

Three Hundred Characters in Search of an Author

FACES FROM THE JUNKYARD

The title of this essay is not just a hyperbolic paraphrase of the title of the famous drama “Six Characters in Search of an Author” (Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore) by the Italian Nobel Laureate in Literature, Luigi Pirandello. This title, in addition to its association with the metatheatrical work of the great Italian playwright, novelist and poet evokes an unusual event of my encounter with forgotten characters of oral stories that I recorded with a tape recorder for years on my homeland island in the middle of the Adriatic Sea, on the island of Vis.

These narrators did not tell their stories to me, they told them to their regular audience. In these stories, narrators interact with their audience. They tell their stories and laugh. They tell their stories and act their characters. They are both mimes and pantomimes. Through the stories, they revive the characters from real life situations that they often directed themselves to produce events worthy of a story and memory, and in these stories, the narrators were often also characters, participants in drama games in the street, in the square, in the barbershop, in all the public space areas where they gathered to communicate and participate in the event of the story. And these stories preserved in the collective memory many characters of the deceased protagonists of the stories, the forgotten faces that continued their life only in the stories. I have never seen and never met many of the characters that my narrators have revived in their stories, but in my imagination, they were so present, so alive, so credible. At that time, at the end of the pre-informatics era of human history, which I witnessed with a tape recorder in my hands, there was a community of the living and the dead. The stories revived the dead as characters participating in events in the distant past who were brought back to life by the story, dramatised. The narrator's memory included events not only actually lived, but also those that happened a long time ago. The story turned them into a present theatrical act in everyday interpersonal communication outdoors. Long-spoken dialogues were revived, some that took place a hundred years ago, and some were thought up on the spur of the moment of narrative act.

The poetics of this oral story, in the local community referred to as *facenda*, was based on humour. Humour was the fundamental social principle of this insular world. Humour was a response to the challenge of survival even in the most difficult times of the 20th century when the island was visited by the “four horsemen of the Apocalypse”: phylloxera – a disease of vines that came to this region from America to destroy vineyards and was the reason why many islanders fled

to America, then World War I, then the Spanish flu pandemic and then World War II. And hundreds of these characters, from the recorded stories of this offshore Adriatic island, have preserved laughter as a response to the challenge of survival, humour as a *modus vivendi*.

Based on the characters of the narrators and their audience, I also imagined the deceased characters in their stories, protagonists of past events that they talked about, that they made present. I keep those characters radiant with laughter in my memory. And then there was a surprise: finding a wooden box!

This is a story of a strange journey of a wooden box. A journey from a town dump yard to an exhibition. A man from Komiža who was passing by the town dump yard saw a chest that caught his attention on a pile of garbage. There was a wooden box in the chest. When he opened it, he saw many black and white film celluloid negatives.



Figure 1 and 2. The author's selection of portraits from the collection of anonymous portraits from Dinko Božanić's exhibition "The Forgotten Faces of Komiža", City Library "Ranko Marinković", Komiža, 2010

He didn't know what to do with it. He could only use the well-preserved wooden box as a storage for various things. But then he thought maybe someone might find the contents of that interesting. And he remembered that there was a professor living in his neighbourhood who might not find it funny if he was offered that box with a multitude of celluloid negatives with portraits of strangers.

It was one winter day in 1981, in Komiža on the island of Vis. My neighbour Žan, that's what we all called him, knocked on my apartment door and offered me the wooden box found in the town dump yard. He told me that it seemed to him that I was the only one who might find these black and white negatives interesting because he knew that I was recording the stories of old islanders and that I was recording the oral tradition of the native island with a tape recorder. I accepted this unusual gift and thanked my neighbour with deep respect for him for recognising the possible importance of a bunch of negatives with portraits of unknown people.

I have looked at all those negatives. There were about three hundred of them. The box was full, a whole gallery of characters that sparked my curiosity. I thought that among these negatives there

might be portraits of people from the stories I recorded from the old locals. The stories of my narrators spanned from the last decade of the 19th century to the end of the 20th century and the possibility that I might recognise some of the characters from the recorded stories sparked my curiosity. As I could not recognise any of those people in the black and white negatives, I knew these were people who had died before I, as a child, could remember them or that they died even before I was born.

All these characters, as far as one could guess by looking at their celluloid negatives, had many common characteristics that aroused my curiosity. However, I did nothing except keeping the box with three hundred black and white negatives of my fellow citizens from Komiža, whom I did not know, for some possible future research.

Twenty-six years later, the contents of this box caught the attention of my son Dinko, who returned from film arts studies in Rome. That was in 2007. He thought then that these negatives could be used to make photographs and they could be presented in an exhibition.



