

## ALBUM NOVEL: FORCING REMEMBRANCE

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### Summary

*This paper examines the way memory/remembrance works in some various (social and private) moments (a war and post-war period, crisis, need for self-determination) and analyses a dialectic relation between the culture of remembrance and the culture of oblivion. Inside the wider context of post-modernistic accords and due to the depression caused by the local war atmosphere, there appeared some new narrative forms which try to define the problems of the actual moment (mostly national and individual identity at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Ž. Čorak, D. Ugrešić, J. Horvat, M. Kirin) and we propose its genre-related form to be “album novel”. The justification for distinguishing this form and engaging with it is evidenced by the emergence of new works, among which we single out recent novels (20s of the 21<sup>st</sup> century) written in the Kajkavian idiom (P. Sabolek, T. Ribić). The discursive space of this form encompasses, on the one hand, the discourse of hope based on the authority of tradition and on the other hand the discourse of scepticism, as it was adopted by the critics of postmodernism (Lyotard, Derrida).*

*Key words: identity, culture of remembrance; Kajkavian idiom, standard Croatian language; synchronicity*

### 1. Introduction: The Cause and Corpus

A complex crisis which swept through Croatia in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century creating fractures in the current way of life (pre-war and war period), has awakened, as a counter-balance to a blind destruction, a need for safeguarding history in the form of memories (especially photographs as powerful witnesses). The referent framework includes a few important novels and authors (Željka Čorak – *Krhotine*, Miroslav Kirin – *Album*, Tatjana Gromača – *Crnac*, Jasna Novak – *Az* and Dubravka Ugrešić – *Baba Jaga je snijela jaje*), with the common topics of trauma survival and the creation of a personal poetics of remembrance.

The comparative analysis of the above mentioned novels offers the possibility to observe the relatedness and alternativity and proposes the outline of possible

typology. The actuality of the form is well documented by some recent publications (20s of the 21<sup>st</sup> century), such as kajkavian novel *Moč življenja* by Petrana Sabolek, and (expected) *Kornjača u staklenki šutnje* by Tomislav Ribić<sup>1</sup>, written in Croatian standard and Kajkavian language.

## 2. The Culture of Remembrance and the Culture of Oblivion in the Context of (Traumatic) Postmodernism

As the topic encompasses Croatian region, it is necessary to take current social parametres dominating the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century into account. The state of crisis (the tense atmosphere which resulted in the war) increases a general *edistic* (*post-tistic*) atmosphere typical for the contemplation of the general state of time in the world. A traumatic decomposition of the old world (both in the political sense: the abandonment of the Yugoslav concept of the state and in everyday life practice: the disintegration of families, homes, property...).

By opening numerous new possibilities for organising and existing (the transition into capitalism, the emergence of new ideas – globalisation, democratisation, mass media and mass culture boom) such transition creates memory evaluation crisis.

*The society based on memories, all those institutions such as churches, schools, family and state, which guaranteed the passing of the values ceased to exist. The ideologies based on remembrance, the ideologies that cushioned the transition from past to future are obsolete ... /.../. What is more, the very way of historic perception have been so miraculously spread by media that memory, once the inheritance of the intimate experience, became replaced by the ephemeral membrane of actuality. (Nora 2007: 136)*

Considering such developments in Croatian area, when we put a special stress on what we remember and what we forget, two general, active conceptions of reflection on the topics become obvious:

- a) The defence of identity as historically and culturologically shaped uniqueness (where a “conservative” part of society plays an important role) largely resulted in the activation of amateur discourse<sup>2</sup> with a number of folklore elements and dedicated memories, that is, collective values which put an emphasis on

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<sup>1</sup> Ribić's novel deals with the history of the topics from Varaždin-Čakovec region, and it was created as a radially expanded story *Obiteljski album*, which was acclaimed on the literary competition Lapis Histriae 2021.

<sup>2</sup> “While the institutional literature actually does not know what to do with what is going on below the window, those years witnessed a different type of literature that grew spontaneously, like a creature from a swamp, something nobody wanted or expected. In the situation when each life is an interesting topic of a novel, no wonder numerous amateurs decided to put their war paths and adventures into novels.” (Pavičić 2004: 125).

the traditional concept of homeland<sup>3</sup> and nation<sup>4</sup>, strengthening the hope discourse of the majority of population.

- b) Another concept is an individualized story marked by a sceptical discourse, the story that does not accept the constraint of national frameworks, insignia and symbols, aware of the relativity of values, the volatility of continuity, and the necessity of historical transformation.

Both concepts simultaneously strengthen and weaken the places important to them, that is, they become divergent when striving to understand of what is important to tell (remember), different in a powerful ideological marking of values.

Memories and their valorisation are the materials taken over by institutions when they try to organise a social dialogue. Out of this need for a dialogue and its steering the foundation of institutions such as *Documenta – Centar za suočavanje s prošlošću* has been initiated.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Album Novel as the Form of Remembrance and Testimony

#### 3.1. Definition, Proposal

An album is a private construction of reality (*A photograph is our measure of the world*, Ugrešić 2002: 45) created by the screening through existent, mostly intimate material, which turns it into a distinctly autobiographically oriented witness. A story is created by an image, and in this case, because of the nature of material (literature), this is not necessarily a photograph in its technical sense (although it is often a part of the structure), but basically the visuality of discourse.

