

## Art in War: Comfort and Weapon

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### 1. Baudrillard with Žižek: The desert of the Real as commodity and desire

Some of the ideas of the late sixties age much better than their authors from the student movements and other new theoretical, artistic, and political streams of the famous year 1968. Among them is one of the prevailing concepts of social criticism of the period, that of consumerism vs. productivism. Productivism with its Protestant or, more precisely, Puritan ethics of early capitalism has been replaced by postmodern consumptionist ethics. In his texts "The System of Objects" (1968) and "Consumer Society" (1970)<sup>1</sup>, Jean Baudrillard went well beyond the usual "alienational" lamentations about this phenomenon. He concluded that consumption is not oriented towards possession and use of material goods any more, or dependent upon "material needs". Consumption is a system of symbolic or sign relations, while commodities as objects became part of a socially stratified advertising system. In his text "For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign" (1972)<sup>2</sup> he further developed this line of thought claiming that use value and exchange value are now of secondary importance. The value of consumer objects as expressive symbols has become the new and dominant one. This caused that our perception of reality changed radically. It is no longer shaped by and does not consist any more of material objects. Nearly everything we experience are symbols and images produced and consumed as the main value component of commodities. That is where his idea of a simulated society emerged from: surrounded by screens and not by material "real things" we live in a hyperreality where the difference between reality and staged appearance disappears. Imagery consisting of symbols, signs and words takes off from the ground of their certain and real connotations, and begins to fly freely in the space where no law of gravitation can prevent their free play in creating different parallel worlds which can all stand for as competitors for the status of reality. Consequently, rules of aesthetic judgement and not laws of reality govern our decisions on what is real and what is true.

In spite of different Lacanian concept of reality, this view is present in Slavoj Žižek's commentary on September 11 attacks published as "Welcome to the Desert of the Real!"<sup>3</sup>. His

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *La société de consommation*, Gallimard, Paris 1972 - English translation in Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings* (Ed. Mark Poster), Stanford University Press, Stanford 1988, pp. 29-56; Jean Baudrillard, *Le système des objets*, Denoel-Gonthier, Paris 1968 - English translation in Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, l.c., pp. 10-28

<sup>2</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Pour une Critique de l'Economie Politique du Signe*, Gallimard, Paris 1972 - English translation in Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, l.c., pp. 57-97

<sup>3</sup> Now available on the net: <http://www.mii.kurume-u-ac.jp/~leuers/zizek>

commentary is a mix of Hollywood movies and the real event, starting with "The Truman Show" (1998) where Jim Carrey discovers that his "reality" is a gigantic studio set, revealing the ultimate American paranoid fantasy that a consumerist paradise he lives in is a fake. Another example is "Matrix" (1999) which, beside similar situation ("the material reality we all experience and see around us is a virtual one, generated and coordinated by a gigantic mega-computer to which we are all attached"<sup>4</sup>) reveals "real reality" - what remained of Chicago after a global war. When this reality is discovered by transgressing the limits of staged fake, the resistance leader utters: "Welcome to the desert of the real!"

If we put these topsy-turvy coordinates of reality and stage together with Hollywood catastrophe movies of the same period we get to the conclusion that on September 11 "America got what it fantasized about, and this was the greatest surprise."<sup>5</sup> What appeared on September 11 in New York was the Third World desert of the real which haunts seemingly secure and content welfare being of the U.S.A. and Western Europe. Žižek is introducing his usual Hegelian turn: in this purely evil Outside we should recognize the distilled version of our own essence. Here, he is already far from Jean Baudrillard, because this Hegelian lesson is a typical Enlightenment eye-opener, but, on the other side, he is still in the domain described in Baudrillard's early writings as consumerist paradise, because "the actual effect of these bombings is much more symbolic than real."<sup>6</sup> After the bombings, we dwell in the unique time between a traumatic event and its symbolic impact when it is still open "how the events will be symbolized, what their symbolic efficiency will be, what acts they will be evoked to justify."<sup>7</sup> For America, there are two possibilities, namely, to conclude in accordance with previous belief that we should continue to live in a staged paradise that "things like this don't happen HERE!", or to reveal the desert of the Real with conclusion that "a thing like this should not happen ANYWHERE!"<sup>8</sup>

Seven months after the event, with an ongoing war on terrorism, we can still discuss which answer will come out. In an interview for Slovenian national TV, Slavoj Žižek said that we should look for the answer in the next wave of Hollywood movies. Where Jean Baudrillard is criticized for his insistence that "reality" does not take place any more, as in case of the Gulf War, Slavoj Žižek is criticized that his commentaries arrive from the world of delirium where

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<sup>4</sup> ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

we can not distinguish between movie fantasy and life. This kind of criticism misses the point in both cases.