Figure 3 and 4. The author's selection of portraits from the collection of anonymous portraits from Dinko Božanić's exhibition "The Forgotten Faces of Komiža", City Library "Ranko Marinković", Komiža, 2010

CAMERA OBSCURA

The word photography originally means writing with light. It is derived from the Greek noun φως (phos) which means light and the verb γραφή (graphê) which means writing. Hence, photography is writing with light, an illusion of a real sight of the world seen by the human eyes on some surface. And that was the beginning of the idea of photography. This idea is much older than the daguerreotype magic – the first printed photograph whose discovery was presented by its inventor, on 9th January 1839 before the French Academy of Sciences in Paris, Louis Daguerre, French painter and physicist, inventor of the practical process of making photography – named daguerreotype after him.

The idea of photography was born during the Renaissance. Canadian linguist, philosopher and media theorist Marshal McLuhan emphasises the importance of the visual experience that marked Renaissance culture and the emergence of a new observation attraction referred to as camera obscura that is also referred to as "natural magic."

As the media historian Eric Barnouw writes, “camera obscura” as a natural phenomenon of mapping reality in a darkened room penetrated by sunlight through a small hole and creating an inverted image of the outside world on the opposite wall, was described as a miraculous phenomenon by Leonardo Da Vinci in his unpublished works.¹

Even at the time, in Florence during the Renaissance, the idea was born to fix an image on a flat surface and thus help the painters in the faithful reproduction of the reflection of reality. Camera obscura has become a magic, a visual attraction offered to the public by magicians and various illusionists at fairs and circuses, but it took centuries for the development of chemical science to enable the realisation of the dream of fixation of an image that breaks into a dark room with rays of sunlight and evokes on the wall the sight of the outside world. It happened in 1839 when a dark motionless room became a small moving box, when a small hole for light on that box got a lens to correct the reverse image, and on the inner wall of the box, reached by the outside light, there was a silver-plated copper sheet. This miracle happened when the camera was invented.

The fascination of the first photographed people who could recognise their own image on paper was no less than the fascination of the natives in overseas countries who could recognise themselves in mirrors that the first conquistadors from Europe offered them in exchange for gold.



Figure 5 and 6. The author's selection of portraits from the collection of anonymous portraits from Dinko Božanić's exhibition "The Forgotten Faces of Komiža", City Library "Ranko Marinković", Komiža, 2010

NIGHT AT NOON

When I was a child, my worst parental punishment was that I had to go to sleep at noon during the summer months. It was in the 1950s. My father was a fisherman who fished at night.

After lunch he would go to bed to rest for the following night when he had to go back to fishing at sea. Then all the children, whose fathers were fishermen, had to sleep, as well, so as not to wake up their fathers with their noisy games. Lunch started early, at eleven o'clock in the morning, and at noon all fishermen's children had to go to bed.

1 Eric Barnouw (1959) *Mass Communication*. New York pp. 13 – 14

The fisherman's children were supposed to be in bed. It was not easy to give up playing with other kids outside and go to a dark room. But that was the way it had to be. So as a child in the darkness of my room, I discovered a marvellous pastime. When I grew up, I found out that this child's game of mine was referred to as camera obscura. In my island dialect, the room is called kamara (camera), and the shutters on the window, that make the room look darker, are called škure (obscura). These dialectal words, originating from the Italian language, contained the name of that only toy of mine in a dark room, camera obscura. On the edge of closed window shutters, there was a hole through which the rays of sunshine entered the room, and, on the ceiling, there was my cinema. People were passing in the street, children of those of our neighbours whose fathers were not fishermen were playing, sometimes my cat and my neighbour's dog would appear, and everyone on the ceiling was turned upside down. This twisted world on the ceiling of my room was strange. The sky down and the street up! I loved that movie theatre, that secret of mine, so I didn't complain anymore when my parents warned me that it was time to go to bed. I gladly went into my night at noon, into my camera obscura in which the world of my street was turned upside down. It wasn't until much later, when I was a student, that I learned about the invention of photography and its inventor Louis Daguerre, who perhaps as a boy had to lie in a dark room in the middle of a sunny day, like me, to get the idea of a device that would change the world.



Figure 7 and 8. The author's selection of portraits from the collection of anonymous portraits from Dinko Božanić's exhibition "The Forgotten Faces of Komiža", City Library "Ranko Marinković", Komiža, 2010

DEVIL'S INVENTION

"Photography is the devil's invention." This is what a journalist of the German daily "Leipziger Stadtanzeiger" wrote in the first commentary in the news about the invention of photography, which was published on 2nd January 1839 in many European newspapers. The news was that the Frenchman Louis Jacques M. N. P. J. M. Daguerre had invented a machine that could faithfully fix the scene that people can see only in the passage of time.

