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THE CULTURE OF LAUGHTER, THE CULTURE OF TEARS: SEPTEMBER 11th EVENTS ECHOED ON THE INTERNET

The author, following the already established anthropology of the Internet (or email being a part of the Internet) which observes these phenomena as a contemporary and widespread form of communication, understands both written and visual material that circles through email as a reflection of the popular culture in a world engaged in the process of globalisation through media which enable instant transfer of information from one corner of the world to the other. She is investigating almost immediate email responses (however, for the purpose of this paper only the humorous ones) to the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York City, which took place on 11th September, and which arrived to Croatia merely a day or two after the event, dividing them into the global and the local ones. Those humorous correspondence is being interpreted as a Bahtinesque answer to the tragic events, as well as a popular and group ironical (and self-ironical) distance from the horrifying reality.

Key-words: the Internet, email, humour

Why this study?

Quite accidentally, it was the Internet that provided me with the very first information on the September 11th events. That Tuesday, late afternoon, I was sitting in my office, working, when a message from a friend from Zagreb came in. It was a short, alarming question: "Have you seen what happened in New York? And in Washington? Turn on the TV now!". Since there's no TV set in my office, I went online and tried to reach the CNN site, which was impossible to connect to. So were several other international news sites, and after fifteen minutes of failed attempts to connect to any of them, I tried to find out what had happened on some Croatian sites. "America under attack!", "WTC towers destroyed", "Two planes crash into

WTC, one in Pentagon", "Thousands killed in terrorist attacks",[1] those were the first headlines reporting on the terrible terrorist attacks. Getting informed was merely the first role the Internet played here. The next one was contacting my friends and colleagues in New York City by email, to make sure they were all right. Surprisingly enough, they all responded within an hour, and during the following weeks the news web sites and email were — besides the satellite television networks — the main and the fastest, although not always the most reliable source of information on the September 11th terrorist attacks, as well as on the subsequent events and reactions by both American and international politicians. Besides having broadcast the news itself — two hijacked airplanes having crashed into the WTC buildings in New York City and one in Pentagon[2] — the news sites have spent the next couple of days speculating on two things: who was behind this attack and how many people were killed. Both issues raised many questions — besides mentioning Bin Laden[3] as a prime suspect, there were a lot of conspiracy theories to be found even on official news sites, and the number of the dead varied between 50 000 on the first day to

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[1] I am referring to www.klik.hr, www.vip.hr and www.hinet.hr. These are the addresses of starting pages of big Croatian internet providers that I cite in this paper. The titles, together with other non-English texts, have been translated into English by the author.

[2] Immanuel Wallerstein introduces the analysis of the attacks with a brief account of what happened: "On September 11, 2001, the whole world watched a human tragedy and a great drama, and everyone was fixated on it. In the U.S., four commercial airliners were hijacked in the early morning. The hijackers numbered 4-5 persons in each plane. Armed with knives, and having at least one person among them capable of piloting the plane (at least once it was in the air), the hijackers took over the planes, ousted (or killed) the pilots and directed the planes on suicide missions. Three of the planes hit their targets: the two towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington. Given both the amount of fuel aboard and the technical knowledge to know at which height the planes should hit the buildings, the hijackers managed to destroy completely the two towers and carve a big hole in the Pentagon. As of now, there are probably more than 5000 dead (no one has an exact figure) and many more hurt and traumatized" (Wallerstein 2001a).

[3] Describing Bin Laden, a BBC online article said: "Osama Bin Laden is both one of the CIA's most wanted men, and a hero for many young people in the Arab world. He and his associates are being sought by the US on charges of international terrorism, including in connection with the 1998 bombing of American embassies in Africa and this year's attack on the USS Cole in Yemen. (...) Mr Bin Laden, an immensely wealthy and private man, has been granted a safe haven by Afghanistan's ruling Taliban movement. During his time in hiding, he has called for a holy war against the US, and for the killing of Americans and Jews. He is reported to be able to rally around him up to 3,000 fighters. He is also suspected of helping to set up Islamic training centres to prepare soldiers to fight in Chechnya and other parts of the former Soviet Union. (...) Terrorism experts say Mr Bin Laden has been using his millions to fund attacks against the US. The US State Department calls him 'one of the most significant sponsors of Islamic extremist activities in the world today'. According to the US, Mr Bin Laden was involved in at least three major attacks — the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the 1996 killing of 19 US soldiers in Saudi Arabia, and the 1998 bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. (...) The few outsiders who have met Osama Bin Laden describe him as modest, almost shy. He rarely gives interviews. He is believed to be in his 40s, and to have at least three wives" (Who is Osama Bin Laden, 11 September, 2001).