In order to define this form of autobiographical testimony,<sup>6</sup> which is textual in its essence, but which leans on a visual discourse (either by introducing a visual material – a photograph, or by „translating“ a photograph into a text) we propose it to be called album novel (*An album is a tangible autobiography, an autobiography is a verbal album*, Ugrešić 2002: 45). It is mainly recognizable by a specific usage

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<sup>3</sup> The definition of homeland as *spiritual inheritance* (John Paul II 2005: 64).

<sup>4</sup> “A nation exists through culture and for culture/.../culture exists like a form of the knowledge of the world and self awareness where the beauty was engraved from the very beginning” (ibid. 3, 84-86).

<sup>5</sup> *Documenta – the Centre for Facing the Past* was founded by the Centar za mir, nenasilje i ljudska prava Osijek, Centar za mirovne studije, Građanski odbor za ljudska prava, and Hrvatski helsinški odbor (The Centre for Peace, Non violence and Human Rights Osijek, Civil Committee for Human Rights, The Centre for Peace Studies, and Croatian Helsinki Committee) in 2004. The key motive of this endeavour was the experience of withholding and falsifying war crimes and other war occurrences from 1941 to 2000 which have influenced recent past, both the past of Yugoslavia and of Post-Yugoslav societies.

<sup>6</sup> Although we approach memoir literature here, the relation between autobiography and memoirs is beyond the scope of our analysis.

of techniques, such as „patching“, montage, compositional editing, and retouching of mimetic material by style, which surpasses a monologue and denotational nature of photography.

### **3. 2. The Modes of Recording Memories**

#### **3. 2. 1. Denotative Mode (Narrating by the Semantics of an Image)**

In the concept of proposed form of album novel, photographs/memories are often recorded in the “language of photography”<sup>7</sup> – as an essential motif/content (visually and textually), especially very common in amateur’s practice, whose aim is simply – capturing a moment. Bearing in mind that amateurism has no pretensions toward being avant-garde but demonstratory, that it seeks to define every single moment trying to retain a fleeting life and restore a broken time continuity, retain memory as a sequence of images where the testimony represents the observation of events. Despite the achieved (artistic) accomplishments, D. Ugrešić defines such approach with a self-ironic remark: *Both album and autobiography are in their very nature amateur activities doomed to fail and, from the beginning, to be seen as a second-class.* (Ugrešić 2002: 46), but, in the wider discourse, emphasizes their deep emotional and existential necessity and justifiability.

#### **b) Structural Mode (the Semantization of Form)**

The authors of a validated and recognizable writing style, in accordance with the belief that the art is a form and a way (that is, a system) of observation, narrate using “photographers’ language”. They promote the experience of fragmentation of reality and, through their specific compositional strategies, make their work individualized and distinct. In this sense, each or the authors “retouch” – in his or her original way – the initial mimetic material, creating their own stance by those shaping strategies.

D. Ugrešić, for example, creates fragmented text and uses a number of text codes (narration, discourse, retrospective, fabular flow, associativity, etc.) making

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<sup>7</sup> According to A Mijatović: the “photographers’ language” is a way of expression that acquires the procedures used in photography (its fragmentary nature, a focus on detail, the absence of the whole), and “the language of photography” relates to the system of meanings of the photography itself, that is, to the way a photograph “speaks” as a medium, the way it creates and organises the meaning. In other words, the photographic way of writing is a style similar to photography, and the language of photography is a semantic system of the photography itself (Mijatović 2003: 65) or, to put it simply: the language of photography proves that the totalisation is not possible (the emphasis on a fragment), and that the language of photography shows that the totalitariness appears as a construction – through framing and presentation.

her writing look like a vortex in which a recipient, completely individually, by the manner he/she reads, finds a way out, that is, its meaning.

A special place inside this paradigm belongs to the album novel by M. Kirin. In the structural sense it uses the visual sample concept in the most consistent way, that is, it is the album in its purest form – composed of a number of textualized photographs: visuality is, in accordance with the nature of literature as the art of words, turned into the text in the form of series of moments frozen in time. However, the exceptional poetic quality of the text shifts the photographs from the level of documents onto the level of a visualised emotion.

#### **4. The Ways Memories are Textualized**

##### **4. 1. Memory as an Emotion**

The texts recording memory as an emotion result in the form of an album in its conventional (zero) sense – as a series of suggestive images. In this category of memories recording there is a noticeable range from the proustian (memory as the reading of something denotatively marked – Ž. Čorak, M. Kirin, D. Ugrešić) to Camus/Meursault's way where a simplified concept of the character never comprises the effect of time, but only the sequence of events (T. Gromača and her character-narrator's first person narration).

D. Ugrešić, as an author inclined to a metapoetic discourse, qualifies her memory as a story *lead by the angel of nostalgia*, which clearly emphasizes that an emotional content, despite its polemical and discursive qualities, remains a basic layer of her stories (the paragraph *An Autobiography is a Serious and Ugly Genre*; Ugrešić 2008: 47).

