that have unjustifiably developed over the past 15 years. Most citizens agree that they live better than before, but still 40% of them emphasize that the standard was better before. Objectively it is hard to agree with this because 15 years ago an average salary amounted to what would today be approximately 100 Euro; however, something has obviously influenced the perception of citizens who, in fact, idealize the time of community and struggle for independence. Analysts warn that citizens are more troubled by inequality, especially inequality that resulted from the travesty of privatization and corruption, than by poverty more or less evenly and fairly distributed among all citizens."

Domestic scientists: "Under the spell" of transition

Interestingly, until 1990, the humanities here used to be flooded with Marxism. Everyone used to analyze capitalism, and now when their favourite subject is in their own backyard, the period of universal silence has begun.

(Duda 2003)

Writing in the 80's about the ways in which social science positions itself in the crisis societies, Aant Elzinga sets a scale on which:

One part responds by raising the question of science in society, and does so with increasing political awareness. (...) Another part of the intelligentsia tends to give uncritical support to the ruling economic class to whose fortunes science is tied. If it does not propagate a philosophy of developmental optimism serving technocracy, it may well be that it lends its voice to certain notions of "limits of growth" which would serve to legitimate dismantling of industries and increasing unemployment (Elzinga 1980).

In suggested, although "outdated" terms, it could be concluded that today's social science in Croatia show characteristics of the latter two tendencies, and almost completely avoid posing fundamental "questions of science in society". In the same manner, and in line with the trends of professional politization – making a "political debate" crucial in all economic and other questions of social affairs – "developmental optimism" is almost fully left to the vocabulary of political parties.⁸ Accordingly, economists' warnings that have been published from the mid-1990's, guided by specific deviations of Croatia's transition, have been mainly treated as excessive "panicking". The later insights differ from those of social scientist's with regard to two basic questions: in identifying general historical (not local idiosyncratic) causes of the crisis of post-socialist economies, and (probably the main reason why they have been ignored), in emphasizing Croatia's actually good predispositions for transformation processes (no matter its post-war conditions), which makes it clear that there was a choice here and not just *historical necessity*. With regard to the issue of decisive role of "socialist mentality", economical analyses differ most from the conclusions reached by the majority of Croatian sociologists which mainly take over the interpretation of negative trends,

⁸ In view of the fact that over the past dozen years after the war the tendency has been noticed of the alignment of political programs of the two basic political blocs which alternate in power under the principle of "pendulum", this *programme optimism* is inscribed into almost uniform, but phrase-ridden and empty political discourse, which is "interesting" just because the citizens, according to most public opinion polls, do not trust it. "The only strategic document of general character dates back to 1991, but none of the sectors of today's politics no longer relies on it" (Katunarić 1998:228).

drawing attention to the "limits of growth" of social development as a direct consequence of poor accumulation of the *sociocultural capital* and the "level of civility".⁹

The Croatian ethnology and cultural anthropology, when more strongly motivated by social and cultural changes from the early 1990's, generally speaking, sets two forms of macro-theoretical frameworks for micro-ethnographic insights. One insists on the concept of "globalization" and especially on the examination of changes in traditional and everyday culture, whereas the other, with the key concept of "post-socialism", is more oriented towards reviewing the position of insider insights within the international production and redistribution of knowledge (and towards the ways in which the observation of transitional affairs includes the elements of post-colonial discourse). To one of them, anecdotally said, bibliography most often begins with A (Appadurai), and to the other, with B (Bhabha).¹⁰

But what is noticeable in both concepts is a diminishing importance of "everyday jargon" as a control mechanism of the scientific making of conclusions. Since it was not subject to the methodological regime of statistic creation of a *representative individual*, ethnology until recently justified its speech *in the name of the people* by giving voice to marginalized and "silent" groups and individuals. In the process, as of the second half of the past century, the (political) voicelessness of the *socialist people* was understood as an implicit fact of the deceptive democratic quality of the (single-party) system; so the authority over this social majority subject was divided by a tacit agreement within different competencies of scientific and other representative discourses. Avoiding the explicitness of both questions and answers, the engaged quality of ethnologic discourse was formed to a certain degree in an "Aesopian" manner, implying that every speech about ideologically less opportune or "banal" issues (in fact, the entire inventory of conventional ethnological interest in then "socialist" fate of national tradition) is *a priori* political, even when it is completely unrecognizable in legitimate political terms. But, what happens when, like today, a subject of ethnologic representation faces a full choice of free political speaking? After the fall of ideology with which it coexisted in a superficial terminological clash, but with tailwind for its *carnival discourse*, will democracy now paradoxically abolish the public advocacy of ethnology, driving it again into theoretical "irrationality" and thematic obscurantism?

The problems of humanities in the pertinent elaboration of the transitional status concern their traditional (self)-perception as a discourse

⁹ "... micro-foundations of the everyday culture of trust, cooperation, social engagement and solidarity" (Štulhofer 2000:118).