5 000, which was an estimation made a week later. However, both issues have started an avalanche of widespread reactions circulated through the Internet. As an average internet user, I received dozens of the attack-related emails daily, and as an anthropologist, surprised by the quick, often intelligent and even more often witty creations by the anonymous internet users, I started wondering how do the mechanisms of the popular, widespread and global reactions to such an event function. In this paper, I will focus on the internet-mediated responses to the September 11th events: the attack-related humour that circulated through email, being — — unlike the majority of homepages — the fastest in response and the most interactive dimension of the Internet.

The Internet, part one: Placeless? Global? Affordable?

The most frequent, and the most common misconceptions about the Internet are that it is placeless, global and affordable. Those three beliefs are highly interconnected and for this reason it would be necessary to look into the very concept of the Internet and try to present at least some of the academic discussions and scholarly dilemmas connected to this controversial topic. As noted by Miller and Slater in their book on the Internet and Trinidadians, "contrary to the first generation of Internet literature, the Internet is not a monolithic or placeless 'cyberspace': rather, it is numerous new technologies, used by diverse people, in diverse real--world locations" (Miller & Slater 2000:1). Writing about further possible directions in investiganting the Internet, they say that what should be studied is "how Internet technologies are being understood and assimilated somewhere in particular" (ibid.:1). This is exactly the way I have investigated the Internet in this study, especially in its second part. Although the access to the Internet and its contents is not limited by space, it should be noted that its contents do result from the efforts of real people who live in real, defined places, to contribute to this 'global' media by creating their homepages, participating in on-line discussions and chatrooms or sending emails, and should be observed as such. The quality of the Internet that used to be called *placeless* changed its name (and, in part, its contents) into *virtuality* or *cyberspace*. "The Internet is more like a social space than a thing", claims Poster, defining it further as "a series of relations which constitute an electronic geography" (1996:205). This would be the most accurate definition for the purpose of this study. There have been numerous scholarly discussions on these terms, and if one belongs to the privileged class of Internet users, it is easy to get carried away and enthusiastically claim that "it is a whole new culture in its beginnings, characterised by the new and changed understanding of reality", that "virtuality increasingly influences our reality, supplements it and even replaces it" and that "it could be said that influences of the cyberspace on our everyday life should not be underestimated" (Todtenhaupt 1997:105). While it indeed *is* a whole new culture, most

authors would not agree with the statement that today the Internet is present to that extant that it would influence everyday lives of people even in rich countries around the globe, not to speak of the whole regions and even continents where it would take decades for the Internet culture to start playing any role at all — and certainly, the 'real life' culture influences the culture of/on the Internet in return, or perhaps even stronger, as we shall see later on in this paper.

Although it is not usual for the Internet studies to engage into detailed discussions of the globalisation, I will nevertheless address the issue to the point necessary for better understanding of the topic. Defined as a series of **ongoing** and **ever changing** processes "operating on a worldwide scale, which cut across national boundaries, integrating and connecting communities and organizations in new space-time combinations, making the world objectively and in the experience of people, more interconnected" (Van Elteren 1996:54), when talking about globalisation it is important to note that there is no *global* culture as a word of a fixed meaning. As Long argues, "we should not be seduced into believing that globalisation has a uniform impact everywhere. To do so would be to fall into the same trap as previous attempts at theorization, namely that of formulating a general (or universal) theory that seeks to identify certain 'driving forces' (...), 'prime movers' (...), or 'cultural facilitators' (...) of change" (Long 1996:37). Different scholars say it with different words: whereas Arjun Appadurai speaks of the need for global capitalism to be thought of in terms of flows rather than binary positionalities (centre versus periphery) and divides identities into five different global cultural flows (ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes and ideoscapes) (cf. Appadurai 1996), Long sees "global *orders* whose building blocks are groups and associations set within multiple and overlapping networks of power. These various networks are constantly reordering themselves in the face of changing global conditions" (Long 1996:41). One way or another, it all comes down to the extremely complex network of simultaneous processes which take place with different intensity in different parts of the world: what we may call *global* is a multitude of cultural elements that are at one point of time more or less important or prominent than other elements, and these elements are constantly being created, changed or even abolished (cf. Kalapoš 2000a). Although (nation-)states remain important to a certain extent, the processes of globalisation have an ambiguous way of playing with their significance: "We use 'globalization' instead of 'internationalization' since the latter conjures up the idea of 'inter nation--state' relations, thereby suggesting that the constituent parts are composed of nation-states. Such a view is clearly too restrictive" (Long 1996:49). Appadurai discusses globalisation through migration and media that produce instability which he sees as productive and positive, offering his view of the way lifestyles, popular culture or self-representation circulate internationally, at the same time employing imagination as the key