Interpreting Žižek's position, the artificial fake and the Real exchanged their proper places and produced a situation of undistinguishable frontiers between themselves because the Real is so terrible and traumatic. But paranoid fantasies reveal also the other component: in such circumstances there is no peace and conciliation, and in spite of a staged sustainable artificial quasi-reality, there is a constant skepticism about its status, and a drive to discover "the real Real" which is very probably a terrible desert. Still, we would like to get over the borders of our comfortable artificial "sphere" anyway. This is another Enlightenment touch: unsatisfied with a fake, we are ready to confront ourselves with the real Real, whatever it may cost us.

With Baudrillard, we have the simulated society as a result of commodified aesthetics which divorces us from any direct experience of the real. With Žižek, we find out that all this commodity criticism is another "Entäußerung" and "Verdinglichung". Marx would describe such social relations in terms of the division of labor and surplus value oriented production. Žižek points out that this situation belongs to Lacanian simultaneously terrible and fascinating "Real thing". Where Kant establishes a possibility of an unending progress of humanity towards perfection, where Marx establishes a possibility of a proletarian revolution, Baudrillard and Žižek accentuate a framework of an individual and collective therapy. And therapy can always choose its direction. Žižek's familiar joke is about a person who complains that a crocodile is under his bed waiting to dismember him, and is found killed in his bed by a crocodile after some unsuccessful attempts of his therapist who tried to convince him that crocodiles can not be hidden under his bed. But he could also try to adapt him so that he will accept that, O.K., crocodile is under the bed, so let's go and buy a rifle. If there are no crocodiles, who cares?

In those old days of the 1960ies, therapy was called an ideological manipulation, but it was not always conceived as just a plot or a conspiracy of a capitalist system and its actors. Speaking of the same topic as Jean Baudrillard and at approximately the same time, Wolfgang Fritz Haug in his "Critic of Commodity Aesthetics" (1971) concluded that we can not explain commodity fetishism simply as manipulation or even as a capitalist conspiracy. Criticism of manipulation, he said, has to go into research of reasons which make manipulation, i.e. commodity fetishism and consumerist society possible. And the first step of such approach would be to admit that manipulation is the language of the real interests of the masses. We are

deceived, but we are deceived because we wish, like and long to be deceived.<sup>9</sup> Deceit, then, is not just a deceit. It is an image of the world we would like to inhabitate, and this kind of world is shown to us in the appearance of commodity aesthetics. Commodity aesthetics, approached from the side of production which needs to find its realization on the market, is the bait to catch consumers in a competing economy where all goods are commodified and the most appealing difference between them is their aesthetic image and surface. Commodity aesthetics, approached from the side of consumption, is the good needed for our appetite to inhabitate a world of our desire, a surplus value of otherwise necessary "real" use of the purchased product.

It is correct to call this dimension of commodity its aesthetics, and this use of commodity an aesthetic use. The aesthetic function used to be a prevailing function of the artwork, but it has been always present in all the other discourses. Today, we can not say any more that this function still dominates in contemporary art, but it dominates the process in which commodities seduce their consumers. Those two processes, by the way, are interdependent. Production of artworks, on one side, tries to remain something special and different from all the other productions (the position it obtained in nineteenth century), and has to abandon the domination of the aesthetic to do so. On the other side, artworks became just a sort of commodities with their aesthetics appeal calling for consumption spread all over and silencing their artistic presence. To say that the aesthetic function of great art is something belonging to the past, while the prevailing aesthetics is now that of commodities, might be a reason for cultural pessimism. But more important than to indulge in it is to understand that even as the most important factor of commodity fetishism in late capitalism, aesthetic function works both ways as always. It turns our attention from "the real" to "the imagined", "the teleological" and "the fictional", yes, but it can also reveal the horrible desert of the Real. The use of aesthetic function is a motor of pacifying as much as of traumatizing experiences, in situations when our desire longs for deceitful images of our welfare being, and in situations when our desire longs for a heroic encounter with the terrible Other, or terrible Real. This are two sides of the same desire anyway.

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<sup>9</sup> Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Kritik des Warenästhetik*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1977 (7<sup>th</sup> Edition; 1<sup>st</sup> Edition - 1971); "Kritik der Manipulation mußte dieser Einsicht zufolge heißen, die Bedingung für die Wirkungsmöglichkeit der Manipulation zu erforschen - schon um etwas dagegen tun zu können. Wirken aber Konnte Manipulation nur dann, wenn sie 'irgendwie' bei den 'objektiven' Interessen der Manipulierten einhakt. 'Die Massen,', postuliooerte icj, 'werden manipuliert in Verfolgung ihres Interesses. Manipulative Phänomene sprechen daher immer noch die Sprache wirklicher Interessen, wenn auch gleichsam als Fremdsprache der bis zur Unkenntlichkeit verzerrten und entfremdeten Interessen." (ibid., pp. 7-8)

Speaking of art as a therapy which is as much a comfort as it is a weapon, I would like to examine positions of a new war-movie *genre* which re-presents contemporary Balkan wars, especially that of Bosnia. The position of camera in these movies is the position of the one who knows, the one who has been through it, and who could not allow before to see what he or she was going through and what he or she was involved with - until confronted with a representing mirror of events, as a horrible truth and a healing painkiller in one,+ for a victim and a culprit together. After it got the Best Foreign-Film Award, which was somehow surprising culmination after all the other praise and awards<sup>10</sup>, "No Man's Land", Danis Tanović's film financed and produced by international conglomerate and shot in Slovenia, will be at the center of such examination. But before indulging in that, we have to touch the topics of old and new wars.

