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(2015) Mark Losoncz (University of Belgrade – Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory): „Šta li će biti sa tobom, postjugoslovenski svete...? / Qu'est-ce que tu seras devenu, monde post-yougoslave...? / Was wird aus dir geworden sein, post-jugoslawische Welt ...? / What will have become of you, post-Yugoslav world...?“*, Eve-Marie Kallen (ed.), *Anachronia XIII*, Hamburg, 51–81. ISSN 0946-347X.

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Mark Losoncz

What will have become of you, post-Yugoslav world...?

Perhaps one could begin the story like this: once upon a time there was an Eastern-Europe, *but* in it there was Yugoslavia. In a way, Yugoslavia has incorporated itself into the XX century (which began with the Sarajevo assault, and ended with the war in Kosovo), and it never ceased to provoke us.

Yet, while the unfinishable project of Eastern-Europe unambiguously signals the tragedy of a messianic hyper-modernization and thus refers to a structural-historical defeat of “the weakest link in the chain” as well as the contradictory narrative of a “(counter-)revolution with an ambition of catching-up”, thanks to the existence of Yugoslavia, a country which was said to be socialist, the abovementioned “*but*” cannot be erased. It’s as if, in spite of everything, there remains a productive surplus which cannot be reduced onto any other fact. We are not concerned here with an experiment of reviving of a triumphal discourse which replaces the image of the dying Yugoslavia, bathed in an ocean of blood, with the image of a peripheral regime of a super-power that vanquishes all of its opponents (imperialism, fascism, Stalinism): on the contrary, we are interested exactly in this surplus that might be revitalized even today.

Just as Pavle Levi tried to articulate Yugoslavness with the Lacanian concept of *nullibiquité* – hence with a constitutive excess which in itself is empty and in some ways surpasses the codified and affirmed ethnic identities – so too must we stress the excessive nature of Yugoslavia which in itself holds no distinctive content. This is because there is no content which could not be demystified and which, in time, would not succumb to the act of disillusionment. Thus, regarding its anti-fascist-militant and above all glorious foundation (“There was not a single revolution in Europe after WWII except for Yugoslavia”), it is not hard

to point out that the establishment of Yugoslavia implied blood and violence without which there would be no primary accumulation of capital (as well as no primary state-capitalist accumulation of capital as well). And regarding other moments of demystification – we only know them all too well: so the anti-Stalinist pathos of self-management shows that the self-management constantly oscillated between party bureaucracy and managerial technocracy, that it was anchored in the conflicts between “labor *versus* capital” and “capital *versus* capital”, and when one speaks of a geo-politics of the non-aligned movement, the mystifications are only all too easier to dispel... Furthermore, one must also speak more radically than Levi: Yugoslavness is not an essential surplus because it only sublimed the ethnic identities in a problematic (and not at all original) way (e.g. by spectacularly excluding non-Slavic identity matrixes such as the Albanian or Hungarian identities). Thus there is no content which could be saved. *But*, there remains an excess as a pure form: in that sense, Yugoslavia relates to a moment which condenses in itself a utopian surplus as that which is “something more” in the Eastern-European adventure, a surplus in the context of dying utopias. That is the way in which Yugoslavia was an alternative to the alternative hyper-modernization. Once upon a time there was an Eastern-Europe, *but* in it there was Yugoslavia, and here the “but” is itself the essence.

The importance of this excessive characteristic can be seen in the Yugoslav experience of 1968. As evidenced by Boris Kanzleiter’s research (*Die “Rote Universität”*) Yugoslav events represented a synthesis of all the rebellions related to that year, although they are usually thought to be essentially pluralistic in character. For, what was the link between Mexico City and the Western Balkans, what was the connection between Italian *operaismo* and the Prague spring, what made possible the commonness of the commune in Shanghai, situationism in Paris, the Warsaw uprisings and the *Zengakuren* militants? The aforementioned symbolic year in Yugoslavia represented neither the longest nor the most spectacular, and not even the most massive experience, and yet in it one could find the condensation of its global essence. Understood in this sense, the year 1968 brings into question the ossified interpretation according to which the Eastern-European actors at the time fought against socialism/communism, while the Western *soixante-huitards*, portrayed by the “carneval/libidinal and anti-oedipal” moments, misunderstood themselves when they were fighting under the red banners. For, the Yugoslav 68’ was at once a critique of the mechanisms of alienation and the exploitations of the market (this was in fact its reaction against the deadlocks of the Yugoslav market reforms) and also a critique