¹⁰ At this time I cannot discuss in more detail analytical hypotheses and achievements of individual works.

separated from the main stream of the key social and political debates. Additionally, and not without a reason, what is noticeable from the late 1980's is an accumulation of critical theory inspired by the American post-modern anthropology, just as the so-called trend of feminization which made it "hypochondriac" (as Geertz would say) on the level of all basic ethno-anthropologic activities, *from the fieldwork to footnotes* (cf. Prica 2006). The inclusion of the elevated elements of anthropologic theory which are considered exotic in a "rational discourse" also label it as an "uncertain collocutor" in debates on the contemporary problems of Croatia.

Also crucial could be a notion of the non-adaptability of Croatia's transitional reality within the realm of any systematic scientific research. The clue that we do not witness some describable reality at all, but the simultaneity of parallel times in the paradigm of "sociocultural laboratory", strengthens the necessity of trans-disciplinary discourse coping with the vague subject, "constantly someplace in between the academic strictness and the unexpectedness of everyday life".

Hardly anywhere, if anywhere at all, there is a social situation like ours, marked by the tradition of non-bloc socialism on which have subsequently settled regressive modernism, war and nationalism, while we find ourselves in a neo-capitalist environment. What I see as a problem is the fact that this entire cultural and social puzzle, composed of the elements of ex-Yugoslav socialist tradition, nationalist retrograde intervention and neo-capitalist tendencies, has remained outside of any systematic interest of the domestic humanities (Duda 2003).

And where the systematic interest of humanities would certainly help is where the social science's analyses, linking scientific rationality to "developmental pessimism", have failed. The denial of "rational capacity" of the holders of survived *socialist mentality* in such objections ultimately boils down to a rather "irrational" explanation of the current crisis – people being unable to *anticipate* the welfariness of transitional project and to behave "already in accordance with it". In this respect, the duty of ethnography lies in recognizing everyday active practices which defy this overturned scenario precisely by the same *irrational* means: the methods of "instantaneous achievement of the future state".

Explicitly, the public perception of an average Croatian citizen about "cultural arena" of which (s)he is both a witness and an actor, is ruled by a strong system of signifiers, let's call it the *glamorous world of spectacle*, suggesting a radically different embodiment of what they perceived as their present time. It is, of course, not only a screen of passive "staring", but an imaginative reservoir for developing active tactics of everyday culture. With a "glamour of the poor", our case differs in no special way from the entirety of post-socialist world. However, a strict separation of "core" and "light" aspects of its reality, makes a strong mark of its scientific, intellectual, and political

culture. Not only are intra-disciplinary divisions made – according to an intuitive deduction of "serious and less serious" character of phenomena – to strictly rational (disciplinary, objective, quantitative) and less rational (descriptive, poetic, metaphoric, trans-disciplinary) approaches, but here is also the basic source of general division to *conscious* and *unconscious*, *rational* and *irrational*, *capable* and *incapable*, new and old people of contemporary times.

The differentiation has seeped deep into the perception of domestic intellectual community, primarily as a call to filter one's own professional class from different forms of "losers", to see the "old guys wither away", as well as "converts", scientists with "fake diplomas" and other forms of political-intellectual hybrids brought on the soil of former ideology.

According to the best-known Croatian sociologist Josip Županov, the problem lies in the contemporary continuation of the trend indicated by a grotesque relation towards science in socialism. While the socialist state economy generally leans towards the non-professionalism and anti-intellectualism (where "directors, who have hardly managed to complete primary school education, drive experts away"), supporting in the early period of self-management a "kind of Feierabendian anarchism" (Županov 1998:112), the period after the collapse of socialism, according to him, is not marked by changes in substantial trends. "There is, to be fair, great intellectualization of politics and administration, but that does not imply any breakthrough of scientific approach. In order to survive in the new roles, people with diplomas and high-sounding titles have to accept completely different codes of conduct" (ibid.:113).

Thus, the aspiration to move away from the own unadorned tradition becomes one of the necessary conditions for the intellectual self-fashioning, forming a more acceptable model of "contemporary European expert", distanced from the fate of place which marks him "by default".

However, as regards the relation towards the controversial and convertible "Balkan intellectual", insiders could have learned a lot from their outsider predecessors. Over the past decades, it was not rare that commentaries of different international experts, as well as anthropologic works on the topics from the *region*, assumed a form of acute fear from "infection" with the (apparently rather contagious) *Balkan discourse*, and some of them did not shrink from the most obscure racist conclusions.¹¹

¹¹ Controversial Dr. Vaknin, a regular columnist of the electronic magazine Central East European Review, expert in the psychopathology of narcissism and until recently an economic adviser of the Macedonian Government, for example, speaks in an almost unbelievably incorrect manner about his impression of "Balkan intellectual". "The intellectuals of the Balkans – a curse, not in disguise, a nefarious presence, ominous, erratic and corrupt... They fail to disseminate the little, outdated knowledge that they do possess. (...) In a vanity typical of the insecure, they dismiss all foreign knowledge. They rarely