## 2. Van Creveld and Mary Kaldor: the transformation of war

The transformation of "old war", the label now used for the war of modernity and a theory of war associated with the name of Carl von Clausewitz, into "new war" has been announced in the last ten or fifteen years.

The message of Martin van Creveld's "The Transformation of War" (1991) is that "we are entering an era, not of peaceful economic competition between trading blocks, but of warfare between ethnic and religious groups...Already today the military power fielded by the principal developed societies in both 'West' and 'East' is hardly relevant to the task at hand; in other words, it is more illusion than substance. Unless the societies in question are willing to adjust both thought and action to the rapidly changing new realities, they are likely to reach the point where they will no longer be capable of employing organized violence at all. Once this situation comes about, their continued survival as cohesive political entities will also be put in doubt."<sup>11</sup> In short, Clausewitzian theory obsolete because there is no monopoly on violence on the side of nation-states any more. What happened is not "the end of history" as a triumph of free market and multiparty democracy with global neoliberalism in charge. Ethnic in religious fundamentalist groups are taking over, using all possible means of a new war. Van Creveld is addressing great powers to confront this re-distribution and privatization of violence before this world gets completely out of any possible control. To put an end to this globally

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<sup>10</sup> Surprising, because it has not been expected by Danis Tanović's compatriots believing that nothin nice ever happens to them, and surprising because it did not bring enough money in Usa audinece compared with expected winner Amelia (Tanović's United Artsi's distributed movie has made just about 800.000 USD, a mere nothing compared with Amelia's 134 million USD, the best result for any French movie in American history).

<sup>11</sup> Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, The Free Press, New York&Toronto 1991. p. ix

dangerous sequence of events, we have to understand historical circumstances and overall reasons for war, which now both go well beyond Clausewitz's historical circumstances and ideas. While historical circumstances are those of ethnic and religious outburst of intolerance, fundamentalism and violence, war is a persistent manner of human conflict-resolution means in most diverse historical and cultural situations. Van Creveld "does not argue that war is biologically predetermined - no more, say, than are religion, science, productive work, or art. However, it does argue that war, far from being merely a means, has very often been considered an end - a highly attractive activity for which no other can provide a substitute. The reason why other activities do not provide an adequate substitute is precisely because they are 'civilized'; in other words, bound by artificial rules."<sup>12</sup> The period of nation-state control over violence is over, the urge and desire to fight and destroy won over the imposed artificial rules. This brings us back to state of war before Peace of Westphalia (1648). "As the vital warmaking function is taken over by new types of organization, no doubt those organizations will proclaim new myths and define their objectives in radically different ways. As new forms of armed conflict multiply and spread, they will cause the lines between public and private, government and people, military and civilian, to become as blurred as they were before 1648. The point may come where even our present notions of policy and interest - both of which are closely associated with the state - will have to be transformed or replaced by others more appropriate to the new circumstances."<sup>13</sup> The first victim to this situation is Clausewitz rational explanation of war: "In another sense, the question as to what future societies will go to war for is almost irrelevant. It is simply not true that war is solely a means to an end, nor do people necessary fight in order to attain this objective or that. In fact, the opposite is true: people very often take up one objective or another precisely in order that they may fight. While the usefulness of war as a means for gaining practical ends may well be questioned, its ability to entertain, to inspire, and to fascinate has never been in doubt. War is life written large."<sup>14</sup>

The basic lines for understanding new wars called by Martin van Creveld in 1991 "future wars" are:

1. Wars will be fought by fundamentalist ethnic and religious groups, while nation-state control and monopoly over the use of violence will give way to fighting unbound by rules of modernity, which calls for new (post-modern?) kinds of control.

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p.218

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 226

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 226

2. Rational notion of war as a means to an end is over, the only reason for wars is a desire, i.e., we are not rational animals mobilized by the liberal vision of individuals as subjects calculating risks and profits of war as a continuation of politics. We are beings desiring violent conflicts for the fun of it.
3. The image of new war will not be the post-modern and post-industrial high-tech "clean war". It will be bloody and horrible, "it will have more in common with the struggles of primitive tribes than with large scale conventional war".<sup>15</sup>

This account from 1991 sounds prophetic, being articulated before Balkan wars and other fighting of the 1990ies, but it is obviously extracted from the experiences of Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Van Creveld's prejudices are clear and may be easily criticized, as his insistence on a difference between modern and primitive or tribal, but his views are nevertheless correct as an image and analysis of new kinds of war. His prediction that the power of nation-state is not sufficient to prevent universal use of violence any more has become universally repeated statement, and his pessimistic notion of universal human desire to find unrestricted entertainment and inspiration in persecution, violence and terror is now, albeit still confronted by more humanistic and enlightened ideas, much more familiar as it was when it was written at a time of triumphal conclusion of the Cold War, when the vision of the peaceful ending of all the other "low-intensity" conflicts prevailed. For people who found themselves in this new situations of unrestricted and terrible violence caused by their neighbors, friends and relatives, this grim view of primordial human evil bursting out once again without any power to stop and control it.