of the technocracy as well as the party state and the state party, respectively. The document drafted by the Belgrade students (“3000 words”) very precisely illustrates the point in question: “Briefly, the ideal of the students is a democratic socialism”. It is symptomatic that the Belgrade students protested hand in hand against the repression in Warsaw as well as the intervention in Czechoslovakia, but also against the repression of Western-German students. What happened in Yugoslavia in fact represented a synthesis of the whole of 68’, and this is the proof that that year ultimately does not succumb to false dichotomies such as East/West, market/state, etc.: on the contrary, it was ubiquitously harnessed against state-capitalism which bases itself not only on welfare but also on conformism and paternalism. We must again repeat that the Yugoslav experience wasn’t special in the sense of its inner content, because it did not produce any novum which hasn’t already appeared elsewhere and in other situations. But its very essence lies exactly in this synthesis, in the synthesis as an excess and as a way in which the Yugoslav experience overcomes our prejudices.

But, alas, figures such as Yugo-nostalgia and nostalgia for Josip Broz Tito that are bound to appear only renounce this allegiance to the excess. As the authors of the the Serbian journal in Croatia, *Novosti* (“7+1 thesis on the dark disintegration of Yugoslavia“) put it: “The paradox lies in the fact that people today gladly remember the socialist Yugoslavia, albeit not for its communist ideals of equality and freedom, but because of the liberal values that they were promised in ’the revolutions of 89’: mobility , productivity, full employment, multiculturalism, a good living standard, peace and prosperity, the benefits of the welfare state, international recognition, a close bond with Europe, etc.“ What’s at stake here is a special retrospective fantasy which looks at the past through the lens of an unrealized future: as if the Yugoslav adventure was not related to the diminishing of class society or as if it was related merely to the integration into the European Union (in order to realize its well-being), only by poor means. For those who have understanding, the *Internationale* will sound here only as a digitally pure melody of an *Ode to Joy* at best: this fantasy proclaims that all men will be brothers, including the wretched of the earth. What chances does Yugoslavia then stand of being an excess? And what could reflexive and emancipatory counter-nostalgia exactly do?

Before we revive this counter-nostalgia, on the one hand, we must stick to the fact that the disintegration of Yugoslavia cannot be seen as a necessary outcome of a former decay, or, as the finalization of a teleological narrative. Rastko Močnik, Goran Musić and several others have