Experience and emotion represent a filter in the transformation of photographs into a text in the works of Ž. Čorak. She shapes her story using solemn, majestic tone: the character does not grieve because of perishing, but shows respect (*/great-grandmother/ deserves to be remembered with respect*; Čorak 1991: 26). Visual and textual exist in a mutually complementary relation: the text is an intimate and emotional interpretation of a visual sample. Photographies record the state of the moment, fix a memory, and their effect can be felt as a testimony of reality and a personal experience of this reality.

Kirin's discourse is also a search for a form of authentic expression (of almost unspeakable) emotion (suggested by a frequent use of a stylistically powerful method – ellipsis, which is, in this case, used to the point of hypertrophy) and therefore belongs to an intuition realm. The dialectics of reality decomposition (war) and the construction of the novel (the creator's act of writing) results in the tense rhythm and the creation of additional meanings. Although the title (*Album*) suggests

visuality, the author consistently sticks to textual, that is, the presence of photographs can be observed on the level of minus-procedure: photographs are missing. What is more, the experiencing-memorising subject describes some lost photographs from his memory and some that have never been taken but constitute the fabric of his imagination, that is, they are a pure mental content.

The sequence of the parts suggests a viscous, discontinuous simultaneity of experiences which results in a synergistic effect of emotions and the text, in this way, becomes a sort of psychogram. The solitude of fragments and – in tune with that – the solitude of characters, their exclusion from the context, create an impression that time, no matter how well it is equipped with the signs necessary for ‘objective’ detecting, exists as an eternal present.

Gromača’s persistence in practicing indifference (producing a series of sentences in a zero stage of syntactic pattern: subject – predicate – object) in its construction denotes (a complete reserve) a character’s attitude towards the world. As with M. Kirin – her “photographs” are not visual, but rather textual units in which the sentences, Gromača’s consistently neutral intonations, are the signs of a psychological profiles of a simplified being that survives in a purely biological form.

Gromača’s character is also indifferent to memories, that is, to the category of the past, he/she does not remember, despite using past tense while writing. An expressive quality of the grammatical category of a narrative tense is neutralised by an excessive usage and the absence of the traces of events, their transmission from one period to another (which is the essence of remembering). In this way temporality, focusing on the past, does not bear an emotional charge.

#### 4. 2. Remembrance as Knowledge

Numerous texts record memory as remembrance-knowledge, pervade narrative with a lot of explanatory sequences. Such concept of the album novel perceives memory as the repository of a material which can be manipulated. In other words the elements of memory when arranged differently, by an individual “retouche”, instilling of personal concepts (personal ideology), can result in a changed (“forged”) interpretation of history.

D. Ugrešić demonstrates those “counterfeiting” effects of memory on the example of one of her characters – Mirek (*Muzej bezuvjetne predaje*), who is transformed into Miroslav by the alchemy of memory: a being-who-remembers replaces the original with a forgery created by the power of desire and need for a different reality

(*Gradually, my acquaintance embellished Mirek's photo and started to believe in it, the "retouche" become reality*; Ugrešić 2002: 34).

J. Horvat follows the similar track, defining biographies as *distorted images of reality* (Horvat 2009: 136). History is possible in the form of a chronological chart used for reading stories, but there are no unambiguous decoding systems, so decoding is (more or less acceptable) personal interpretation. In her subsequent effort to solve the issue D. Ugrešić sees traces/memories/tradition (despite general belief that they are objective and stable) as flexible and volatile: *the myths are for me/.../ they are disintegrated, upgraded, they mutate, adapt and mis-adapt/.../in a constant transitional-translation state*. (Ugrešić 2008: 227). The decoding skill is the matter of personal freedom and intellectual maturity.

J. Horvat sees history as a deliberately, artificially created construction. She is a contemplative builder who, by documenting certain content, also builds in her text a personal attitude (nationally-affirmative, but also inquisitive). She outgrows the commitment to reality and follows the inner imperatives of literary structure, which ignore differences between legends and (documented) history. The network of facts determined by reality (external factual material) is used as the support of arguments structure, that is, a memory material is rearranged in accordance with ethical and aesthetic attitude of the person who interprets it. The presence of a traditional author narrator who can give comments, judge, and so on, is not evident in her story.

As for Kirin, there is no trace of forgery since he does not even try to offer an original. In his world both reality and photographs have been destroyed in the war, so the influence memory has on falsification is not measurable. All that exists is an "artistic truth" – as distrustful, permanent and convincing as the text is well structured. The sense of the reality is not objective since there is no way to measure it.

## **5. The Models of Album Novel**

### **5. 1. A Defining (Zero) Form: Novel as a "Transcript" of an Album (the Testimony of Identity Created by the Linear Sequencing of Motifs)**

(Ž. Čorak, *Krhotine*; M. Kirin, *Album*; T. Gromača, *Crnac*)

The concept of *Krhotine* by Ž. Čorak, compatible with her professional profile (a curator and art historian), is shaped as an exhibition catalogue. Autobiographic facts (photos, documents from the family archive, and "little histories") are catalogued (set as pictures and commented) in a way which enables the reception of the