component of the new global order (cf. Appadurai 1996). Putting the topic of migration aside, I would agree with the argument that can be found throughout his essays, about media having democratized the imaginagion and thus making it a daily activity, not restricted to artistic or social elites as in previous centuries (cf. Appadurai 1996). Imagination and democratization take the topic to the level of everyday culture and ordinary people — however, it should not be idealized and we should not be led into believing that the imagination of the ordinary people, be it artistic, musical or any other kind, is what creates or strongly influences the global processes. I cannot emphasize enough the claim which Rajko Muršič wrote in one of his essays: "I have to make it clear that I do not want to overemphasise the role of popular culture in contemporary historical processes. History is a highly complex exchange of people, their ideas and the material results of their actions. It is permanently (re)created at the everyday level and at the level of great events (the notion of "history" in the strict sense)" (Muršič 1999:140).

Having the above mentioned in mind, when studying "global" culture, it should not be about "global" culture, "but about the concepts that culture generates, concepts that are themselves related in more or less complex ways to other concepts associated with other practices, and so on" (Surin 1997:202). In other words, although the process of globalisation has been taking place for decades, there is no *global* culture as its fixed and precisely defined result, nor is what we call *global* culture evenly distributed around the globe: financial and technical means are the prerequisite of participation into the process of globalisation and there are hundreds of millions of people in the world who do not have access to even basic education, who are likely to die of a disease, hunger or in a war. What may seem as a part of everyday life in Western countries is almost completely unknown in some other parts of the world, be it McDonald's restaurants, Coca-Cola, MTV, sushi, Mexican soap operas or the Internet (Kalapoš 2000a:68; cf. Lang 1996). However, the elements of culture or events that are considered to be global almost as a rule have their local responses within the cultures that have at least partial access to the "global" culture, sometimes called *glocalisation* (cf. Bausinger 2001 and Maase 1998). The process of globalisation is indeed the one that reorganizes global capitalism, but also re-defines the notion of the nation-state. These relationships between the global and the local will be discussed in detail later in the paper.

This brings us to the accessibility of the Internet: as argued by Lockard, "cyberspace is expensive space. True believers who tout the Internet as democracy actualized, as an electronic town hall meeting, live with class blinders in a muddle of self-delusion. (...) Access to cyberspace is effectively divided between self-financed, institutionally financed, and unprotected non-access. Private access requires significant disposable income to cover computer capitalization and the continuing outlays of phone bills, repair of maintenance-intensive equipment, and periodic

recapitalization. For those whose employers pick up the tab, the cost arrives in the form of hierarchical workplaces and limited personal autonomy on the networks. Others — university students, for example — receive access as a temporary, institutionally sponsored privilege that comes with a 'keep-up-with-the-cutting-edge' education. Nonetheless cyberspace has arrived virtually unchallenged as a democratic myth, a fresh field for participatory citizenship. (...) Access capital is the poll tax for would-be virtual citizens" (Lockard 1996:220). It is thus indisputable that the Internet, although being generally regarded as a *global* cultural good, is not equally available either in each country of the world, or to members of different social strata within one country, which is an important information to be kept in mind when studying *any* aspect of the Internet: its users are most frequently spatially situated in rich or at least not the poorest countries of the world, and they tend to be the minority within these countries: the ones who, as Lockard puts it, either have an Internet access connected to their social and/or professional status or dispose of enough financial means for the individual use.