rightly emphasized that the 80's cannot be treated through the shadow of later events. Instead, these years should be viewed as an open sequence and an episode that contained emancipatory possibilities as well. It was a situation characterized by aleatory elements and by the confrontation of different forces: parts of this configuration were represented, for example, by the syndical confederations which exceeded the borders of their respective republics (just during the year 1986 alone, which according to dominant interpretations was a preparatory year for violent ethnicization there were in fact about 1700 strikes). On the other hand, one must resist the discourse that treats the dissolution of Yugoslavia as an exception, as an irrational event compared to European norms ("in Europe after World War II there was no genocide anywhere else"). It should be emphasized that the violent and bloody disintegration of Yugoslavia with 130,000 dead and hundreds of thousands of refugees is actually a symptom of an age – it is a typical tendency, and in fact a manifestation of the late (neoliberal, if you will) capitalism. The pressure exerted by the IMF since the eighties, the coercive competition between the regions, international economic policy that constrains the marginal *homo debitor* to his savings, "humanitarian"-military interventions, general social disasters in the form of conflicting ethnicities, replacement of the national-state unity by ethnic conflicts, the ties between the local lumpen-bourgeoisie and autocratic systems ... – it is clear that what happened with Yugoslavia is no exception: its corresponding tendencies anticipated today's Eastern-European (and global) reality, and thus our common misery. The history of Yugoslavia follows the footsteps of a general history: its crisis coincided with the crisis of the welfare state (with the crisis of its Western and Eastern forms), and its dissolution anticipated the future, that is to say, our present (in some ways it is even good that Yugoslavia did not have an "emancipatory" experience in 88'/89'/91' – consequently to that we record a fewer number of illusions. In fact it should be said that as a result of these tendencies we can clearly see that what appeared in other places as hope, was in fact merely an unintended side-effect. Thus the world is not being "balkanized" (a notable keyword of the cultural-racist [auto-]colonization, to which we must thus bid farewell to); the Balkans were one of the first victims of today's world. One should understand correctly Mladen Dolar's formulation *à la* Lacan, according to which the European unconscious is structured like the Balkans: its space is a space of prominence of such traumas that relate to *everyone*, a space which condenses *our common symptoms*. Let us summarize: the defeat of Yugoslavia in spite of

its internal tensions did not pose as a genetically programmed necessity, but took place amidst the configurations of late capitalism.

We know all too well that to the West of Rhine, where the Bolshevik turn of hyper-modernization never set in, the residues of pre-capitalistic forms are, at least to some extent, live and well: up to this very day there remain last traces of dynasties as well as the corporate worker's movement, and we thus detect the still existing aristocratic attitudes as well as the authority of the church: this actually means that different layers of the past still continue to subsist and exist together. Against this socio-cultural *pastiche*, the same Eastern-Europe which once projected a plan of circumventing capitalism now (in a paradoxical way) embodies the true terrain of pure capitalism itself. "Where was then the resistance to capitalism to be found? In the proprietorship of the aristocracy, in the *ecclesia triumphans* and the social-democratic workers' movement. The Bolsheviks, »communists« destroyed all of this", writes G. M. Tamás. At the same time, the effacement of the past happened once again, since the pathos of hyper-modernization with elements of urbanization, secularization and accumulation was replaced with the indifference of the deindustrialization and all of this had, in a marvelous way, realized the late-capitalistic fantasies: the stability of the states' "real-economy" was replaced by the poverty-ridden flexi-cariat – in essence, by the various representatives of human capital – the unemployed masses, the precariat and with the black zones of the economy... All of them are far more "rootless" than their proletarian predecessors. The same Eastern-Europe which had so mercilessly eradicated the pre-modern relations had also eradicated its own hyper-modernization with the same zeal: it is not by accident that the rhetoric of investment ("we must attract foreign capital") might signal that hope, perhaps, springs only from foreign sources. Hence the indicative title of an essay by Igor Štikš and Srećko Horvat: *Welcome to the Desert of Post-Socialism*. Indeed, one has an impression of living in a desert, namely, in something that extends in space but represents one great big Nothing. The authors are even right that this Nothing is carefully monitored and that it is approached differently: "The European Union not only supervises the Western Balkan candidates ('negotiations' being a euphemism for a one-way communication amounting to little more than the 'translate-paste' operations during the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*), but it actually maintains two semi-protectorates (Bosnia and Kosovo). The European Union developed varied approaches: disciplining and punishing (Romania and Bulgaria), bilaterally negotiating membership (Croatia and Montenegro), punishing and