“big history”. The whole consists of a few sign levels: visual (the picture of an object) and textual (a description, comprises exact data and emotionally interpretative content, that is, of a constant overlapping/collaging of the levels: private-public, narrative – discursive, textual – visualised, non-existent (a real object) – existent (a photography). “The exhibits” are, like those ones on a well conceived exhibition, put into a predetermined frame, which is defined in the preface by the remark that *one cannot know the identity, let alone the difference* (Povodi i razlozi, Čorak 1991: 7-11), which motivates author’s emotional inscriptions. *Krhotine* are an intermedial exhibition, a spiritual imaginarium which is materialised by both words and pictures, that is, a “creation of history” by the word that is based on (still modernistic) faith in the power of word and its meaning. The records construct the history investing the authority of the author as a authenticated person who supports her intention (witnessing truth) by a multitude of documentary material (letters, manuscripts, exact dates, photographs) adding a multitude of the imaginative (emotions, convictions...) and, in this way, turning this history into a real personal story (therefore-not a reconstruction but a construction, a really small personal structure created by a subjective, private choice of material, not a history, but story).<sup>8</sup>

Dated in 1998, the preface presents the whole project as an affirmative voice in the national culture debate, but the year the text was published (1991 – the war period) actualizes the material rendering a new status to the book: the loss and oblivion shift from the personal into collectively, socially and existentially important category so the objects (photographs and texts) become precious testimonies of the world threatened to disappear into oblivion, that is, they are a replacement for the reality lost in a rescuing mission, which makes Čorak very close to M. Kirin’s ideas.

The discourse is shaped in a traditionally-modernistic manner, as an aesthetical and ethical respect for history. The choice of emotionally and aesthetically relevant objects is commented in an intimate, but also solemn and serious tone.<sup>9</sup> A kind of a measured nostalgia arises from the understanding of the final loss of the objects important as mentality and identity values. The inability to document a personal identity by factual material (the objects are lost) is compensated by memory – a discipline sacred for all those who *have grown up deprived of their own continuity and identity* (Čorak 1991: 11). A certain minus-procedure (the absence of an immediate material reality) intensifies the memory awareness as an important aspect of life (*the struggle between memory and oblivion/maybe even more than the struggle between good and evil/is a key problem of my existence*, Čorak 1991: 104). The awareness of the fluidity, constructedness and unreliability of history (*History is constantly constructed*, Čorak 1991: 50) does not diminish the authority of the

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<sup>8</sup> Biti, *Strano tijelo pripovijesti*, Zagreb, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> The author is “the priestess of little things” (Novak 2009.).

phenomenon that surpasses an individual (and inside of which those that consider that memory important), which is actually a society: an individual is a part of a family/nation and he/she is a holder (and a creator) of its qualities. There is a reciprocity of the relations: a community shapes an individual, the individual shapes the community. Life leaves traces worth remembering (for historians the traces are the essence of existence) and we decipher them in accordance with our competences and intentions.

Although remembrance in the author's view acquires the characteristics of sacred memories (in essence, the text is shaped as a memory of the sacred: family tradition), she is aware of the relativity of subjective "facts". Her album is a personal project focused on (a personal but relevant) evaluation of the culture she belongs to; in the situation it had been published, it acquired the meaning of the testimony of value with national features.<sup>10</sup> The perception of remembrance (objective – photograph) as an identity proof is built upon the awareness of the importance of life "trifles", visible only from the subjective approach. The echo of the big inside the small (memory is at the same time the problem of each individual – of a "little history", and a constructivistic play with facts, makes this book unique: it is modern although it seems traditional.<sup>11</sup> Memory as a value inside this concept, by following a modernistic pattern, proves itself as reliable, constructive, revitalising, in other words – as possible, valuable and important, in the same way as all other big ideas – culture, nation and continuities.<sup>12</sup>

Kirin's *Album* develops the text as a series of scenes/descriptions of chosen objects as well. However, on the level of the relation towards a referent reality, this text lacks the possibility to become testimonial and documentary. Namely, the memory lost its testimonial power because it functions as a phantom: it is fictional, not factual, because the reality it speaks about (it testifies?) does not exist. The textualized photographs are free from the material base because both reality and photographs have been lost (in a technological sense, literally) so the text leans on (unreliable) memory. What is more, some photographs have been fictive (or made up?, they are a pure mental content), which implies the possibility that every visual object potentially represents a photograph, and that our memory is a huge album, a storage which cannot make a difference between the factual and fictional. Kirin

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<sup>10</sup> Ž. Čorak was a culture consultant in the Presidential office (1993. – 1998.).

<sup>11</sup> S.P. Novak thinks that "*Krhotine*" still stands as the most important prose work of Croatian postmodernism." (ibid. 9).

<sup>12</sup> "In the contemporary society and culture, post-industrial society and post-modern culture/.../a big story has lost its credibility, no matter what way of unifying force we attach to it – speculative one or the story of liberation." (Lyotard 2005: 53).

deals with them (both with photographs as a mental recordings and as material documents, although lost) in the same way. He does not argue with possible approaches to reality: he is consistent in his concept, although always faithful to the experience peculiarities (the story is a dialogue with himself: the text is, although in a dialogue form, a soliloqui – “I” is both a sender and a recipient). In his concept, memory is – unlike Ž. Čorak’s concept of memory – unreliable and almost impossible. The images appear in continuity, but it is, if we see photographs as documents of reality, senseless because it has no foundation beyond the story. Therefore, we can read Kirin’s text as a fiction, the testimony of an imaginative concept, not of reality.