The daguerreotype device, as the first camera was called, really appeared as a devil's machine because with this invention man reached for divine competence: for the first time it was possible

for a human device to stop time, to freeze the scene in a fraction of a second, to preserve it visually in time not only as a mental image in human memory, but as a two-dimensional visual fact, more permanent than human memory. It was in 1839, that was not only the beginning of photography, but it was also the beginning of a visual revolution in the history of human communication. A century after the invention of photography, the invention that was still revolutionary at the time, did not achieve its planetary victory over words. The culture of visual communication did not suppress the oral-aural.

The great civilisational changes in the mid-twentieth century began precisely with the establishment of the dominance of the image as a faster communication medium than words. The acceleration of the time of today's global civilisation begins with the victory of image over words.

EXHIBITION OF FORGOTTEN FACES OF KOMIŽA

But let's go back to our story about the wooden box from the junkyard. When the author of this exhibition began scanning black and white negatives, a miracle happened. The characters of men and women, boys and girls appeared under the cover of the scanner whose physiognomies testified about the long gone insular world of Komiža on the island of Vis more convincingly than words, textual records or verbal documents. They spoke of a miracle that occurred during the time between their world and ours. When the first characters appeared before our eyes, it became clear that this exhibition would be a cultural event that testifies to the epochal change in visual perception caused by global visualisation in human communication. And I was really surprised – these faces were not smiling. Where have the characters from the stories I've been chronicling gone? Is it possible that they are hiding among the characters of these serious people frightened in front of the camera lens?

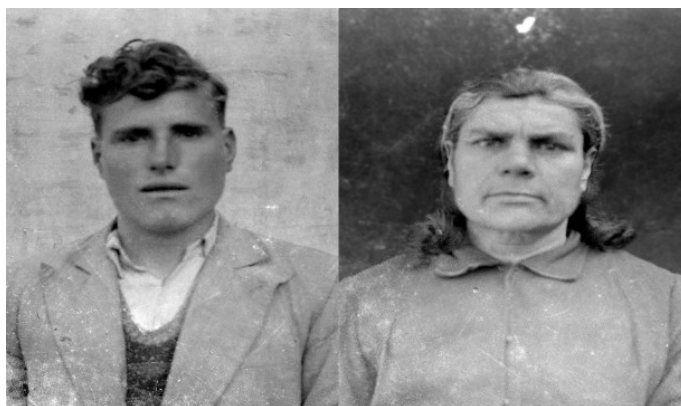


Figure 9 and 10. The author's selection of portraits from the collection of anonymous portraits from Dinko Božanić's exhibition "The Forgotten Faces of Komiža", City Library "Ranko Marinković", Komiža, 2010

The author of the exhibition then went in search of the author of these celluloid negatives on behalf of all these three hundred preserved silent faces who were separated from the time flow by a two-dimensional achromatic reflection in the camera of the author who at the time was unknown.

Characters from the wooden box from the junkyard helped to identify the author. His name is Jerko Fabris (born in Split in 1914 – died in Rome in 1998). His father, Duje, was from Split, and his mother Vinka from Komiža.

After her husband's death in 1925, Vinka Fabris, with her son Jerko and daughter Tonka, moved to Komiža where they lived in the parents' house of the Zamberlin family nicknamed Pompa. Young Jerko went to do photography apprenticeship in Dubrovnik. After the completion of his photography apprenticeship, Jerko Fabris returned to Komiža where he opened a photography studio. Shortly before the war, he moved to Rome, and after World War II, he came to Komiža in the summer, and some of his portraits were made in post-war times.

When Jerko Zamberlin's birth house was sold, the new owner of the house threw many things that he found unnecessary onto the town dump yard. Among them, there was the chest with the wooden box with three hundred characters of Komiža inhabitants that Jerko Fabris filmed in his photography studio in Komiža, both during the pre-war and the post-war times.



Figure 11 and 12. The author's selection of portraits from the collection of anonymous portraits from Dinko Božanić's exhibition "The Forgotten Faces of Komiža", City Library "Ranko Marinković", Komiža, 2010

The author of the exhibition decided that the visitors would be its protagonists, that the exhibition would be interactive in some way. With each exhibited photo, visitors are offered a paper and a pencil so that they can record their memories or associations in connection with recognising the person in the photo.

The exhibition was opened in April 2010 in the City Reading Room in Komiža, titled "Forgotten Faces of Komiža". It was a unique exhibition that was visited by those who, perhaps, had not seen a single exhibition in their lives, and among them many old people from the nursing home in Vis, who came to the exhibition. They were attracted by the curiosity whether they would recognise someone, perhaps themselves, or someone who they had preserved in their memory.