However, even the most serious and well-reasoned works proposed theses about South-Eastern Europe as one of "complicated places" (cf. Geertz 2004) to practice anthropology. Thus, the idea of the historical "cursedness" of the territory, frequently held by its inhabitants, also spreads to the fate of Western regional analyses, where it assumes, especially from the moment of transition, a form of "discursive hysteria" in which the safe boundaries of objective languages and social ethics are often crossed.¹²

However, to lament about the depth and range of malign Orientalistic discourse which has arched over the case of one of the worst forms of transition worldwide does not seem any longer a good way, if it has ever been, to practice (and especially to present) the domestic view of the reality of ex-Yugoslav post-socialisms. Numerous circumstances in the history of this cultural space have prompted regional social scientists over the past fifteen years or so to re-think their elite conceptions that were *a priori* antagonistic towards *cultural stereotypes*, and to try to find out what are their actual predispositions. So, can we talk about any "measure of truth" in the metaphor of *Balkan intellectual*? Does the scientific ambivalence towards the transitional subject serve mainly to camouflage the problem of leftist intellectual heritage "suddenly" transferred into the post-communist environment?

One of the exceptionally sensitive authors with regard to the problem of "journey of anthropologic theory to the East", Michael Burawoy, warns of the following:

know a second language proficiently enough to read it. (...) Unable to educate and teach, they prostitute their services, selling degrees or corrupting themselves in politics. They constitute a large part of the post-Communist nomenclature just as they constituted a large part of the Communist one. (...) Terrified by the sights and sounds of their threatened territory, they succumbed to obscurantism and resorted to nostalgia, the abstract and the fantastic, rather than to the pragmatic. This choice became evident even in their speech. Marred by centuries of cruel outside domination, it is all but meaningless. No one can understand what a Balkanist has to say. Both syntax and grammar are tortured into incomprehensibility. (...) Nature here is cleverer than humans. (...) There is no real fire in Balkan intellectuals, despite the fact they get excited, shout, blush and wave their hands ever so vigorously. They are empty. (...) They get nowhere, because they are going nowhere." All columns of this "most controversial, but also most popular author" carry the editorial board's disclaimer ("DISCLAIMER: The views presented in this article represent only the personal opinions and judgements of the author"); thus, one cannot (?) talk about the opinion accepted by the editorial board.

¹² "The fact that discussions about the Balkans continue to be heated and still provoke insults of a kind that one rarely finds in reports about the recent conflicts in Rwanda or Zair, is just as much a result of the Balkans being geographically nearer, as of the fact that this region is 'European'?" (Goldsworthy 1998:258). Goldsworthy speaks of the "fear of perfidious" as the fear of "voluntary polluting the Western Europe by the Balkans, because the weaker can corrupt the stronger just with mutual consent" (ibid.:90).

The theoretization of post-socialism is still based on socialism as a negation or comparison – mainly as a celebration of the capitalist predominance or, much less often, a source of criticism of capitalism. As socialism withdraws into the past, we face the danger of becoming increasingly confined within this single model – an ideal projection of liberal capitalism – in relation to which we make comparisons. (...) It may be imagined that intellectuals of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, reacting to their own marginalization within the national limits, will once again divide themselves into two camps – the Westerners and nativists. Disappointed with promises of the western liberal theory, the new generations of dissidents would, thus, abandon optimism and teleology of the so-called transitivity and turn towards a considerably more kindred post-colonial theory. (...) What inherent theoretization will emerge in order to oust and transform the western imports, (...), what will be contours of the post-socialist theory in the 21st century and in what way will that theory flow back to the West? (Burawoy 1999: 310).

The most dramatic form of insisting on theoretical differences claims that the true understanding can never be achieved along these lines,¹³ whereas the completely non-dramatic, pragmatic solutions simply require that both sides accept the agreed-upon languages of professional communities. To write from such *complicated place* is not, therefore, an inevitable identification with the idiosyncratic intellectual subject who moves from Vaknin's diagnosis of idiotism to trans-historical character of *barbaric genius*. But the insider who tries with all his might to write "as an outsider", is a position unconvincingly fleeing from the implications which seem to be so convincing when set in conclusions of regionally oriented analyses. A refusal to be embedded in the

¹³ "Not only are Americans and other Westerners ill prepared to understand Russian experience and Russian wisdom, we are – with few exceptions – bound to misunderstand. The cultural and experiential differences that distinguish us are too great. Yet Westerners must not give up on their own attempts to understand Russian experience. Also, they must not assert that – under their own power and without much Russian help – they can understand Russian culture, experience and struggle. (...) My assumption may be incorrect, but I doubt that it will prove to be so. The CIA was unable to predict the end of the Soviet Union. American businesses were unable to understand post-Soviet Russia as a marketplace. Well intentioned Westerners were unable to see that Western laws and business codes would not neatly be transferred into a Russian environment. They attempted to transplant legal and business codes that they believed would improve Russia's situation, but, as Marshall I. Goldman saw it in 2003, "... an unusually large number of such efforts have so far proven to be futile or even counterproductive." Goldman likens transplanted laws and business codes to liver transplants that are rejected. They are alien entities and they are likely to remain alien. We would be foolish to assume that those episodes were only anomalies. Based on such indicators of Western confusion over the systems at work in post-Soviet Russia, we should believe that, without the aid of an on-going dialog with Russians, we are likely to misunderstand a variety of Russian experiences to include their attempts to establish freedom of expression as an essential element of democracy" (Daily 2004).