The Internet, part two: Email

Unless one uses some of the free email services and creates a false identity, email is one of the most reliable means of the Internet communication as far as the identity of the communicators — of both the sender and the receiver — is concerned. Usually, we get email from friends or colleagues, and if we get fun emails or other messages sent as chain-letters, we are most often able to trace the way they came into our inboxes, however long this way might be. Unlike the other forms of the Internet communication, such as forums, ICQ or chats, where users only exceptionally know other users in person, the main characteristic of email communication is that we do know people from whom we receive and to whom we send messages. Therefore, it is fair to assume that the email users would be much more careful about what they send and to whom, especially when the contents belong to a borderline category, be it sick humour, erotica or something else. Another thing — not less important — that has to be taken into consideration when discussing email communication is that, although the identities usually are established in the real life situations, there still is a possibility for the parties involved in the email communication to use this medium as a means of *identity*, or perhaps it would be better to say, as a means of their *image* construction. In other words, a very private person may write and send out very personal emails and someone who is considered to lack their sense of humour may regularly send jokes and cartoons.[4] What I have observed here — and I would like to emphasize that
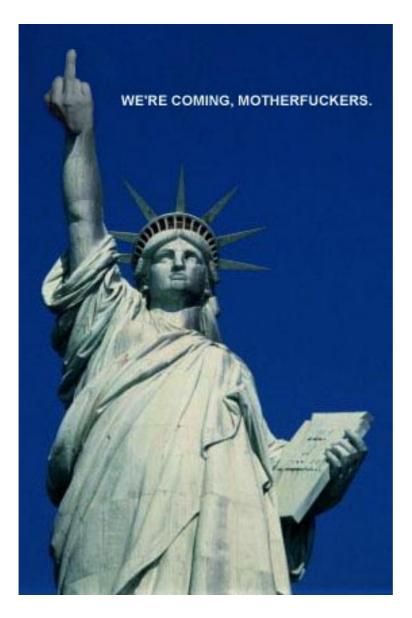
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[4] Another example of humour in computer-mediated communication (CMC) is a study by Nancy K. Baym (s.a.), who looked into a Usenet newsgroup which discusses soap operas, and argues that humour can be accomplished in CMC and can be critical to creating social meaning on-line.

this segment of the research is in part very self-reflective — were not personal notes or commentaries connected to the September 11th events that people wrote to each other, but circulation of humorous, primarily visual, materials referring to the attacks. For the purpose of this paper and in order to be able to illustrate the quick and interested *local* response to these attacks, I am discussing **strictly the communication to and from Croatian email addresses**. Having all these criteria in mind, the materials sent could roughly be divided in three groups, and the examples shown here are, the same as any other ethnographic material, chosen by the researcher as the representative examples of the topic in question. The first group will be only briefly mentioned, and the latter two are going to be discussed into detail. **The first group** was comprised of emails that were sent only during the first week following the attacks, and were primarily presenting conspiracy theories. They are mentioned here because they built a large part of the post-September 11th correspondence; however, they are not analysed in this paper. Namely, until September 11th, 2001, the destruction of New York City and the landmarks of Western civilization in general was only shown in science fiction, thriller or action films, which made the very concept of its realization literally unbelievable. The reaction was, therefore, disbelief and the very first emails referring to the attacks tried to find any explanation as to the origin of the attackers or the motifs — even the supernatural ones. For example, a photo of one of the WTC towers going up in flames with circled part of smoke resembling the devil made quite a few rounds — in a later version, it even came with the CNN logo in the corner, which should have given the claim that the attack was the deed of the devil more credibility. Another creepy email was often sent — the number of flights of the hijacked planes, together with the date of the attack, displayed in a different computer font spelled out a frightening combination of skulls, crosses and airplanes. These are obvious examples of the need to rationalize events that cannot be grasped at first — even in a country like Croatia that had no obvious connection with the attacks.

After the first shock was over, and following the development of the international political discourse, emails started changing their tone from conspiracy theories to topics such as Osama Bin Laden, Arabs in general, American president George W Bush and the symbols of American culture in general. **This second group** would therefore be comprised of humorous emails connected to the attacks, and their main characteristic would be their *globality* — they are all written in English, they feature well known landmarks, people or symbols, they can be all found on international web sites and they came to Croatian email addresses from abroad. Some of them contemplated what the world would look like "if the Arabs win", and witty computer users created pictures of the New York skyline with prominent silhouettes of mosque towers, put veil on the Statue of Liberty's head or placed the American president in an unambiguous pose of sexual intercourse with Osama Bin Laden.