On the first day of the exhibition, a lot of paper under the exhibited photographs was filled with handwritten text. Among the older visitors to the exhibition, there were those who could identify a fair number of people whose portraits were exhibited and remembered the memories of them preserved by word of mouth in the collective memory of Komiža.

This wooden box with three hundred faces, found in a discarded chest in the junkyard, not only preserved the memory of the then oldest people of Komiža of their fellow citizens filmed more than eight decades ago, but much more than that. In that box from the junkyard, time left its mark. The moment in which the camera captured the filmed scene, that moment that lasts like the blink of an eye, is the event of stopping the flow of time, isolating the scene from its surroundings, from the context to which it belongs. “What I like about photographs is that they capture a moment that is gone forever, impossible to reproduce,” said the German fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld. The act of photography stops the flow of time so that one moment in time is prolonged, intended for imperishability.



Figure 13 and 14. The author's selection of portraits from the collection of anonymous portraits from Dinko Božanić's exhibition "The Forgotten Faces of Komiža", City Library "Ranko Marinković", Komiža, 2010

“It's me! I recognised myself by the flowery dress. I was ten years old, I'm wearing a new dress for the photo shoot”, wrote the old woman Keka, who was brought from the retirement home to see the exhibition.

“And this is Šime Rudi who was sent by a fishing boat crew, anchored in the bay of Porat, to milk a nanny goat in the village of Okjucina at night and bring milk, and he returned with an empty pot because he milked a billy goat in a dark barn thinking he was milking a nanny goat.” Someone knew Francesca and her sister Nanda, who were named after the crown prince of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy Franz Ferdinand – their father's godfather – an Austrian naval officer who saved his life during a safari hunt in Africa, and Franz Ferdinand gave him a prize, to dance with Princess Sofia, to open a dance in the Imperial Castle Miramar near Trieste. “But poor Franz Ferdinand was also killed in Sarajevo,” writes an unknown hand on paper under Franceska Zamberlin's photo, “and that's why World War I started. And Franceska was in love with a priest, and she loved to knit *mirlic*” (lace). “And this is Petar Pepe. He was killed by Italian Fascists in 1943, and I told him to hide, not to chase the donkey with a load of carob to Komiža, that it was dangerous, that they catch people, but he did not listen to me. They shot him. His name is now on the monument.” “And Frone Ješkica could eat fifty pilchards and he used to carry a comb in his pocket because he was handsome, and he always combed his hair.” And

so, memories were written down, from paper to paper under black and white photographs of serious people who were not smiling, they were staring at the camera lens in fear, aware of the seriousness of the moment when their face is stopped by pressing a finger on the camera button and is selected out from the flow of time.

Are we today, members of the culture of visual communication, capable of understanding the miracle of Daguerre's "devil's device", which today in its technological variants produces virtual worlds more real than the one to which, as physical beings, we currently belong? This key communication question is addressed by an unusual exhibition titled "Forgotten Faces of Komiža", which was created by an incredible chance.

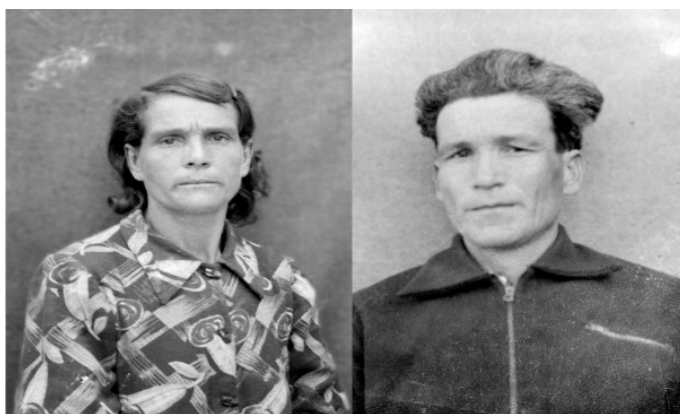


Figure 15 and 16. The author's selection of portraits from the collection of anonymous portraits from Dinko Božanić's exhibition "The Forgotten Faces of Komiža", City Library "Ranko Marinković", Komiža, 2010

DAGUERREOTYPIC TRAP FOR TIME FLOW

The only surface of the human body by which it is possible to know another person is their face. The face reflects the spirit of the person, their psyche, their attitude, their emotions, their intellect, their experience and their memory. Likewise, the person's face reflects the time to which that person belongs, their social environment, collective memory, that incomprehensible communication fluid that is easy to recognise and difficult to name, that special something which the face expresses with its mime and its attitude, recorded by a camera trap for the flow of time. That is evident in these faces from the edge of the collective memory of Komiža. There is no laughter on these faces. These faces are often frightened by the act of filming. To them, the photographer takes away something of the most intimate, the most personal – the expression of their face, only to turn it into a two-dimensional art document with his strange device, for which time ceases to flow. Not only that, but by the act of photographing, the character is framed, cut out, therefore excluded from the context of the world to which it belongs. The frame of the photo, beyond whose rectangular boundaries there is nothing but emptiness, points out, emphasises, focuses on the character, draws the attention of unpredictable observers to the image with which the photographed person most often cannot communicate.