cultural code whose in-depth experiential knowledge, after all, gives us the right to speak (differently) is a dislikeable luxurious position which, above all, serves to provoke "likeableness" of regionally oriented presentations on the international scene. To take a critical position towards one's own, occasionally quite frightening reality, and at the same time presume that we are not deeply affected by it, that it does not "grinds" us according to the same patterns and models which we triumphantly identify, is, in fact, a lack of significance.¹⁴

Unreal socialism

It is really amazing how socialism survived for half a century despite a large number of committed anti-totalitarian intellectuals who "opposed" it. An uninformed hypothetical observer might think that the vanished ideologies of communist parties had an extraordinarily difficult task in facing a multitude of fervent defenders of national tradition, liberalism, Christian democracy and other factions that aspired to unmask the inhuman character of totalitarianism.

(Kuljić 2001:368)

As Katherine Verdery notes, the Western anthropological narrations are largely marked by a tendency to introduce the narration of transitional process *ex nihilo*; they imply, in the "big bang" emplotment, that "history is only now beginning and that prior to 1989 the area was without form and void" (Verdery 1996:205). However, it's interesting that in the discourse of the Croatian social science the introduction to the transitional scenario has an even stronger character of epiphany (*sudden revelation*), or emergence (*the appearance out of nothing*). The "sudden event" of transition occurs with the unexpectedness of a natural phenomenon; it's a cut by which the old system disappears *overnight*, and people "on the eve of transition" (cf. Prpić 1993), half-asleep and unprepared wake up in a new world.

Old Communist regimes, marked by authoritarian political systems, "overnight" found themselves faced with new social, political, economic and cultural requirements (Karajić 2000:201).

So it also happened in the early nineties when an entire social system – socialism – overnight disappeared from the European political scenes (Čengić & Rogić 1999:5).

¹⁴ A strategy of anthropological struggle of a western subject who has found himself on the domestic ground of the "Balkan demon of difference" was in unforgettably witty way described by the Dutch anthropologist Mattijs van de Port (1999).

In addition to the widespread physical metaphors about "collapse" and "downfall" of the preceding state, a direct mention of symbolism of natural force, earthquake, wave, wind, introduces the ambivalence of event – its character is like a "catastrophe with generally positive outcomes".

The socialist 'project' has, as it is well-known, definitively collapsed in all of its (Eastern)European variants (...), leaving behind a huge relief, but also ruins, debris and desolation in people's heads and hearts (Zeman 1998:13).

Everyone throughout Eastern Europe acted with arrogance, and then the wind arose (it does not matter who, how and why created it) and swept away all, until then untouchable, big and small leaders (Kalinić 2005).

The emphases on patterns and causes have, thus, been left hanging in the air. Was it a self-implosion of giant edifice, or was the "colossus" swayed by some external, also mysterious force? The consensus on this matter has obviously not been definitively reached and it causes strong fictional excursions of the *objective* scientific languages. Even when the stricter economic terms are used, such as *bankruptcy of socialism*, and when it is explicitly stated that it did not happen "due to the force of its internal or external enemies, but primarily due to reasons immanent to its nature" (Zeman 1998:13), we are again called to seek assistance in extra-historical, even extra-human imagination.

We could claim that the 'black hole', opened by the terminal weariness of socialist economy, which in the end proved not to be immanently-structurally equal to the requests it faced, also undermined all political, ideological, cultural, world view and other social configurations, and, thus, led to a spontaneous self-implosion of the system (Zeman 1998:13-14).

A part of mythic character of these "beginnings" may be mainly attributed to the retrospective nature of sociological analyses of transition, which, in Croatia, preoccupied with the problems of war and newly-established state, mainly appear only at the end of the 1990's, almost an entire decade after the *sudden event*. The fact that transition could not have been speculated about much in advance, could have been decisive for a stronger influence of narrations characteristic for the Western transitology. But the belatedness has also additionally "muddied up" the local interpretations in view of the already visible, and very ambivalent, social and economic consequences. On the whole, anthropological exegesis, with a *human subject* put in the centre of cosmological emplotment, start to dominate once the discussion about the problems is opened. Hesitancy about *for whom* transition is then such a "great" and purposeful process has most likely resulted in changeover from the natural science metaphors to the narrations with a common protagonist. Mundane practice rather than theoretic anticipations has proved to be crucial

here, but a rhetoric model of interpretation gradually prevailed: like the *overnight* nature of transitional event served nothing else but to lecture that "nothing can be achieved overnight". Anyway, the failure, difficulties and deviations are a subsequent impetus of the "enormous theoretization" of transition. "As long as a practice functions, it does not require reflection" (Savić 2001:18), which, perhaps, makes the "optimistic" anthropology of transition so deeply impossible.