Gromača’s album is also a series of images, but more related to a dossier: the parts are glued together in a chronological order and in a “zero level” of stylisation. They have no intention to witness identity, they are simply witnesses of existence. A series of 138 situations-scenes records the world without description and reflexion.

*The cousin fulfilled his promise. The black box and a gray lid were with me in the orchard. I unfolded them there, slowly, in the same way my cousin unfolded white flesh in my panties. There was a long black ribbon with little holes at the edges, which would/.../ show people/.../standing in front of their houses, watching the person taking photos of them. (a fragment 21, pp 29).*

The images are static (although there is a slight hint of events), composed of a series of details in a spatial relationship, shaped by a string of independent, substantially complete sentences and, in this sense, they look like an album.

While Ž. Čorak models the story inside an evaluational category of sacred, M. Kirin does the same from the position of an existential vacuum which he fills in with a personal content. T. Gromača records the world in a desecrated and vulgarised modus. All three concepts overlap in the fact that the parts of memory are set into a compositional relation of fairly independent fragments which do not reconstruct reality, but rather suggest it (the understanding of suggested space is a matter of interpretation). The fragments (shreds) of Ž. Čorak are represented as the arguments which affirm the reality,<sup>13</sup> Kirin’s fragments are amalgams of real and fictional that add to the emptiness of reality, and Gromača uses a series of images/situations which do not prove anything, but represent a very neutral sequence of linearly and chronologically positioned observations (he shows the reality.)

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<sup>13</sup> “...that everything that exists is just a fragment or reflection of some other, bigger existence, and that the Truth is a central point in the poetics of this author.” (ibid. 9).

## 5. 2. A Transitional Form: The Problematisation of Time and Identity

(D. Ugrešić *Muzej bezuvjetne predaje*; M. Kirin, *Album*)

If testimonial power of memory is called into question – album novel gets transformed into several varieties of transitional forms. The fractures of temporal continuity break the connection between past and present (this connection is, for example, the basis of Ž. Čorak's discourse and concept), they move away from a particular moment's testimony and come closer to timelessness and, in this way, to the universality of the message.

In M. Kirin's work reality destroyed the belief in the meaning of existence (and maintenance) of the flows: the expressed subject is halted inside the space without time – one that goes forward, exists in a moment and which is the only thing capable of, with help of the poetic quality of the text, achieving the feeling of the eternity/timelessness (characteristic of poetry), but without emancipation from the atmosphere of a particular moment. Therefore, Kirin's text does not prove itself as a talk about reality, but as a talk about soul. Its system is not testimonial, but inquisitive and, for that reason, distinctly subjective: it relies upon a personal experience – it explains history to itself, that is, revises the content before it is definitely lost as a memory.

Although Kirin's text is a poentilistic construction focused on each point/photograph separately, there is a clear dynamic of phenomenon/object transformation through time: the effect of oblivion, that is, the deformity it provokes, is shown through a reflexive part of the discourse (authors comments:

*Remembrance does not hold anything, and an eye even less than this/.../ If, on the other hand, it might seem that memory still offers something, this is definitely the phantom of truth; Kirin 2001: 156).*

The past is the combination of everything demonstrable by the facts and the things that can be perceived individually, the amalgam of documents and imagination (the description of taken and untaken photographs), which do not have any relevant and definite difference between themselves.

Remembrance, as shown in the Kirin's text, represent a fluid storage of psychological material which is, in a Proustian way, activated by a motivating impulse, but without a material trigger: in this way M. Kirin problematise mental activities cliches:

*... the intimacy with those close to us becomes stronger when we spread photographs in front of us; then memory becomes alive /.../ But, what happens to the loss, is the memory loss strengthened when a photograph is lost... (Kirin 2002: 22).*

By the relativisation of material traces (photographs, data, documents), the remembrance, freed from the trace conditioning (let us call it a “pure memory”) exists as a psychological, ethical and aesthetic basis of an individual.

M. Kirin achieves the simultaneity/transtemporality through the choice of the present tense as a dominant tense form used for narration/description. Registering both existent (saved and lost) and non-existent (imagined) photographs in the album, and showing his scepticism towards the possibility of remembrance and witnessing (...*you cannot be sure, nothing is absolute any more*; Kirin 2001: 93). Kirin annuls the differences in the types of material and, by doing that, opens a free space for imagination, for transformational mental processes through which the subject achieves the balance of his system of privacy. Although each detail (temporarily) gets a central position in the memory process, the psychological space has both centre and the edges for M. Kirin. Kirin creates a special non-place, undefined by logic, but necessary in the practice of emotional existence for each unwanted individual/event (*You will continue to exist in a displaced place, not in the memory*; Kirin 2001: 182).