In the last few years, Mary Kaldor introduced a theory of new wars which was originally built on the case of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>16</sup>. Contrary to van Creveld, she does not accept a diagnosis that these kind of wars are civil wars produced by ethnic or religious conflicts. They are political conflicts which involve state power and other, more or less private forces (paramilitary groups often financed by governments of this or that country, self-defense units, mercenaries, plundering groups, "weekend" ransackers, and, of course, international troops). The political of these conflicts is "identity politics" as a means by which political elites reproduce their power, and these means include systematic murder and forcible expulsion of the Others (known as ethnic cleansing), violations of women and other ways which scare all

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p. 212

<sup>16</sup> *New Wars* (Ed. Mary Kaldor and Basker Vashee.), Pinter, London 1997; *The End of Military Fordism* (Ed. Mary Kaldor, Ulrich Albrecht and Geneviève Schméder.), Pinter, London 1998; Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, Polity, Cambridge 1999; there is also an abundant account of her work and global discussion of her ideas on the web. Third chapter of her 1999 book is a case study of Bosnia and Herzegovina war.

the others or turns them into fighters, thorough destruction of all cultural signs of presence of the Others, and production of uninhabitable areas. In old wars, even those of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, 80% of victims were army soldiers or otherwise armed and organized people; in new wars, 80% of victims are civilians. The economy of these forms of violence destroys all normal resources and collapses in black and gray zones (drugs, weapons, oil smuggling...), diaspora fund-raising, external governmental assistance, and international humanitarian aid. New forms of violence and new forms of global economy have something in common. Their results are not new areas of production and prosperity but new "bad neighborhoods" of world economy and global society. An erosion of organized state power includes blurring of all modern "binarities", so that the distinctions between public and private, military and civil, internal and external, war and peace erode in mere zones of transgression. Military speaking, there is no victory in these wars if compared with Clausewitzian concept of mobilization of state, army and people to be engaged in a war which should reach its culmination in a decisive battle. This distinction is essential: in new wars there is no decisive victory because war is not a means to an political end. War is a political end in itself and is fought for the political sake of it, not because of individual human desire of this or that kind. These wars are fought because nation-state is getting weaker especially in some parts of the world, because global economy and other globally operating powers have no rules at all, and because there is no balance of powers which could stop wars or, at least, there is not enough interest and power to turn them into "low-intensity conflicts".

Social ideas of the 1968 movements and criticism stressed the dimension of manipulation and ideology as the power which makes the world of consumer societies go around, producing innocent alienated victims of political establishment and capitalist economy. Martin van Creveld articulated widespread feeling that manipulation and ideology work because they have something to count on, and in case of war this is a desire to fight against any rules imposed by a civilized society and against the Others just for the fun of it. All reasons for war are manipulative construction, made not just for the sake of alienated power structures which would use these constructions to deceive innocent people. They are made up to be used for self-deceiving, so that taking part and enjoying in violence can be covered up in each individual case by some kind of superficial excuse. In the case of consumerism and ideology critique, all of us are just innocent victims; in the case of basic desires, all of us are involved and responsible. This interplay of innocence and guilt, put together with the fact that these wars involve every civilian as activist or victim or, usually, as both, accompanied with the impossibility of a heroic outcome obtained through victory in a decisive battle, is a situation

which calls for some kind of therapy. These wars do not solve political conflicts with military means. They create all kinds of conflicts without solutions. The unfinished story of war haunts such deserts of the Real, and calls for new narratives to give some meaning and reason to all evil which happened with no conclusion other than death and destruction, and to explain how and why it could be that such hatred and evil has been hidden under normal, if not friendly conditions of sustainable community for so long<sup>17</sup>. The old difference between "just" and "unjust" wars has now changed into "clean" and "dirty" wars. It seems that Martin van Creveld urges the great powers of the world to enter into a campaign of "clean" war against the "dirty" war before it would be too late for the introduction of any kind of post-nation-state control over violence, while Mary Kaldor puts "clean" and "dirty" wars together as two sides of the same process, both devastating and cruel especially for civilians, and calls for a new cosmopolitanism to stop it. In a commentary on the events of September 11, she repeats: "The world is a dangerous place. The best we can hope for is that a new understanding will emerge from the catastrophe, that the destruction of the World Trade Center will act as a catalyst for a new political project aimed at finding a co-operative global alternative."<sup>18</sup>

This is similar to Žižek's point. But is there any kind of artistic skill to re-present this as a viable possibility?