Some commercial symbols of American consumer culture were also mocked: Osama Bin Laden was pictured wearing an "I love NY" T-shirt and collecting frequent-flyer miles, a new version of the Microsoft Flight Stimulator Programme was created with Osama Bin Laden's photo in the corner, a hamburger with a taliban-like beard was pictured under the caption "McLaden", and the Nike's famous motto "Just do it!" was said to be the new slogan of the talibans. Others created new versions of the WTC towers or the Statue of Liberty, showing the enemy the middle finger.

After the military action in Afghanistan had started, the topic of the email humour has again changed, and the main theme was the war with the Taliban regime together with its expected defeat. The Americans were, now already weeks into the attacks, pictured as the unquestioned winners, and one of the most ironic pictures illustrating possible results of the American victory is the one showing the whole territory of Afghanistan as a giant plain with McDonald's restaurants and empty parking space, at the same time believing in American supremacy and ironizing the possible effects of American colonization of the gained territory.

And as the Taliban regime became increasingly weaker, the humour turned to mock both Osama Bin Laden and the Arabic culture per se, sometimes even making fun of truly disturbing issues, like the position of women in Afghanistan.

As we can see, political corectness has entirely disappeared from humour, and open war with the Taliban government in Afghanistan made it possible to openly insult members of a whole religion, their customs, way of life, clothes, etc.

Simultaneously with the "war against terrorism", as it was called in the media, American patriotism was often discussed. The most famous icons of the American popular culture, in the first instance actors and musicians, were giving out patriotic statements, crying in public and expressing their love for the nation. This wave of patriotism has also gained an ironic email reaction, one of the most frequent ones to travel through the Internet and the ultimate sign of self-irony being advertisement for the so-called "Patriotic Pads", hygienic pads in white and blue, saying "you add the red".

And finally, we come to **the third group**, which would be the local response to the attacks: the usual main characters of local jokes, Mujo and Haso,[5] were placed in New York City and took part in the September 11th events in their own way. In one of the jokes, Mujo and Haso are aboard the plane heading for New York City. Haso dares Mujo by saying "I bet you can't get into the cockpit and fly this plane!", and Mujo answers "Who, me?" Another joke that found its way in the email communication is the one in which Mujo, after being on the plane that crashed into the WTC tower, gets up on his feet, brushes off the dust from his jacket, looks up and, disappointed, says: "I thought New York would have a better airport". Furthermore, two illustrations were making rounds through email. The first one looked like newspaper page, whose headline said "Exclusive news! The destroyer of the Twin Towers in New York discovered! It was Božo K., a

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[5] They are the characters of the jokes that are supposed to picture stupidity and naivety at the same time. The exact same jokes are being told all around the globe, with other ethnic groups as targets, naming the characters with typical ethnic names. Ethnic group targeted in case of Mujo and Haso are the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina (not necessarily Muslims, although their names would indicate so).

government minister in a small Balkan state! Reason for destruction: illegal building". The wit of this joke was that the Croatian Minister of Environment and Building, Mr Božo Kovačević, was notorious for his fight against buildings built with no proper permits and documents as he initialed project in which numerous illegaly built houses and other objects were destroyed. And the final one pictured Mujo, paragliding in direction of the highest skyscraper in Zagreb. The caption said: "Mujo in a terrorist attack of Zagreb. Outcome: one dead".

Of course, those were merely several selected pictures or jokes that found their way to presumably thousands — perhaps millions — of internet users. Their authors are anonymous and the medium used for their dissemination made them a part of contemporary popular culture, not only American, but international.