With its concept of solitude and by placing itself into the space with relativised values and menacing emptiness (*Actually, the God was the first to die, than the author and, after that, it was the turn for photograph to vanish.*; Kirin 2001: 168), Kirin's subject becomes closely related to D. Ugrešić's character although its immersion into emotion is more explicit. M. Kirin's text and his characters are vulnerably poetic, while D. Ugrešić develops defensive strategies – through an ironic mode. Her ironic, two-component text (particularity/reality and abstract/myth) retain an individual identity, but necessarily reflect – that is, explain – each other, simulating, or better, suggesting a logical reasoning. Distancing from the determination of temporal parameters, that is, reaching a supra-temporal component, is achieved by ironic, fairytale digressions: for example, by the image of an angel (it is shaped in accordance with the time of the story – it bears ideological and generational symbols of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the star, skate-board – but remains abstract, in the function of a symbol, not of the plot), by a magic feather (which, surprisingly, is not used for writing, but for erasing) and by a fairytale formulae (*however, I was there too, and had some wine*; Ugrešić 2002: 248), which are, of course, ironic.

The story, even the story about history, turns from a document into fiction. The events and the activity of remembrance, in their collapse in the chaotic world of the war reality, are constructed in a subjective and simultaneous way. The disintegration of meaningful relationships (the state of crisis) lends the remembrance the function of problematisation (not testimony) of the identity (an individual is

positioned as a seeker for a personal support and for his group which is supposed to represent authority), that is clearly visible in the idea of ultimate relativisation of the possibility to transfer reliable information through the time in essence or, at least, without their considerable deformation. The sign is not a stable fact: the remembrance is not a document, it is a personal construction of questionable credibility (*It may be this way, and it may be that way*; Ugrešić 2002: 276).

In her discourse from 1990s D. Ugrešić becomes sceptical about the credibility of memorative techniques: the remembrance does not define, but deform and is possible only as a fiction because of emotional share activation (co/remembrance, the building up with the character/narrator's comments) in the reception of its content. A memory/photograph stop the time flow and thus deform life and the perception of individuals because the individuals/ identities are a process, not a state.

### **5. 3. A Synchronistic Re-affirmation of Remembrance: The Synthesis of History and Myth/Legend**

(J. Horvat, *Az*; D. Ugrešić, *Baba Jaga je snijela jaje*)

In this concept the factual and imaginative time (the feature of a narrative discourse) and timelessness (mythical discourse) are positioned (cooperatively) into synchrony.

In the novel *Az* by J. Horvat the legend, as a form of historical testimony – because of the absence of a “more reliable” witness – is complemented with a rich factographical material which functions in a documentary way, and which is, at the same time utterly subjective. A historian voice, when it is included in the story (for example, the role of Ivan Đakon), testifies about a private mode (or shows scepticism towards objectivity), so that the discourse does not include an objective standpoint and the narration becomes a personal story: oral tradition (which J. Horvat, whatever its form is, accepts in a distinctly affirmative way<sup>14</sup>) is transformed in accordance with an interpreter's abilities (but without any scepticism). The history unfolds as a record of God's principles (the whole structure implies/ suggests that the world is created from a higher principle). The world is a logical and geometrical system (and the novel is structurally “geometrical”<sup>15</sup>). Although

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<sup>14</sup> The novel is shaped as a “unorthodox conception of an intermedial experimental novel /.../ Through philology as a medium the novel *Az* became not only the voice of heritage-identity story of the Croatian (and Slavic) medieval language-writing culture, but also away to activate a trigger for creating new structures in scientific and pseudoscientific, literary and pseudoliterary reality.” (Lukić 2002: 235-247).

<sup>15</sup> The compositional sequence and inserted schemes of graphemes, distinctly geometric, are a special, interesting theme.

the Genesis is remembered as a human structure (as a story we created), the original (authentic, God's act) record is not "lost in translation": the act of creation which is, more or less, successfully deciphered, so the stories about it are (to varying degrees) credible. However, the biographies are necessarily distorted images of reality because the translations are of the interpreter scale (*Each biography is untrue, we are free as long as we live*, Horvat 2009: 136).

J. Horvat's narrative concept is structured as a game which constructs an immanent truth, unlike the first two models which need an external support and argue with reality. *Az* – with its truth – establishes a correlation with the assumptions (and knowledge) of different areas which articulate the same topic (*Panonske legende* and historical records are equal sources.) However, *Az* does not debate with them, but feeds on them – they are a welcome material it will lean on (or won't). The story does not strive after a complete truth status, but in an individual and immanent way interprets the world, creates a "human truth", hoping to reach a reciprocity with the divine (*The Three of Us* /the bishop Gauderik, Anastazije the Librarian, Dean Ivan, note E. K./ *write a history, as you know. We lose a grip on how the history we create should sound...*; Horvat 2009: 151) using a variety of available material and creating certain lexicon novel.<sup>16</sup>

D. Ugrešić's opus, if observed in continuity from 1990s to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (the novel *Baba Jaga je snijela jaje*), shows the development course of examining what role the memory plays in the story about ourselves and about our reality. The state of chaos, confirmed in the 1990s, from the babajagologic perspective of the 0s, start to transform itself into more stable systems. At some moments D. Ugrešić applies the solutions related to those of J. Horvat: amalgamates myth and reality, that is, interprets particular life situations based on the general concept of myth and creates the integrational principle of the structure (the archetype as a matrix which serves to turn a particular story into variation on a theme) thus ensuring the stability of a dissipated concept and the individuals involved (Baba Jaga – the archetype of an old woman, the embodiment of tradition and experience). Different types of the discourse (mythical, mimetic and narrative<sup>17</sup>) are integrated quite loosely so that they exist as separate stories/types of discourse, and its

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<sup>16</sup> See: Milorad Pavić, 1984: *Hazarski rečnik: Roman-leksikon u 100.000 reči*, Beograd: Prosveta/ *Dictionary of the Khazars: Lexicon-Novel in 100.000 words*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group (Penguin Random House), NY.