### 3. Comfort and weapon: art in new wars

Artists with their art take sides, defend their own and attack enemies, especially in nationalist art common to all newcomers of the modern world order. That is beyond the question, of course; what is interesting is the power of such art, namely, is it to blame for raising belligerent feelings and is it to praise for healing wounds and pacifying passions. In the First World War, intellectuals and artists alike were supporting the war against the Others, with rare exceptions as Romain Rolland; later, their attitudes changed more or less as the feelings of the public opinion calmed down and their eyes opened to disastrous reality. But their

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<sup>17</sup> Interesting, if not acceptable, is the idea developed by Barbara Ehrenreich exploring the persistence of war over many different cultures and times. She finds the wellspring of war not in a biologically rooted and culturally developed "killer instinct" unique to the males of our species, nor in our Paleolithic hunting tradition, but in the blood rites early humans performed to reenact their terrifying experience of predation by stronger carnivores. In historical time, this source of violence and war becomes, finally, the central rite of the mass religion we know today as nationalism. Her analysis is interesting because it puts together some of the post-modern feminist principles of socially grounded gender parts, and the search of a pre-historical source of war and socially organized and accepted violence. This combination of post-modern deconstruction and pre-modern quasi-scientific research finds what it looks for, thus showing precisely that kind of explanation which Enlightenment planned to get rid of, with an abundant use of above quoted Martin van Creveld book (Barbara Ehrenreich, *Blood Rites. Origins and History of the Passions of War*, Metropolitan Books, New York 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Marx Kaldor, "Understanding the message of Tuesday's events", on [www.open.democracy.net](http://www.open.democracy.net)

influence was not great, if any, and, as in later case of German Expressionism blamed for the successful march of Nazism, they were not powerful enough to flare up or spread the fire of war. With totalitarianisms, and in the Second World War, art and culture were among the targets of war already - Jewish art, Non-German Art, Non-Socialist Art, *Entartete Kunst*, Un-American Art, they were all among alien dangers which have to be destroyed. The assumed great political power of art is a position typical for totalitarian approach because one-dimensional view of reality is necessary for its success as political commodity distributed as a mass product, and art can be of great use-value as a material which can distribute this one-dimensional image to its consumers, or, vice-versa, destroy one-dimensionality with its aesthetic strategies and tactics. For instance, in partisan fight against German, Italian and Hungarian occupation in Slovenia during the period 1941-1945 art was a powerful weapon, be it in form of poetry, scenic event, or radio<sup>19</sup>. This kind of art was a weapon spreading propaganda and counter-propaganda when other means were dangerous or inaccessible, and a comforter giving way to images of free and just life of Slovenian liberated and proud community after the imminent victory. Art was a source of courage when enemy seemed to be invincible and much too strong for any try against its forces. Clausewitzian kind of war between nation-states needs just drums and trumpets, but massive involvement of civilians in the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century introduced art as a weapon and comfort already. After the Second World War, literature on it became a genre, even without mentioning all the other arts involved with bitter memories and building new hopes from terror and death. This kind of art had at least two social functions. It stressed that the victory over the forces of darkness was a just one and a salvation for humanity as such, thus giving legitimization to the post-war order on both sides of the Curtain. Representations of war produced new narratives which were easier to accept and to swallow as those brought from the war itself.

With post-industrial and post-modern society, one might conclude that mass culture and media means may have an important part in production and maintenance of new wars. That, of course, is true. But traditional art forms had an important role as well, especially in Yugoslavia. Later president, Milošević's tutor and the leading author of the famous Serbian nationalist Memorandum which announced the political program of ex-Yugoslav wars at the end of the eighties Dobrica Ćosić was among the first to introduce new nationalist sagas in the

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<sup>19</sup> There are many poets who were involved with the movement as poets, and recognized as fighters for their poetry, as much as those who organized scenic "meetings" in vilages and towns liberated for a period or permanently, and there was "the only free radio in the occupied Europe", the label given to "Radio Kričač" ("Radio Screamer", illegal radio emitting from different localitis of Ljubljana during the first years of war when it was divided between Italian and German occupation forces).