According to the same instructive author, the beginning of reflection "may also be the moment of its separation from reality" (ibid.:18), those events which cannot be named in the given interpretative matrix are left out. However, these non-included, latent processes can prove to be decisive for the outcome of the event. What is, then, the unnamed *factual level* for which we have reason to suspect that it "disappeared" in the analyses of post-socialist failures?

When talking about insider insights, it is not advisable to overlook the fact that the contemporary social commentary is here most often established in a realm of author's intellectual conversion: a shift, withdrawal or "somersault" in relation to one's own *old consciousness*, but also flight from an ideologically conformist background which, according to the above mentioned opinions, implied functional and falsified academic interpretation of socialist reality. No matter how hard we try to indicate the *concealed dissident* nature of our participation in former environment, the corpus of knowledge and information which bred us, must be dissimilar from the competence which authorizes us to interpret the *free-world* contemporaneity. The gap is, in that way, unbridgeable in rational terms – it causes the telling of a completely new story out of "end of something", the story which is thwarted by a narrative practice where, as Yurchak would say, *everything was forever, until it was no more* (Yurchak 2003).

In that vacuum re-emerges the *socialist* model of "self-criticism" in the characteristic "partial" form of self-exemption. The reflection about social crisis is formed as the "gossiping" about proverbially voiceless, average people, as the "merciless criticism" of their inherited socialist mentality which completely reversed the *normal* development of transitional processes. Before any clear difference of economic, political, "mental" nature of deposed and newly-established paradigms, thus precedes an anthropological division of human sources, according to their ability to change (convert or just imitate). A procedure of "otherization", highly abandoned in outsider post-socialist studies and replaced by the emphatic, "ethnography-with-tears" approach, is thus paradoxically reproduced as "internal Orientalism" (cf. Buchowsky 2006). While the Western science starts to sympathise with the post-socialist common subject resisting the new-established "transitocracy" of their societies, the domestic science is embittered because it can not be anything else but the anachronistic act of "socialist mentality". Their story about the

beginning of new age, the eve of transition with which they have been born again, thus lacks the main protagonist – the "people of transition" resisting mentality-cognitive obstacles for appropriate social changes.¹⁵

However, in the meantime, and unhindered by these primarily *cognitive* difficulties, "in the production sphere, a new economic elite that functions in line with the laws of free market is being formed" (Rimac 2004:409). This leads us directly to the question: "How did it happen that after decades of common historical experience with real socialism in Central and Eastern Europe some people have been able to curtail it within them, and some have not?" (Buchowsky 2001:17). Someway, like the interpretations of the post-socialist crisis as the remnant of socialist consciousness, are of no value when

¹⁵ A typical scenario of the "enlightened" internal criticism of Croatia's transition, therefore, mostly employs the term of re-traditionalization, i.e. social regression (instead of the expected progression - modernization) before which the transition itself, as a global process, is "surprised" – for a reason that still needs to be identified. That transition was simply sedimented in the consciousness of people incapable of "passing through a series of functional adaptations leading to an increasing efficiency, (...) an increasing specialization of social roles – of organizations as well as of individuals, (the consequence of which will be) an increasingly fragmented experience of the world and causes of individual events" (Rimac 2004:410). Failing to understand this kind of change, the population "which is considered as losers in the transition process due to the fact that they have passed the zenith of their professional activity" (ibid.:413), tends to negatively assess the newly-emerged situations and looks for a "scapegoat" for their position. The citizens, thus, not only appear to be unsuccessful in understanding and implementing changes, but, additionally, they are not able to understand the reality of transition, i.e. they misrepresent it as a society of crisis and problems; they place the causes "outside individuals and blame them on deviant individuals (crime) and special circumstances (war), even when those causes have no direct connection with the real situation" (ibid.:413). Since the citizens-losers think in an "old-fashioned" way, their perception of the real causes is predominantly distorted, so they do not see the crucial importance of the "problem of habits and behaviour remaining from socialism" which they ranked on the low "25th of 31 possible positions" on the scale offered by scientists in a poll. More balanced insights have resulted from trans-disciplinary research (introducing sociology, economy, sociobiological, psychological and cultural studies); they led to the notion of so-called socioeconomics, with an assumption of "subjective measure of benefit" as the main problem in the "confrontation of sociology and economics" in the studies of transition, cf. Meštrović & Štulhofer 1998). The analyses move towards the relativization (introduction of the category of feelings) of the basic axioms of the neoclassical economic analysis which consider "rationality" and "benefit maximization" (the so-called rational selfishness) as the basis of economic conduct of an individual. The studies has resulted in the notion of situational rationality (specific sociocultural wisdom), which in its turn strongly relies on inherited factors ("the persistence of habits related to the social and economic system that emerged in the cloud of post-communist dust", Štulhofer 2000:12). The re-traditionalization of Croatia's transitional society is placed in the realm of the term of cultural capital which has been insufficiently accumulated, just the economic, social and symbolic capital, which speaks of the "impossibility to ideologically standardize internal competence for the basic values of a liberal and democratic society" (Meštrović & Štulhofer 1998:4). Thus, it again "becomes clear how preferences and habits developed by actors within the old system may become a large problem for the development of new system" (Štulhofer 2000:106).