Closing thoughts — thinking out loud

Although many authors suggest that the Internet opens up the possibilities for the development and maintenance of distance transcending relationships, it is also important to note that computer-mediated communication (CMC) can contribute to building both one-to-one and group relations (cf. Smith 1999:87), regardless of the spatial relations of the communicators. The email communication shows the need of anonymous authors to use their creativity and, with the help of technology first produce and then transmit their contribution to or comment on a topic of interest. Humour is very important element here — in such a case,

it should be understood as a violation of the reality principle (reality principle being defined as all kinds of knowledge about the world) (cf. Liu 1995). Of course, in the case of the September 11th related humour studied here, it goes way beyond violating the reality principle — it can be easily defined as sick humour, which "proliferates after social tragedies such as the explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger*. (...) Sick humor (...) makes fun of death, disease, deformity, and the handicapped. (...) Such jokes reliably accompany significant disasters, tragedies, or threats to human welfare, whether temporary or longstanding." (Herzog & Bush 1994:323, 324). Furthermore, Herzog and Bush showed in their research that people with higher education and broader tastes in humour would be likely to openly admit enjoyment of sick humour (Herzog & Bush 1994:327), which coincides with authors arguing in favour of the claim that the Internet access is primarily the privilege of highly educated professionals, of the middle-classes and of the members of academia (cf. Lockard 1996), thus explaining the high popularity of the above described emails. As Fry claims, "no person or group of persons has been found to be without a sense of humor, except on a temporary basis because of some dire personal or national tragedy which for the time being has caused an eclipse of humor. (...) Rather than being regarded as learned, as it was presiously, humor is now considered to be a genetic, biologic characteristic of the human race" (1994:111). Therefore, I tend to interpret those humorous approaches to and comments on the September 11th events not as an act of ill will or the unwillingness to be sympathetic with the suffering. On the contrary, just as Bahtin (1978) explains mocking the medieval and church authorities in the paintings by Rabelais to be a popular reaction to the serious political and social events of the period, I tend to view the engagement in attack-related humour as distancing oneself from the problematic and potentially distructive reality of everyday life and taking refuge in *the culture of laughter* — instead living within a culture of f/t-ears.[6] Namely, "it is appropriate to conclude that humor, mirth and laughter are on the side of contributing positively to the maintenance of health and survival, from the standpoint of their physiologic effects. (...) Humor physiology generally provides enhancement of those physical functions which support good health and

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[6] As Wallerstein points out in his comment on the terrorist attacks, published on September 15th, 2001, "Perhaps what is happening is that this 'war' — as it is being called this week in the press — cannot be won and will not be lost, but will simply continue. The disintegration of personal security is now a reality that may be hitting the American people for the first time. It was already a reality in many other parts of the world. The political issue underlying these chaotic oscillations of the world-system is not civilization versus barbarity. Or at least what we must realize is that all sides think they are the civilized ones, and that the barbarian is the other. The issues underlying what is going on is the crisis in our world-system and the battle about what kind of successor world-system we would like to build. (...) September 11, 2001 will soon seem to be, contrary to what many are saying, a minor episode in a long struggle that will go on for a long time and be a dark period for most people on this planet" (Wallerstein 2001a).

continuation of life" (Fry 1994:117). Furthermore, Herzog and Bush argue that "we use sick humor to cope with a variety of unpleasant realities" (1994:338). Although humour used here is evidently not politically correct, MacHale explains that "most humor and almost all jokes need a target for their effect. In addition, the target needs to be specific or real. (...) My belief is that political corectness is forcing us to restrict our targets" (Lewis 1997:454). So, instead of living in fear of the next world war, the nuclear destruction of the planet or the next terrorist attack that can happen anytime anywhere, popular media turned to humour, and instead taking part in the culture of tears, it created a culture of laughter — — yet again.

Now, we are to address the issues from the beginning of the paper again: the placelessness and the globality of the Internet. As far as the spatiality of the Internet and its users is concerned, we can conclude that the Internet indeed is a special form of social, technological and geographical place, being extraordinarily detached from the actual space from which an individual user is connecting and communicating, entering a world of almost entirely different rules and etiquette, but at the same time, ambiguously enough, having a firm sense of place and (cultural, social, ethnic, age, gender, etc.) background which each and every Internet user brings with himself or herself when engaging into an Internet mediated communication. "The defining interaction of Internet culture lies not in the interface between the user and the computer, but rather in that between the user and the collective imagination of the vast virtual audience to whom one submits an endless succession of enticing, exasperating, evocative figments of one's being" (Porter 1996:xiii). As Wilbur puts it, members of virtual communities are "sitting alone at their computers, but surrounded by a global multitude" (1996:6). When discussing email communication, this *global multitude* is composed of both our friends to whom we send emails as well as to the countless Internet users who also might get the forwarded message.