1970ies, with his "Time of Death" as the beginning of a "*La commedie Serbe*", a multinovel opus on Serbian grandeur and constant betrayal of the Others which offers Great Serbia as a solution for all damages and troubles of the past. It has to be added that this is the same Dobrica Ćosić who had the distinguished role of putting new program of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in a literary appealing universal humanist shape at the end of the 1950ies, as the document of the theoretical and political outcome of the break and fight with Stalinism. His is just the most outstanding, and as literature really good example of the wave of nationalist literature and art in Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and elsewhere in the 1980ies. While mass media spread uneasiness, irrational passions and target-oriented explanations of "who's to blame", this kind of art built a case for historical roots of nationalism and its human dignity and mission. On the other side, you may find such cases as a TV humorist show "Top List of the Surrealists" produced by a group of Sarajevo actors with Branko Djurić as leading figure (Branko Djurić played one of the two leading parts in "No Man's Land") at the end of the 1980ies. This was a kind of Balkan "Monty Python" humor, with all-embracing dark perspective of disasters of a new war waiting for all of us around the corner. This kind of humor, irony and cynicism of artistic production made life in Sarajevo easier during the war, when it became a pattern of a stubborn humanist and cosmopolitan response against nationalist appeal to enlist to one's own tribe. And it is this kind of humor that inhabits the image of war produced after Dayton agreement as a therapy aimed at the building of new sustainable multicultural community of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In spite of post-industrial global society of informations spread around the globe by networks for the distribution of images and texts, even traditional art has not become obsolete in conditions of new wars which are, as most authors agree in description, fought in much more primitive manner and with much more simple weapons as expected in announcements of a high-tech period of warfare. Main targets and victims of these wars are civilians which cannot really help themselves getting involved, most of the time in both parts, as victims of war and as perpetrators of violence. Prevailing image of new war is universal horror and total chaos introduced by force, but persisting as an order of things even after cease fire takes place. If there is any proof of the theories of risk society and uncertainty as a global situation, we can find it in the world-view of those who were involved with new wars even if only for a short period of time. Any other situation is not accepted as "ordinary" any more, at its best in can be a "safe haven", a contingent and limited place or period of time.

Global network of images would like to describe these situations as exceptions to the global rule, to express optimism based on out-dated traditional examples of humanism and

compassion, and to declare chaos and terror are just results of local reasons emerging from unenlightened remnants of the past, such as ethnic hatred, unsolved disputes, religious fundamentalisms and fanaticisms etc., thus diagnosing the state of emergency as only a local event and a temporary period of transition. Local artistic therapy consists more of presenting chaotic terror as something permanent and fatal, an epoch which we have to adapt ourselves to if we want to survive as humans, and for that mission we cannot use shallow humanistic phrases any more. To give some elevating food to our spirits, we need much stronger drugs which include means of plebeian arts well known from all kinds of dark ages.

#### 4. "No Man's Land": the best foreign and the most plebeian movie

National TV stations were most appropriate means to spread the atmosphere of hatred, uncertainty, chaos and terror, using hyperreality produced by a mixture of biased information, false commentary, one-sided political talk-shows and round tables, spiced with life image of fight in the political arena. Nationalist art was not that important, but its production in theatres and books was massive anyway. After-war therapy is concentrated on movies which, as everywhere else, are first shown in cinemas, then appear as videos, and after a certain period also on TV screens. Movies on Balkan wars now already are a *genre* because they have something more in common than just a topic. Beside "No Man's Land" (2001), just to name a few, there are "Before the Rain" (1994), "Underground-Once Upon a Time There Was a Country" (1995), "Pretty Village, Pretty Flame" (1996), "Welcome to Sarajevo" (1997), "The Wounds" (1998), "War Live" (2001), "Chico" (2001). They are all anti-war films, some of them made as a warning, as Milčo Mančevski's Macedonian movie "Before the Rain", and the rest of them as an after-war image of events. Some of them deal with the general ex-Yugoslavia narrative, especially Emir Kusturica's "Underground", but the better part shows the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These could be catalogued in three groups: Serbian (as "Pretty Village, Pretty Flame", "The Wounds", and "War Live"), Bosnian (No Man's Land) and international (as "Welcome to Sarajevo", and "Chico"). These groups have different anti-war poetics. Serbian films follow the logic of terror and horror, chaos and disturbed life to open the perspective of a total abyss of humanity. Bosnian film follows the specific Bosniak's tradition of humor, wit and sur-realist image of the same terror and chaos. The humanism's chance with the first kind lies in a possible catharsis obtained through total estrangement and horror, and with the second kind in a possible catharsis reached by means of laughter and mockery confronted to the same terrible reality of war. International films use melodramatic narrative to enable audience to swallow what "the Balkan Others" do to each other while

remaining in position of civilized first world doing its best. Obviously, these are also positions of therapy targeting different audiences, but as movies are all international today, they get mixed effects and understandings. That was already obvious with Kusturica's "Underground" which was accepted differently with different national or international public. And while Serbian war films of horror may show to their domestic audiences what they were not allowed to see as a "TV reality", it may represent for the others just another proof of the matter-of-fact dealing with violence and barbarity. "No Man's Land" may be accepted by Bosnian public as a witty estrangement from reality, and still the only form of representation of life suitable for this public, but may be criticized by international public as insensitive mockery, especially of the international unselfish efforts to organize humanitarian aid and to prevent and later stop the war.

What international public of these movies lacks in atmosphere is not just a direct experience of war common to all of ex-Yugoslav audiences. They do not share the experience of Yugoslav film narrative which persists in this ex-Yugoslav *genre*.