Thus, to be stopped in the passage of time, to be separated from the context of life, to be watched by unknown inquisitive glances, becomes an experience that these faces encounter for the first time and this is evident in them, this surprise, the amazement and even fear.

What they all have in common is that they do not smile. The photographer's warning for a mandatory smile before the photo shoot (say cheese) did not reach these people who were frightened in front of Daguerre's device.

A hundred years had passed since the inventor of the photographic camera presented his invention at the French Academy of Sciences in Paris, and these Fabris's characters come before the camera as serious as at a funeral without any previous photography experience.



Figure 17 and 18. The author's selection of portraits from the collection of anonymous portraits from Dinko Božanić's exhibition "The Forgotten Faces of Komiža", City Library "Ranko Marinković", Komiža, 2010

It needs to be added that these faces are also a testimony of the experience of the insular world, closely linked with the elements of nature. They are, one would say, carved of hard materials, resistant, unpolished, numb by the spasm of expectation of the event of photographic incantation. These faces are visually innocent because they do not want to be different, that is, better than themselves as they are. They are not aware of smile as an expression of optimism and life cheerfulness that in our time is a sign of marketing expedient personality, market exchangeability. These characters are serious. They participate in a serious act, in a work that is unusual, in an act that is an event, which is remembered and retold, and whose trace, printed on photographic paper, is framed and kept under glass as a relic for generations to come.

THE WORLD OF BLACK AND WHITE PORTRAITS

In my childhood, in the 1950s, people of strange professions visited Komiža who would walk through the streets and shout their offers. They came to the island to sell their today unimaginable services or goods in a matter of days. Among them, the most frequent guests were the Roma who offered to repair ("kalaisanje") pierced cooking pots or repairing umbrellas, and their wives read the Komiža women fate from the palm of their hands. At that time, an umbrella was bought

once in a lifetime, and it was repaired when necessary and the arrival of the Roma in the town was a sign that it would rain because it was the best time for the service that they provided – umbrella repair. Leech sellers arrived from the mouth of the Neretva River and people bought leeches from them and kept them alive in bottles of water, in case someone got hit or punched, to drain blood from the hematoma. I vividly remember people who walked the streets and shouted out about their photographic services: “We increase the size of photographs cheaply!”. They also offered a special service that was more expensive – colorising black and white photographs. In some old houses there are still photos on the wall, portraits of the newlyweds, taken at the wedding, while the masters of “magnification” did their “make-up” in the photo. Most often these were photos of married couples with a bouquet of artificial flowers in the bride’s hands, in festive wedding clothes, with a stiff attitude in front of the camera and without a smile.



Figure 19 and 20. The author’s selection of portraits from the collection of anonymous portraits from Dinko Božanić’s exhibition “The Forgotten Faces of Komiža”, City Library “Ranko Marinković”, Komiža, 2010

From today’s temporal distance, I count myself among the last witnesses of this incredible change that took place in the middle of the 20th century. And in my childhood photography was still an exception, a rarity that had a special place on the wall, next to framed pictures of male and female Christian saints in bedrooms. When I was three years old, I was photographed for the first time in my life. On that occasion, it was the first time that I saw a steamboat and found out what an island is and that I live on an island because for the first time in my life I entered a steamboat with my mother to travel to a big city on the mainland by the sea to go to a photographer to have a photograph of me taken. The photographer placed me in an armchair and told me to smile, and I cried and ran away when the photographer covered himself over the head with a black canvas. My mother had to assure me for a long time that nothing terrible would happen to me and that I needed to sit back in the armchair for a photo shoot. In my family photo collection, I keep that picture as a memento of my first photography experience, I keep that photo of a frightened boy lit by a spotlight in front of a man with his head covered with a black canvas and a camera pointing right at me.

SHADOW HUNTER

I remembered my fear of the camera when I visited the Museo Municipal in the southernmost city of the world – in Porvenir in Tierra del Fuego in Chile. There I saw a dictionary of the language of the Indian tribe of Yamana with a strange title “Shadow Hunter”. This “Shadow Hunter” was the author of the dictionary – a Belgian photographer whose name I have forgotten. A museum curator at Museo Municipal told me a story of a photographer who decided to live for two years among the last indigenous inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego. Indians in this subpolar zone did not know clothes, and they lived exclusively from hunting and collecting food from nature. At first, they were afraid when he would point his strange “weapon” at them with the intention of photographing them. When asked about what he, that strange, dressed white man, was chasing with that “weapon” of his, the photographer showed them the photos. Then they called him “Shadow Hunter,” and that is how he titled his dictionary of their language.