<sup>17</sup> "The novel *Baba Jaga je snijela jaje* represents both a genre turn in Dubravka Ugrešić's opus and its poetic constant. The poetics of postmodernist reappraisal of some 'lower', popular literary forms (detective novels, romantic novels) in this novel spreads in the spaces of folk imagination." (Ryznar 2010: 314).

typical “two-component” quality (irony), so characteristic for Ugrešić, is achieved by a mutual collision: although the parts are self-sufficient and independent, the whole structure is inevitably revelation of one in the other, which is explicitly suggested by the author’s explanations in the *Napomene* (Ugrešić 2008: 243).

In this way, the history reminder gets sense again (even “higher” one, because myths/legends bring in timelessness, universality into a specific event) instead of being spent on the particularity of specific unique situations.

The associations of myth/legendary connotations enable the definition of the identity by combining the factual, something verifiable by experience (historically) – but, at the same time, disputable (that is, unreliable) on the one hand, and oral material in which the remembrance is recorded as sacred (mythical), on the other hand. The particular (a specific situation, person, event) is analysed through the mythical pattern of eternity/trans temporality (universally) is only a situational variation on the general theme.

From that standpoint, a final liberalisation and equalisation of values (important for the previous concept) can be seen as post-modernist testing of forms possibilities, and an actual idea as a declaration of a need to stabilize the values, and to integrate remembrance as a (relatively) reliable insight into particular issues.

## 6. Actualisation: A Recent Production, Kajkavian Expression

*Moč življenja*, the novel by P. Sabolek, enters the space of album novel in multiple ways: the most obvious one being the method of photographs insertion. However, the textual discourse has also gone through structural changes because of its focus on the image/scene taken from the reality. In essence, the novel can be defined by terminology applicable to an autobiography – as a confessional genre whose focus (certain level) of identity is the author – the character – the expressed subject. In this case the material is distinctly transformed into narrative code, into a story (the plot, characters, motivations, temporal and causal continuity of events), or better to say – into a series of stories connected by a frame (people, space), so that it gets transformed into a form of novel. The character-narrator is more like a witness of some selected events/images than the actor. Photographic material incorporated into the text is illustrative, denotative, on the level of the basic information almost redundant, but since it is about the old world, nonexistent (and local) reality, it is useful (for the insiders as an emotional stimulation, and for those uninformed as a source of information). The photographs unburden the text from the need of the setting description (the most common motif is the exterior – the country urbanism). The material is mostly of an ethnographic kind.

*I was always welcome at the church on Saturday evenings to assist in its preparation—more precisely, in cleaning it. The women washed the vases, filled them with clean water, and arranged fresh lilies and other flowers in them. They also tended the flowering shrubs in the churchyard, beneath which we children, under their supervision, removed thorns and collected litter. (accompanied by a photograph of the church organ; Sabolek 2024: 30)*

Through the narrative segments, the complete stories, the characters witness local/endemic forms of co-existence (sisterhood, courtship, the customs around St Nicholas day, religious feast), not in the form of an essay but as a particular situation. The narrative voice, the maker of the material and the determiner of the frame (the introductory remarks on the time and circumstances), has positioned itself beyond the “image”: the person in the image is of the earlier age – one who lives, remembers, but very often unable to understand things that have happened. That is why such positioning sometimes results in a comic misunderstandings. The characters are retouched into “sepia-like” visually-acoustic experiences: they are defined by the language as the branches of a mentality spacially-temporal basis. The characters themselves are the interpreters of the situations (the plot, misunderstandings) – not as separate entities, but in a mutual complement (in a kind of oral authority of the group), who are given some other (testimonial) replicas, with the condition that the final result is not explicit as a moral, but is created by the synergistic effects of characters’ replicas. The authority of the group is also confirmed by a kind of photograph: namely, there is no individual portrait, but they are all the representations of a group gathered around an event (sisterhood, harvest, funeral, flood, ploughing).

In the novel *Kornjača u staklenki šutnje* by T. Ribić the photographs, since he is primarily dealing with people (the events are rather personal and from a very painful state expressed moments of biographical interlocking), the context of the story/event which, documented graphically and extremely unambiguously, enables the expressed subjects to free themselves from citing and structuring of the fact and to shift from the discourse of describing themselves and the world as Personae (in a psychoanalytical sense) onto the discovery of the shadow in its complexity (the Second, Third). Ribić obviously wants the reader to experience the story with his/her body (as well) and, therefore, creates the testimonial person as an element which gathers this “dispersed” material of the inner experience. The photographs of people (mostly their portraits) and other objects (the photographs of documents) are a strong witness of reality: their authenticity is suggested by the acceptance without any “corrections” (the weathered photographs, the lines as a sign they were folded – the moments that are technically solvable, but which the author obviously wants to be shown; in the textual part, the documentary character lies

in the temporal specification of events, which are verifiable and therefore accepted as truth in their reception, and are also confirmed by photographs). The textual parts are fictional – the author is present in them on the stylistic level and inscribed in a very personal way: by merging of an extreme documentation/determination by the reality and with the same power of imagination, which is in the function of revealing different variety of subjects.