After the Second World War, following the Soviet example, film production became the most important part of the socialist culture. When Yugoslavia broke its alliance with Soviet Union and other communist countries and parties in 1948, this strive for a socialist film production increased due to even greater need to build an independent historical legitimization of Yugoslav communist leadership. The best way to build a socialist *genre*, the first one of a typically Yugoslav kind, of anti-fascist liberation war of 1941-1945. At first, numerous films followed the pattern of heroism, which later developed in classical monumental historic sagas about fights of Sutjeska, Neretva, Drvar, Užice, Sarajevo and others. Later, another kind of Second World War movies joined the first kind, with a tendency to show the war through the ordinary people's eyes, to prove that the whole nation was a collective hero of the underground and guerilla heroism. The best saga's, especially those of Veljko Bulajić, tried to put together both ways and mixing Richard Burton featuring "Tito live" together with "small people's" histories and tragedies.

The period of so called "black wave" appeared in 1960ies and 1970ies, and produced some of the best Yugoslav films ever, using different means to confront the false legitimization image of historical heroism and socialist welfare state with more or less radical modernist criticism. This *genre* became very popular in spite of its prevailing intellectualism and avant-garde touch because it was the only possibility to experience a different image of reality from the official one. Somewhere around 1974, this kind of production was banned, restricted, and these movies were put away from distribution, appearing again only at the end of the 1980ies.

In the meantime, another kind of film discourse developed with the group of cineasts called "Prague school" because they came from Prague film academy. These directors, their actors, and all the other more or less permanent staff changed the point of view from intellectual to common everyday view of everyman/everywoman, and the manner of targeting the reality from modernist coded narrative to humor, wit and joke emerging from the confrontation between official ideology and everyday reality. The specter, of course, includes those who decided for more simple and easy everyday comedies, and those who developed a poetics of sur-realism, irony and sometimes even cynicism. This kind of mirroring the distorted reality in a funny decomposing mirror entered theatres and TV comedies, rock music shows and video production as well. As much as mass public was able to decipher codes of modernist intellectual criticism and enjoy its stings, mass public now became familiar with a complex discourse of sur-realist carnivalesque laughter. Already mentioned TV show "Top List of the Sur-Realists" is the result and also one of the best examples of the kind.

All Balkan war films made in ex-Yugoslavia production, be it in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Macedonia, share with this "Prague school" films something more than just some of directors and actors and other involved staff. They use poetics of this school as a starting point.

Many thinkers of the last decades announced that enlightenment humanism is dead. This fact is proved in Balkan war films in two ways. First, narratives which try to rebuilt traditional humanism are more or less an artistic and ideological failure; this goes especially for international production. Second, the best body of films from "Underground" and "Pretty Villages, Pretty Flames" to "No Man's Land" directly confronts us with the impossibility of any humanism at their starting point. They can not use devices common to Second World War opus where pure humanism heroically and tragically wins over the dark forces again and again, with "Schindler's List" as one of the late and still functional and popular examples. With the horizon of humanism, tragedy and heroism are lost as well. We are stuck with the bare facts of new war's cruelty and despair, without and healing ideology. Beside that, there are just everyday human beings, introduced in their war roles which were not really chosen by them, but which they have to play without hope anyway. Perhaps that is why international film critics so often use the label of absurdity to define this *genre*. In all films of the sort, big bosses of war are absent. The officer's rank never reaches generals, the politicians, native or international, never gets to the level of those on the Hague tribunal's list. There is no separating line between culprits and victims. The ideology of "collateral damage" and "innocent victim" is destroyed both ways. First, of course, in new wars civilians are not

collateral damage. They are the prime target. Second, everybody is involved and becomes responsible - even those who left the country feel responsible and guilty for not being there during the worst times, and are constantly reminded that they do not share the same experience with those who stayed there. Nobody is given a privilege of being innocent and everybody is a victim too.

"No Man's Land" is a typical Bosnian film, with a special touch of carnivalesque laughter. The absurdity of Samuel Beckett's kind is not the best comparison. Nasradin Hodza's art of life combined with Radio Erevan deconstruction of ideological twists might be a better one, but the real background is the "Prague School" narration, together with Branko Djurić's and his groups "Top List of Surrealistst" TV show (he plays one of the two leading parts in the film!).

Doctors recognize symptoms, risk a diagnose and prescribe a therapy. With after-war therapy in hand, we can risk a conclusion about a diagnose, but also recognize what doctrine doctors follow. In Balkan war movies, two things well connected in the case of Second World War are missing. The first is clear definition of the culprits and their punishment, not only with Nürnberg trial which was a stage in itself but with numerous historical books and artistic fictions repeating the story of culprits and victims over and over again, until it became a pattern of collective memory. The second is the will and ability to forget and even forgive, after the justice is done, and live normal life again. Justice and memory of the collective first step made forgetting and forgiveness of the individual second step possible, but both were built on clear-cut result of the war. There was no doubt who won the war, and we know that history belongs to the winners. With new wars, there is no victory, only devastation. In the absence of a winning collective, individuals have to cope with the problem which can not be solved by any international tribunal because there is no winning side. The possibility to declare international order with its organized humanitarian help and military intervention a winning side is still far away. From contemporary point of view the most clumsy and absurd activist of new wars is international community. Without a clear victorious side which would do justice and put down official historical interpretations, individuals have to cope with their troubles by themselves as they can, with means accessible on an individual scale and to plebeian production of culture, deeply wounded in their humanity as victims and culprits, overflowed with the impression of the senseless tragedy, and feeling in their bones that it can happen anytime again because nothing has and will not change. From this starting point, artists have found a method to overturn reality, and then follow two ways to offer at least some therapy. Reality in Bosnia and Herzegovina is precisely "the desert of the Real", and