Figure 21 and 22. The author's selection of portraits from the collection of anonymous portraits from Dinko Božanić's exhibition “The Forgotten Faces of Komiža”, City Library “Ranko Marinković”, Komiža, 2010

The experience of a photo as a shadow, as something that is not real, I wrote in an oral story that a narrator in Komiža told me, a man born in 1912. It happened in the 1930s, at the time when Fabris's portraits of the people of Komiža were being created. My narrator, a boy at the time, who wanted to go to the movies, asked his father to give him money to pay for the ticket. His father refused to give him money, telling him that there was no use in going to the movies because the cinema was just a shadow. And I also wrote down a story that testifies to the experience of this “shadow” as reality. The story is from the same time, when cinema first appeared in Komiža. One elderly cinema visitor fled the hall shouting that he would be run over by the horses he saw running towards him on the movie screen in a cowboy movie.

In my family photo collection, I do not have a single photo of my father as a partisan in World War II, my grandfather an Austrian soldier in World War I, or my great-grandfather who spent a decade on the Costa da Morte in Galicia, near the town of Finisterra, Spain, as an organiser of hunting and salting pilchard and anchovies for fish factories in Komiža at the beginning of the 20th century. I have only one photo of my mother from her youth in which she was photographed with a women's choir when she was a war refugee in the EI Shatt refugee camp in the Sinai

Desert in Egypt, with desert sand in the background, from the time of the escape of the civilian population, which was organised from the island of Vis in 1944 in anticipation of the invasion of the German army on the last free territory – the island of Vis.

Such exceptional experiences of people only exceptionally left a mark on the photos. The photo was irrelevant for a long time after Louis Daguerre presented his discovery as a worldwide sensation at the French Academy of Sciences in Paris in 1839.



Figure 23 and 24. The author's selection of portraits from the collection of anonymous portraits from Dinko Božanić's exhibition "The Forgotten Faces of Komiža", City Library "Ranko Marinković", Komiža, 2010

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY AS A COOL MEDIUM

A collection of portraits from the wooden box from the junkyard caused a collective sensation from the observation audience. If they had been high-resolution colour photographs, that sensation probably would not have happened. An unfinished, incomplete expression, an expression of low informative value of these black and white portraits, damaged by the passage of time, scratched, faded, blurred portraits from the junkyard, portraits that require imaginative participation of the recipient, is precisely the perceptual event referred to as "cool medium" by the Canadian philosopher and communication theorist Marshal McLuhan. He considers "hot" those media that prolong a single sense in "high definition" (rich in sensory data) and do not require a high degree of recipient participation, and he considers "cool" low-definition media that require a high degree of participation of the recipient of the message. The terms "cool" and "hot" media are used by McLuhan in the sense in which these terms are used in the slang of the so-called Flower Power generation of the late 1960s and early 1970s.²

To understand the phenomenon we are talking about, the phenomenon of surprise before the eyes of the serious, astonished, frightened people, caught in front of Fabris's daguerreotype device that stops time, we could use a much older communication theory with which McLuhan's theory of cool and warm media corresponds. This is the theory of one of the founders of the Russian formalist school Viktor Shklovsky in the 1930s, a theory that was a precursor to structuralism and poststructuralism. He uses the term

² McLuhan (1964). *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*. (New York, McGraw Hill)

“defamiliarisation” (in Russian *ostranenie*) to name a deviation from routine perception. He distinguishes between vision and recognition. Shklovsky believes that we recognise the things we are surrounded by, but we do not see them, and the role of poetry is to enable us to see, since the language of poetry breaks the routine of our perception to see again. The vision, according to Shklovsky, is associated with wonder.³ Children see because they can wonder. It takes wonder to see. One needs to get rid of the routine that makes seeing impossible.

It is precisely this river of time that has elapsed since the moment of Fabris’s click on the daguerreotype machine to cut out of time the characters that we could see from our time of the visual civilisation that replaced the speech or, rather oral-aural civilisation, that allows for the miracle of vision that Shklovsky speaks about or engaged viewing that involves and requires participation.

Complementing what is missing, but is being perceived, as McLuhan speaks with his theory of distinguishing cool (unsaturated information) from hot (saturated) medium.