The example of documentarism:

*In the year 1938, I was enrolled into the first form of Državna I. Mješovita pučka škola (The First Mixed Primary State School) which was called Škola Kraljice Marije (The School of the Queen Maria). There I went to the children's daycare from 1937, and after that, into the first and second form of primary school. On the twenty-fifth of February 1939, my brother Mladen, who we called Pubica, came into this world.*

*In the spring of 1940 my mother concluded we'd had enough of tenancy. We set off to inspect houses in Varaždin. My mum liked the house in Optujska street... (Ribić 2006, expected)*

An example of a phantasmagoric internal monologue:

*A demon is nesting inside me. I feel it's wantoning and sucking life from me, opening the desert of solitude, prodding me with his skeleton, drawing tatoos on my hand with a rusty tin of a sardine can. The sinkholes of my body are shivering. My insides are a green wave of gloom. My thoughts are swirling, the words are choking. I don't feel closeness, warmth. The loneliness is a black tooth of time. Imprisoned, I am going crazy, here in the world of thieves, thugs, the sea of iciness has overflowed me. (Ribić 2006, expected)*

Ribić deeply involves us and enables us a very emotional experience of the situation he has been caught in by roaming of his restless consciousness like a subterranean river which appears in some very different types of structuring.

His individuals exist in visual (the photographs) and textual images (narration, meditation, the stream of consciousness). Since they are weird, the images are deranged too. It often happens that in some special situations, when the classical order of the world (*Persona*) weakens and the cover cracks (the fragments from the prison, hospital, from the context of pain, illness, fever, the disintegration of an individual), the deeper layers which intertwine and overlap into the grotesque of the surrealist structure become visible through the cracks and, in this way, this structural mosaic creates symbolic, sublexical messages.

Those two recent novels are also on the trail of what we mentioned in the “theoretical” part of the essay as dominant types of album novel phenomenon: *Moć življenja* is denotative, descriptive demonstrative, enters the real world, it is referent; *Kornjača u staklenki šutnje* by connoting it, speaks in structures, simulates dynamics, physical and intellectual experience, the narration is factual and reductive (not

explanatory, but suggestive), it results in the coherence of the parts which sometimes enter in the depth of personal spaces of the created individuals in a whirlwind/centripetal way.

## 7. Summary

### **The Flow from the end of the History to its Recovery**

In the period of Croatia history this research focuses on (from the 1980s to the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century) the thematized novels have experimented with different possibilities of creating/practicing remembrance, and none of the approaches predicted their testimonial potential. However, there is also no approach which denied their testimonial abilities.

Unlike in the 1990s, when an ideologically clear message was the imperative of the day, by a considerable credit of dissidents voices (spatial and poetical) which put “the One” into perspective (in a denotative way, as a verbalised message – the early works of D. Ugrešić), in the late 1990s and at the turn of the century, first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there appeared some hermetic systems which communicate by their structure – by a synchronic combination of numerous paradigms (a genre interference), which require decipherment of sub/superlexic levels of the text (J. Horvat, later D. Ugrešić).

The research shows that, in some basic form, the system can be set as a duality, with a number of individual gradients. Album novel thus appears as

- a) as an album novel in the sense of denotative testimony (T. Gromača, Ž. Čorak, P. Sabolek)
- b) as an album novel in the sense of testifying by its construction (D. Ugrešić, M. Kirin, J. Horvat, T. Ribić).

The parametres necessary for the determination of the variants have already been analysed together with thematised novels which construct very specific authoring models by documenting flexibility and varieties of possible approaches to narrative-remembering literary practice.

*(Translated by Alma Keser Brozović)*

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## ROMAN ALBUM: FORSIRANJE SJEĆANJA

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### Sažetak

*Rad istražuje način funkcioniranja pamćenja/sjećanja u raznovrsnim društvenim (i osobnim) trenucima (ratno i poslijeratno razdoblje, kriza, potreba za samodefiniranjem) te razmatra dijalektički odnos između kulture sjećanja i kulture zaborava. U akordima postmodernizma kao širokog konteksta i u depresiji lokalne ratne atmosfere pojavili su se novi narativni oblici, koji nastoje definirati probleme trenutka (ponajprije – 80-ih i 90-ih god 20. st. – nacionalni, ali i individualni identitet: Ž. Čorak, D. Ugrešić, J. Horvat, M. Kirin), za koji predlažemo žanrovsku odrednicu roman album. Teorijsko promišljanje ovog oblika kao posebne teme držimo opravdanim zbog zamijećenog kontinuiteta srodne produkcije, iz koje izdvajamo recentne romane (20-e god 21. st.) pisane na kajkavskome jeziku (P. Sabolek, T. Ribić). Diskurzivni prostor naznačenog oblika obuhvaća, s jedne strane, diskurs nade utemeljen na autoritetu tradicije, a s druge diskurs skepticizma, na tragu kritičara postmodernizma (Lyotard, Derrida).*

*Ključne riječi: identitet; kajkavski idiom; kultura sjećanja, sinkronicitet; standardni hrvatski jezik*