the continuity of social elites on this territory is in question (or was it, nonetheless, a class-less society that we are talking about?).¹⁶

At any rate, with the continuity of the "mentally socialist people", on one side, and trans-ideological "capable elites", on the other, it remains uncertain what the *sudden event of transition* was really about. Having used up its symbolic-mythic dimensions, the *grand narration* about a radical change, disoriented by the record of a new social reality, is gradually reduced to an expectation of its bare goal: a future that would have come for all, if it "just could have". The critical potential of social theories turns almost entirely towards the escapist criticism of "everything existing in the past", and exhausts itself in social-imaginative and moralistic formulas according to which the citizens, protagonists of historical changes should be able to behave *already now* in line with the system that *has not yet* begun. Without an "initial event" of change this instruction is even more irrational, but can we afford such a Marxist-like demand as the moment of "revolutionary change of consciousness"?

Thus, by imitating the structure of socialist narration that functioned in a similar way – as an *advertisement of its future existence* – another "pattern of continuity" (Jansen 1998)¹⁷ has been established at the heights of partial scholastic interpretations, condemning the pernicious inertia of the spirit of "ordinary people", stubbornly inclined to live their lives *here and now*.

But how does the fact of Croatian people's incapability to "transit" relate to their capability to gain the national state? There are various interpretative strategies for finding a way out of such a difficulty of argumentation. Firstly, a "collapse" in the Croatian case could cosy stays

¹⁶ For, "it is a paradox that the Communists and members of nomenclature that should have become imbued most with elements of old system's habitus, proved to be one of the quickest in switching to a new symbolic system, in mastering 'civilizational competence'" (Buchowski 2001:17). Studying the transformation of elites in Eastern Europe, Laslo Sekelj has concluded with somehow different accent: "Another essential functional characteristic of political elites in the formerly communist countries is that at the beginning of the transformation process they invariably resorted to nationalism as a means of their legitimacy. In the countries of basic type 2 (i.e. multi-national countries with national minority problems), they have succeeded in retaining power throughout the period of political and economic transformation primarily owing to this particular means of manipulation. Ethno-nationalism as a legitimacy basis and the unbroken continuity of elites are linked in Croatia, the FR of Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and most CIS countries" (Sekelj 1998).

¹⁷ Talking about the "patterns of continuity" in ex-Yugoslavia Jansen notes "the paradoxical but undeniable fact that the present situation mirrors certain aspects of the Titoist period, despite, or actually because of, the dramatic attempts to differentiate the post-communist societies from that time. (...) Like communism, the dominant discourses of today are built around a 'new start' – and precisely in this desire to do away with what was before, they are not different from the revolutionary Yugoslav narrative" (Jansen 1998:102).

solely for the collapse of former state, without elaborating a general paradigm of socialism: it was, true, a socialist state but foremost it was a "prison of nations". Therefore, the lack of practical interpretations and factual practices of social changes can be fairly substituted by the speech about a national state, without sufficient consideration of a recognizable and desired political system which would eventually identify it. In this way, the undifferentiated notion of "Western democracy", implied as the only choice, concealed a "paradoxical situation in which the interiorization of international norms is interpreted through the mediation of normative models (democracy, international law, human rights, technological and economic development) which are themselves in a crisis" (Savić 2001:17).

The war on the territory of the former common state has for a long time suspended conditions for a discussion about transitional processes as an introduction into the situation of "real capitalism". Thus, the need to face disturbing indicators of the state economy and difficulties to explain them in the light of "general progress" shyly appears only with a decade's delay.¹⁸ But it was precisely this decade – marked by the war and criminal privatization processes – that was taken as a model period for forming stereotype sociological conclusions about the "resistance of mentality" and the role that the "bad socio-cultural capital" played in the weaknesses of transitional strategies. The culturalist interpretations of "wild capitalism" being a predestination of the Croatian society culminate with the idea of Croatia's double "hereditary" burden.

Croatia belongs to the groups of European societies with a relatively low level of confidence, i.e. its socio-cultural heritage covers its affiliation with the Mediterranean circle with the dominant influence of Catholicism (in this we are close to Italy, Spain and France), but also some fifty years of the communist experiment (Račić 1999:325).¹⁹

The next influential thesis seeks a solution in the fact of the "non-authenticity" of transition, i.e. in the non-existence of original conditions for its localization – and, thus also, for forming a proper historical subject of its

¹⁸ Croatia, that had the status of one of the countries best prepared for transition, has been systematically falling towards the bottom of the scale with regards to all indicators of economic growth. It will not reach its GDP from the 1980's until far in the 21st century (if the existing trend continues). In the late 1990's, Croatia had the highest unemployment rate among the central European countries, five-fold increase in the deficit of trade balance and its foreign debt doubled (Vojnić 1999:389).