Figure 25 and 26. The author’s selection of portraits from the collection of anonymous portraits from Dinko Božanić’s exhibition “The Forgotten Faces of Komiža”, City Library “Ranko Marinković”, Komiža, 2010

TO PARTICIPATE OR TO OBSERVE

In the time in which we all become photographers; the question is what is left for photographing. In the time when the mobile phone, which is also a camera, has become, as it were, an inseparable part of the human body, almost one of its organs, we observe, from our time, Fabris’s characters, for many of whom this celluloid record from his wooden box was perhaps the only photograph in their life, especially for the oldest among them. In the time of selfie culture, a new, mental phenomenon appears that had previously been unknown – homo duplex, to use this phrase of the French sociologist of the 19th century Émile Durkheim, a double person in one, a person who wants to be at the same moment both the spectator and the audience, and the observer and the participant, both the cameraman and the filmed.

3 Viktor B. Shklovsky (1969). *Resurrection of the Word*, Stvarnost, Zagreb, pp.43-44

The American writer, philosopher and political activist Susane Sontag is one of the greatest photography theorists in the world, the author of the famous book *On Photography* (New York 1977). She excludes the coexistence of a participatory and observational position when she says that photography is basically an act of non-interference since the person filming cannot intervene and the person who intervenes cannot film. Selfie culture denies that. It is just a matter of what is going on. Can the photographer even see?

The first selfie in history was not the one taken in 2002 by the Australian Nathan Hope who took a picture of his wounded lip from a fall because he had been drunk the previous night. He shared it with friends on social media online, saying it was bad because it was a “selfie”. That new word spread globally in no time through social media, and the Oxford Dictionary named it “the word of the year” in 2013.

Nevertheless, I would say that the first “selfie” is a vision of the observer’s figure reflected in a pool of water, symbolised by the story of Narcissus from Greek mythology, the myth of a young man who drowned in the water in which he saw his own reflection and fell in love with that. And when it comes to photographing oneself with a daguerreotype equipment, then it needs to be said that it was created in 1839 in America, the same year Louis Daguerre invented it. That oldest photographic self-portrait in the history of photography was made by the American Robert Cornelius.

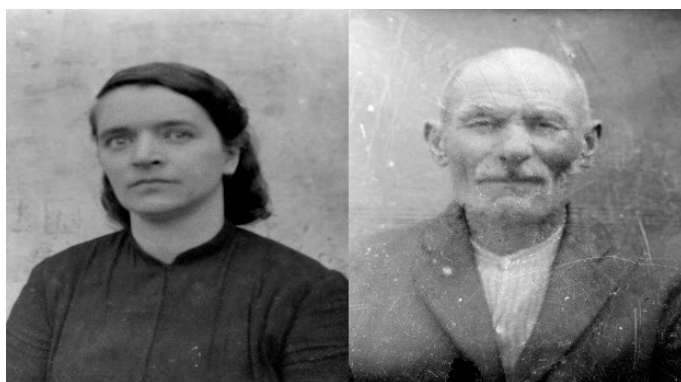


Figure 27 and 28. The author’s selection of portraits from the collection of anonymous portraits from Dinko Božanić’s exhibition “The Forgotten Faces of Komiža”, City Library “Ranko Marinković”, Komiža, 2010

Considering the selfie phenomenon, that is, the phenomenon of focusing on oneself when observing the outside world, I would say that through this act, the reduction of the focus of looking at the context, the frame, the background appears. So, we have a vision reduction problem.

In the moment when Narcissus observes his own reflection in the water, the vision of water disappears because a face looking at itself in the water, not water, is leaning over it. The selfie becomes a symptom of inability to see. Huge tourist masses are driven by the desire to see, to escape from the daily routine that prevents seeing, the desire to exceed the limits of life’s constraints set by the existential necessity of work for survival. A craving to escape from constraints that make it impossible for us to be noticed. What we should see becomes the background to

us, a framework that gives our portrait an aura of existence in an attractive place, an aura of the significance of our personality that we share on social media globally. But the craving for vision that moves us is unfulfilled because vision is not possible. The presence of the photographer in the photograph annuls the vision.

Let me give you an example from my insular environment. On the islet of Biševo there is a world-famous Blue Cave, a natural light phenomenon similar to that of the famous sea cave Grotta Azzurra on the island of Capri near Naples in Italy. Due to a sharp increase in the number of visitors to this natural light phenomenon, the organisers of the visit to the Blue Cave had to limit the time of stay of visitors inside the cave. But limiting the time spent in the cave from the former unlimited time to the current five minutes did not cause an outcry from visitors because those few minutes are enough to take selfies and post them on social media. The subject of photography ceased to be Blue Cave, its wonder of light that evokes the reflection of sunlight from the bottom of the sea in the cave, and it was replaced by the image of a photographer to whom the blue of the Blue Cave is just a frame, the context, the background and, of course, the proof of participation in a commonly known important place, evidence shared for known and unknown audience on social media.