In the complex net of the spatial, political, economic, media and other relations of today, New York City is, for an average Croatian citizen, both far away and just a mouse-click away. The local response can be, given the circumstances, easily reasoned. Immanuel Wallerstein claims that both Americans and foreigners see the U.S. as the land of modernity (meaning by modernity the level of technological development), of efficiency, of liberty, and "The Twin Towers are also a metaphor for the attack on America. They were built with great engineering skill. They were supposed to be impervious to every conceivable kind of accidental or deliberate destruction. Yet, apparently, no one had ever considered that two planes filled with jet fuel might deliberately crash into the towers, and hit the buildings at precisely the point, 20% down from the top, that would maximize the destruction" (Wallerstein 2001b). It would be therefore not difficult to see that the attack on the U.S. is globally perceived as a possible beginning of a new, global and unimaginably ruthless war, and to

understand the internet humour not as vicious and cruel mockery of the tragic events and the subsequent international crisis, but as a widespread popular mechanism, seen so often in the realm of popular culture, used to maintain high spirits and to distance oneself from the unpleasant reality.

And what should be said about the local jokes? I suppose it is an excellent example of the merging of the processes of globalisation and localisation, sometimes called *glocalisation* in the literature. Having conducted an extensive study of popular music within the context of regionalism versus globalisation several years ago (Kalapoš 2000b), I have defined glocalisation as "selecting from cultural and other elements the ones which seem 'original' or 'typical' of a community and combining them with the ones considered to be *global*' (Kalapoš 2000a). The same could be applied here, when discussing the local response to the September 11th attacks. Long, as many other scholars, argues that "even the most sophisticated modern communication and media systems and the development of integrated international commodity markets have not destroyed cultural, ethnic, economic and political diversity. Indeed globalization has generated a whole new diversified pattern of responses at national, regional and local levels (...) Changing global conditions — — whether economic, political, cultural or environmental — are, as it were, 'relocalized' within national, regional or local frameworks of knowledge and organization which, in turn, are constantly being reworked in interaction with the wider context. (...) On the basis of 'local' knowledge, organization and values, they [*people*] actively attempt to come to grips cognitively and organizationally with 'external' circumstances, and in so doing the latter are mediated or transformed in some way" (Long 1996:40, 42-43). In other words, it is entirely common — if not obligatory — for the *global* and the *local* to merge at all possible levels, be it politics, economy or simple everyday culture.

To conclude, let me quote Hermann Bausinger when he points out that the process of globalisation will not belittle, but emphasize our national and local differences (2001:125). So, the local response to the September 11th events is locally coloured, being expressed by a large group of people, but still small in relative figures, by the usage of technology (for both production and transmission of its contents), by using the *global* events, names, companies, cultural goods and widespread notions and combining them with local circumstances.

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KULTURA SMIJEHA, KULTURA SUZA: DOGAĐAJI 11. RUJNA I NJIHOV ODJEK NA INTERNETU

SAŽETAK

Promatramo li internet, odnosno elektronsku poštu kao jedan od oblika interneta, kao suvremeni oblik komunikacije, tada i pisani i vizualni materijal koji kola internetom možemo smatrati odrazom popularne kulture u svijetu zahvaćenom procesom globalizacije i medija koji omogućuju trenutni prijenos informacija s jednog kraja svijeta na drugi. Pri tome je zanimljivo proučiti gotovo trenutne odgovore na teroristički napad na Svjetski trgovački centar u New Yorku koji se dogodio 11. rujna 2001. godine i koji su već dan-dva

nakon napada stigli i u Hrvatsku i dosad — čak i za internet — neviđenom brzinom se proširili među korisnicima interneta. Tu građu možemo kategorizirati u nekoliko većih skupina, no u ovome se tekstu prvenstveno govori o humoru, podijeljenome na *globalni* i *lokalni*. Moguća je interpretacija ove vrste humora i kao odgovora tzv. bahtinovske *smjehovne kulture* na zaista tragične događaje, kao neku vrst popularnog/pučkog/grupnog ironijskog odmaka od zastrašujućih događaja.

Ključne riječi: internet, elektronska pošta, humor