rewarding (Serbia and Albania), managing (Bosnia), governing (Kosovo), and, finally, ignoring (Macedonia blocked in the name dispute with Greece). Today, there is one common denominator in all these approaches – Crisis.” The post-Yugoslav reality is nothing but a remotely controlled scarce *Kleinstaaterei* – once again we get the feeling that freedom is a geographical concept. Since even Slovenia plunged downhill and since one experiences the fact that the hopes of the other are also doomed to fail, even the narcissism of small differences seems to have lost its meaning – since, alas, we share our scarcity. Spectral territorial entities, heterotopias (Grožnjan and Severna Mitrovica, Prešovo and Drvar, Novi Pazar and Subotica...), suitcases filled with passports from different countries... all of this represent only portions of a grey everydayness. We are all made to be peripheral – we are unified, though in a fragmented way. In a recently published report by the CIA from the year 1993, it is stated that, even though the Serbian economy was on the brink of destruction amidst international sanctions, the atmosphere in Serbia still wasn't characterized by the anti-system tendencies because Serbs, thanks to their black market and village-produced alimentary products as well as the money pouring in from abroad, still continued to subsist. And we know exactly how much the situation is now worse than it was during the wars: the EU regulatives narrow down the black markets, and families, when they can, without turning back, rush their loved ones to the West, and the vital agriculture has long perished.

This space is experienced as a desert and in that sense it appears as a post-political world (somebody noted that there were bigger differences between Tito and Kardelj than between Milanović and Karamarko or between Nikolić and Tadić). Since the so-called “4P elite” (short for “*pištolj* [guns], *Pajero*, *pager*, *plavuša* [blondie]”) which cherished its close relationship with the society of spectacle, the gray, pent-up layer of a peripheral EU-compatible lumpen-bourgeoisie became far more important: it became the winner of the redistribution of state goods and services who imposed a discourse of a necessary transition, i.e. an ideology of a turn to capitalism, and who will gladly chatter on the topic of “the losers in the process of transition” as well as the forced trajectories which must follow the intervention of the experts (compare: “transformative regression”). This layer arrogantly criticizes the “cultural backwardness” and the “lack of competition” while simultaneously glorifying austerity measures and threatening with EU sanctions. It goes without saying that this semi-colonial discourse always remains unconditionally servile to the imperial hegemon, and that it cherishes a de-politicized rhetoric:

the falsity of this rhetoric lies in the fact that there was actually no transition. Due to former market reforms, Yugoslavia was woven into the neoliberal context of world economy as early as the eighties, while further steps towards market deregulation in the small post-Yugoslav states enabled the traces of welfare to disappear even more. There is no transition, we have obviously arrived here long ago (*Welcome to the Desert of Post-Socialism, come and welcome!*), given the fact that we are standing still in complete poverty as a (semi-)periphery of a late Euro-capitalism. The ideologues of transition have tried to use the ideas of progress and future to make fluid what is already a finished spatial-structural situation. We must not believe them. Stars may shine from a considerable distance even when their celestial bodies have long ago been diminished – thus we must look upon the stars of today's European Union with a much needed skepticism. But what else do we see on their sky?

The infamous article by Tim Judah (*Yugoslavia is Dead: Long Live the Yugosphere*) argued that a Yugosphere comprising 22 million people has emerged, within which the states accordingly do not perceive themselves as strangers and where ethnic confrontations are replaced by co-operation implying import/export relations, military agreements, and pop-folk concerts by Lepa Brena which appear everywhere. What is then the point of the reminiscence of Yugoslavia? Is there anything left in the purse of the emancipatory counter-nostalgia? We have no illusions. We do not believe in resurrecting the past, we do not even want it. However, the avant-garde Yugoslav experiment which was created out of an anti-Stalinist critique and which was dependent on constant self-critique and the regime which was forced by the actors of 68' to confront itself could persuade us that another world, beyond the “catch-up (counter-)revolution” and (semi-)peripheral poverty of transition is possible. Yes, we indeed do want something, namely, something more and something different – here the gesture of excess is important. Since the dawn of the new millennia this utopian surplus began to appear on the surface more and more: in the student movements, in the protests which were accumulating after the Tuzla events, in the mass movements (and to the surprise of many, the byword of „democratic socialism” from the year 68' once again rose up from the ashes like a phoenix)... But, alas, do historical shifts exist at all? Is the periphery once again making a circumvention around the forced trajectories? Maybe yes. Maybe not. *You must go on, we can't go on, we'll go on...*

Translation: Aleksandar Matković