¹⁹ "In addition to existential uncertainty caused by the war, the society is largely pervaded by a homogenization pattern related to the identification similar to the traditional society. At the same time, a new economic elite which functions in line with the free market rules is formed in the sphere of production" (Rimac 2004:409).

narration or interpretation.²⁰ For this reason, democratization is not an unconditional organic continuation of internal change in each transition country either, but primarily an international commitment, an order to "imitate the best sides of political models applied by the winning countries in the competition with the socialist bloc".²¹

However, the most influential interpretation of the contemporary Croatian troubles posed as the problem of unbridgeable past, is the one based on the thesis of "unreal socialism" of the Yugoslav kind. It tries to cope with a nucleus question: how come that, from all the suggested *patterns of normality*, people are only able and willing to imitate a notorious "pattern of consumption", spoiling thus the fullness of the whole idea of transformation?

Unlike in societies where the theory about disciplining the socialist subject by depriving him of material goods and by "tampering with shortages" holds true, here we can only speak about a continuation of the "homo yugoslavicus", a *consumer of undeserved goods*, "who got used, through several generations, to an undemanding but relatively comfortable life under the glass bell of socialism" (Markus 2001:545). The image of spoiled and lazy *worker* thus represents a proper counterpart of the *Balkan intellectual* – it is only placed "a notch lower" in the discourse of the *forum transitorium*, as if someone had to pay for all the resentment about one's own compromises. It is the same sluggish and somewhat dim people, bluntly "satisfied with a full stomach", which is now only put in the position to miss "pots full of food provided by their former masters" (Zeman 1998:14) and to upset the critical complacency of social theories, redirecting their rational potentials, this time, towards the Biblical metaphors.²² The problem is that their continuous pathological surrender to "materialism" has also revealed the character of the "new master". The theory that is forestalled in its emancipative task of indicating sources and subjects of the socialist manipulation with consumer culture can only state that nothing has changed: "everyone lives, or in the case of the poorer classes and countries, want to live, a life dominated by

²⁰ Owing to this, an implicit aspiration, rooted in the collective experience, "to destroy the political structures and networks of real socialism" has been brought in question, since a notorious fact remains that (without doubting the existence of the opposition continuity in the post-socialist countries), "not a single internal individual act of resistance was strong enough for a true showdown with the order of real socialism" (Rogić 1998:38).

²¹ In the case of Croatia, however, the model of imitation has been challenged by the fact that independence gained by the states from neighbouring federations was not part of the international transitional project, but "the emphasis placed on local rationality was, indeed, considered a form of political regression" (Rogić 1998:39).

²² In a similar vein, Josip Županov speaks of the "Easterners who found themselves in the Sinai desert of an indefinitely long and onerous transitional period. Just as the ancient Israelites, clamouring against Moses and Aaron, wanted to return from Sinai to Egypt, thus, 20% of Eastern Germans would like to restore the GDR" (op.cit.:13).

materialism, economism and consumerism, in the belief that having more and spending more means to live better" (Markus 2001:546).

Thus, it turns out that yu-socialism is a bad overture to transition not because of its stereotypical "socialist character" ("drudging", shortages, ideological persecutions), but because it appears as a form of "corrupted capitalism", a context of imitation in which, in addition to phoney intellectuals, also exist "phoney workers in phoney factories", "mannequins of the epochal programme of liberation", who thought that "any banality they do must be charged highly" (Rogić 1998:54). The impotence of critical theories ultimately reaches an unusual conclusion according to which it turns out that if socialism had been "more real" here (i.e. "truly worse", less similar to capitalism), the possibility of its transition would have been better and less questionable. In this way, flirting with the ideal of prosperity characteristic of the Yugoslav late socialism has only made it possible to "spontaneously evaluate capitalism, too, as a system which (finally) frees the right to plunder from the last strokes of an utopian brush, and forms social circumstances that are favourable mainly for intelligent bandits" (ibid.:55).

The strategies of normalization: *The future now*

Speaking about the "nicely dressed Belarus people", Nelly Bekus Gončarova notes an interesting sociopsychological phenomenon of the post-socialist style of life:

Conflicting with the underlying social poverty of the country, the image of people in Belarusian streets creates a rather prosperous picture of the country. (...) The evident contradiction between the known facts concerning the situation in the country, the statistical data, the availability of Belarusian consumer goods on the one hand and the appearance of people in public places on the other is surprising for most foreigners visiting Belarus (2004:1).

Besides a simple imitation, the symbolic activity is established as a form of *bricolage*,²³ the establishment of a completely different symbolic order.

People who are still deprived of many of the material goods manipulate their images not merely for the sake of appearance itself, nor for the simulation of wealth or false prosperity; they rather create their distinguished look in order to stress, to make visible the "private" status of the body (ibid.:5).