Figure 29 and 30. The author's selection of portraits from the collection of anonymous portraits from Dinko Božanić's exhibition "The Forgotten Faces of Komiža", City Library "Ranko Marinković", Komiža, 2010

From 1969, in Bell Laboratories in New York, Willard Boyle and George Smith discovered the first commercial CCD sensor (Charged Coupled Device) that would enable the development of digital photography to 1991, when Kodak launched the first digital cameras weighing, at that moment, five kilograms, only 22 years passed, and since then, the most massive movement in the world caused by this invention has been taking place – the movement of documenting everything visible. Until recently, many Europeans marvelled, and laughed at, the increasing number of Japanese tourists who viewed the world around them through the lens of their digital cameras. In the meantime, this need to record everything has become universal, planetary. As if passing by something, without activating your camera or cell phone, means not seeing it.

Yuval Noah Harari, a professor of history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, says: “The new motto is: “If you experience something - note that. If you make a note - send it. If you send something - share it (...). No wonder we are so preoccupied with turning our experiences into data. It is not about following trends. It’s about survival. We have to prove to ourselves and the system that we still have value. And the value is not in having experiences, but in turning them into free-flowing data.”⁴ I would add that digital photography is the most free-flowing medium of distribution of visual data about the world around us.

PHOTOGRAPHY AS A *MEMENTO MORI*

Susane Sontag says: “Photographs may be more memorable than moving images, because they are a neat slice of time, not a flow. Television is a stream of insufficiently selected images, each of which cancels its predecessor. Every still photograph is a privileged moment, turned into a slim object that one can keep and look at again.” For Susane Sontag photographs are “memento mori” because they “participate in another persons’ (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability and mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt.”

Observing these forgotten faces of Komiza, faces from the town dump yard, I am overwhelmed by the feeling that Susan Sontag speaks of – a reminder of the transience that the camera of the town photographer Jerko Fabris opposed by fixing hundreds of these characters, in fact by clicking the camera that abolishes time, stops the “melting of time”, but it is this isolated, frozen moment that emphasises, highlights what is invisible in the act of photography, and this is an inexorable melting of time, an inaudible murmur of transience.

Did Jerko Fabris photograph only the people who were needed to preserve a visual memory or just a confirmation of their identity on documents? I am overwhelmed by the thought that Jerko Fabris photographed something that was not his intention, that he photographed something that at the moment of photographing could not be seen through the lens of his camera, and that is the time that after his click on the camera continued to flow and through its flow enabled to see these faces from a temporal distance, so that this new perception would find itself before a riddle, before the cultural question: What happened in the meantime? The answer could be: The cyberisation of the planet Earth occurred in the history of human cultures!

Here, for the end of this story, a scene that, I am convinced, best illustrates the abovementioned statement. A mother with a two-year-old girl approaches the window. The windows are closed. Through the glass you can see the yard. It’s spring. An orange tree bloomed in the yard. The child reaches with her hand to the window glass.

A two-year-old girl thinks the window glass is a computer screen. The girl spreads her thumb and index finger on the glass in order to magnify the image of a tree in the yard. The line between the reality and the image of the reality is blurred.

Jean Baudrillard, a French sociologist of culture and a leading postmodern theorist, says; “It’s no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It’s a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, an operation to deter every real process by its operational

4 Y.N. Harari (2016). *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. Focus komunikacije d.o.o. Zagreb, p. 405

double...”⁵ Baudrillard talks about the transformation of reality into an image of reality, reality into its simulacrum. Virtual reality becomes more real than the reality. The virtual planet Earth has an increasing gravitational force, and it is likely to soon be greater than the one we are attracted to by the planet Earth which we walk on or sail through. The information revolution has created a new planet in the solar system – the ninth (monolingual): Cyber Earth.

This is today’s context, the point of view for this Fabris collection of characters from a thrown wooden box from the town dump yard on a small Adriatic island, in Croatia, on the island of Vis, in Komiža. This gallery of black and white photographs, these frightened, serious faces, became a document of a forgotten insular world, the *memento mori* of the forgotten Komiža.



Figure 31. The first portrait in the life of the author of this text, a three-year-old boy who discovered on the same day that he lived on an island, found out what a ship was and experienced the horror of the first photographing (Split, August 1951).

Editor’s note: This essay, titled “Trista lica traži autora”, was originally published in Književna republika journal (Vol. 7-12, pp. 142-159).

5 J. Boudliard (1981). Simulacra and Simulation, Psephisma p. 9