there is no place to escape from it - it is the only reality that is there. No Baudrillard can help here, proclaiming that we do not live in such places anymore, as we abandoned "real reality" and departed for hyperreality. With unobtainable gift of hyperreality, living in the desert of the Real, it is the good old distorted mirroring which comes handy. To see yourself in your world is to estrange yourself from terrible direct presence to sustainable representation. To do that in a manner of realism would be too much and unnecessary. A touch of surrealism is needed, distorting mirroring of bad dreams and suppressed memories. Bad dreams and suppressed memories are not simulacra, and those who are possessed by them are not simulators. To confront bad dreams and suppressed memories is enough, to produce an image of different and possible reality is still out of reach : God of humanistic and progressist preachery is dead. With this method, there are two ways of therapeutic representation which are usually intertwined and combined by movie-makers, but the first one visibly prevails in Serbian cinematography, while the second one is typically Bosnian and multicultural. Serbia had its own "hyperreality" of ideological image which was released incessantly for ten years from all possible sources, and this image was the main weapon and war-field in a country which experienced just a glimpse of a real war at the very end, with NATO bombings. Serbian movies are an information on reality which could not be experienced in former representations, and which people did not want to see anyway, being in love with nationalist grandeur and deceit, dismissing everyday living proof of terror and decay. In these movies, we do not see what we were not allowed to watch by the authorities, we see what we ourselves did not want to see. At last, we are able to see through the fake of "hyperreality". The desert of the Real we see was clearly visible from the simple standpoint of everyman/woman all the time. Nobody forced us to be blind. Ideological image of a fake "hyperreality" was the construction of our own wish, and that is what is really terrible. This is a sublime experience proposed for therapeutic reasons.

The Bosnian counterpart, the way of irony and laughter, does what must seem even more horrible to those not involved. It does not cover the desert of the Real with a blanket of easy jokes accessible to those who had luck to survive untouched and unharmed. It makes the very core of the horror a reason for laughter, which is at the same time a direct denial of any humanism and the ultimate standpoint from which at least some faith in human future can be proclaimed. But this is not laughing after the event became part of the tamed past. The body is here to stay, together with a mine on which it is stuck forever. The reason for sur-realist laughter is that the others still do not know that the whole world is stuck, not Bosnia and Herzegovina only.

## Appendix 1

"No Man's Land" (2001), Bosnia and Herzegovina; 1 hr. 28 min.

Starring: Branko Djurić, Rene Bitorajac, Filip Šovagović, Geogres Siatidis, Serge-Henri Valcke, Katrin Cartlidge, Simon Callow

Directed and written by: Danis Tanović

Co-production of Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Italy, Belgium, Great Britain and Slovenia  
Ciki and Nino, a Bosnian and a Serb, are soldiers stranded in a trench between enemy lines during the Bosnian war. They have no one to trust, no way to escape without getting shot and a Bosnian fellow soldier is lying on the trench floor with a spring-loaded bomb set to explode beneath him if he moves. With the two men stuck in a bizarre predicament, a frustrated UN sergeant tries to help, despite orders to remain at his post. When a journalist waylays the sergeant while pushing for an exclusive melodrama story, she affects the unfolding of events and turns a news story into an international circus. With the world's press waiting for an outcome, no one willing to take action (lest they accept responsibility) and a soldier still stuck with a bomb beneath him which even German expert cannot deactivate, the news-story gets a fake ending while during the evacuation of the spot Ciki and Nino have a final murdering attempt against each other. Finally, the place is evacuated and abandoned, with the exception of the soldier, still alive and still stuck remains there alone, with no one able to help him, doomed to continue his life in a freezed position or, making just one wrong move, to commit suicide.

## Appendix 2

1. Underground (1995), Serbia

Starring: Lazar Ristovski, Miki Manojlović, Mirjana Joković, Srdjan Todorović

Directed by Emir Kusturica

2. Pretty Village, Pretty Flame (1996), Serbia

Starring: Dragan Bjelogrić, Nikola Pejaković, Dragan Maksimović

Directed by Srdjan Dragojević

3. Welcome to Sarajevo (1997)

Starring: Stephen Dillane, Woody Harrelson, Marisa Tomei, Emira Nušević, Kerry Fox

Directed by Michael Winterbottom

4. The Wounds (1998), Serbia

Starring: Dušan Pečić, Milan Marić, Branka Katić, Dragan Bjelogrić, Miki Manojlović

Directed by: Srdjan Dragojević

5. Chico (2001)

Directed by Ibolya Fekete

6. War Live(2001), Serbia

Starring: Aleksandar Berček, Dragan Bjelogrić, Daryl Haney

Directed by Darko Bajić

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