²³ What can be observed is not the creation of objects and meanings from nothing, but rather the alteration and rearrangement of what is given and borrowed into one configuration, which carries a new meaning, and its translation into a new context (ibid.:2).

This anthropologist also sees this habit of social conduct as a remnant of socialism, but, rather differently than in previous cases, as the continuity of the idea that under conditions of public ownership, solely the individual body is the subject of privacy of the social life, "the margin which marks the limits of the private domain" (ibid.:5-6).²⁴

A similar disproportion between the social image and real possibilities also determines, beyond doubt, the image of present-day Croatia, imbued with "glamour" which is not displayed just in the manner of dressing but in "practising" and tracing the entire lifestyles. However, in relation to the consumption of the late Yugoslav socialism, here it is not exclusively the case of escapism and social-symbolic "magic", where appearances which suggest the pleasant life of attractive people just camouflage the reality, a "performative statement of prosperity, profitable social fortune and (in reality) unachievable wealth" (ibid.).

More ironic than pathetically symbolic, the practice of *materialism* is in the condition of "unreal socialism" part of the long-lasting creativity of scrappy "probing the West", by using things and manners touched by its spirit. In the circumstances of proclaimed social equality, it was a representation of enrichment of the middle class from the mid-70's: their act of materialization of promised and thus, *in advance*, ideologically legitimate well-being.

And now, thanks to the *sudden event*, we are just really "there": as the transition is proclaimed as *instantaneous beginning* of new reality, it is not that consumption is the imitation of the external characteristics of capitalism, but precisely the arrival of authentic, "real capitalism".²⁵

²⁴ "The origins of this intention can be found in a socialist ideology, which has dominated this territory for more than 80 years. This ideology was based on the practice of total state property. As a result, the Belarusian people, like all former citizens of the socialist countries, had been experiencing a radical lack of any private ownership for this time. Ownership which can be seen as the element of the 'human extension' not only in terms of 'possession', but also as a practice of the 'taking care of' and personal involvement. As a matter of fact, the lack of the experience of any ownership was probably one of the most essential features of the 'mythology' of everyday life. From this perspective, the human body became a synonym to define a private reality. The notion of the personal status of the human body was also implied through social ideology. One can say even that it was the body that marked out the margin of 'an unshared property' and became the substitute of this experience of ownership" (ibid.:5-6).

²⁵ After all, materialism and the "consumers' irrationality" of ordinary citizens are just a reflection of the official policy of consumption, at least as it is seen by economists, who are proverbially disinclined towards culturalist interpretations: "The policy of overrated stable nominal exchange rate of the national currency encouraged excessive imports, in particular of consumer durables and, thus, the positive effects of credit expansion have largely been annulled by the growth of external debt. As a result, the competitiveness of domestic producers declined due to the macroeconomic policy of appreciated Kuna in the circumstances of the liberalized import. (...) The structural implications of those

As long as the scientific-intellectual critics see transition as being "alien", something external, unadjusted, model-like, something that has to be "imitated", rather than something that has been initiated "with full consciousness" of its implementors, they carelessly underestimate the drawback of such a strategy for those who have been for decades encouraged or forced to think about themselves as the *subjects of history*, protagonists of global revolutionary changes. The loss of the position of *subject that matters* is therefore a key factor in understanding the rationality of post-socialist sense. As such, it resists, ironically, only in the academic imagination of the living past, while a new subject of exercising transitional ideology – probing life as *the future now* - is taking place unnoticed, erroneous and insignificant.

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movements are the following: in near future, when foreign loans will have to be paid, there will be no foreign exchange earnings based on the exports of goods and relevant export services. (...) The guarantor (state) shall have to pay off loans from the budget, which will additionally intensify problems related to the financing of social consumption. Already today, a part of it has to be alimented by the sale of ownership over domestic production capacities to the foreign capital, instead of directing foreign capital into the creation of new production potentials" (Baletić & Zdunić 1999:203).

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U POTRAZI ZA POSTSOCIJALISTIČKIM SUBJEKTOM

SAŽETAK

Rad raspravlja narativne modele tumačenja kriznih aspekata tranzicijskih društava s naglaskom na ispitivanju različitosti unutarnjih i izvanjskih uvida. Analiza se kreće unutar sljedećih pitanja: zašto su obje perspektive vođene nekim (iako različitim) oblikom kulturnog pesimizma; što je u pozadini istraživačke empatije ili pak skepse prema ljudskom protagonistu tranzicijskoga projekta; zašto tumačenja problema hrvatske tranzicije naginju metaforičnim konceptima, mitskom zapletu i prenatlažavanju "socijalističkog mentaliteta" kao smetnje "normalnom" razvitku; na posljetku, koje simboličke strategije i svakodnevne prakse obilježuju inividualne napore prevladavanja, ujedno društvenih promjena i uzvišenih teorija napretka.

Ključne riječi: post-socijalizam, kulturni pesimizam, prakse normalizacije