

A Relay of Youth of the 21st Century. A Re-enactment of Ritual or a Grotesque Performance?

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Abstract: In this paper I would like to present some kind of political ritual. I focused on public holiday in former Yugoslavia called “Day of Youth” (Dan Mladosti), namely the federal festival of the youth. The holiday was one of the largest and most important performative practices related to the ideology of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. “Day of Youth” was a specific form of a state-licensed political ritual and become a key element in the symbolic expression of the “new”, post-war and socialist Yugoslavia. Officially established in 1957, the holiday survived the death of Marshal Josip Broz Tito (then officially dubbed “Tito’s Holiday without Tito”) and had its last edition in 1987. What might be surprising in this context, therefore, is the restitution of this holiday in the early 21st century. 20 years after the last official celebration of this holiday, people who wanted to reactivate it emerged in public spaces. An article not only discusses some dimensions of Youth Day and especially Youth Relay, but also provides few examples of its new functioning. An attempt at comprehensive interpretation of this phenomenon will be based on the use of the concept of political ritual and in context of “performative turn”.

Key words: Yugoslavian “Day of Youth”, Relay of Youth, political ritual, performative turn, Tostalgia

In 1987, in Belgrade, a commission reviewing the works submitted in a contest promoting the Yugoslavian Day of Youth (Dan Mladosti) debated as to who should be awarded the prize. A great favourite of the jury was a project titled “Youth Day” prepared by an artistic group from Slovenia called Novi Kolektivizem. The entire jury concurred that this work should be awarded first prize. Only then did somebody observe that the work was almost a perfect replica of a Nazi poster made by Richard Klein, one of Hitler’s favourite artists. However, the purpose of this article is not to remind of the activity of Neue Slovenische Kunst (of which Novi Kolektivizem was a part), a body of work that still enjoys interest and which had different dimensions and contextualised its meaningful existence variously depend on time and place (Kuligowski 1999). The focal point of my attention rather is a holiday called “Youth Day”, namely the federal festival of youth.

The holiday was one of the largest and most important performative practices related to the ideology of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Officially established in 1957, the holiday survived the death of Marshal Josip Broz Tito (then officially dubbed “Tito’s Holiday without Tito”) and had its last edition in 1987. No doubt, the above-described artistic scandal of the year made a significant contribution to the fall of this holiday and the disintegration of its meaningfulness. Mark Thompson, one of the western commentators of the dramatic process of the fall of Yugoslavia said that “The end of Dan Mladosti did more real damage to the SFRY than any number of discontented nationalists or dissident pamphlets” (Thompson 1992: 233). What might be surprising in this context, therefore, is the restitution of this holiday in the early 21st century. An attempt at comprehensive interpretation of this phenomenon will be based on the use of the concept of political ritual.

In the vocabulary of studies on society and culture, the word ‘ritual’ is to be numbered amongst the most commonly used terms. Today, contemporary theories have significantly transformed its meaning. On one hand, ritual has ceased to be a way of life or a system of social values, an issue generally failed to be brought to attention, but rather has become a specific field of symbolic battles, an object of pride and adoration and an element in national and ethnic politics. As David Kertzer has suggested, ritual structures our experience. Or even more – ritual guides our perceptions and channels our interpretation of those perceptions. “Through ritual (...) we not only make sense of the world around us, but we also are led to believe that the order we see is not of our own (cultural) making, but rather an order that belongs to the external world itself” (Kertzer 1988: 85). Paraphrasing Clifford Geertz’s definition of culture, Kertzer defined ritual as “action wrapped in a web of symbolism” (Kertzer 1988: 9). This assumes that ritual has – among others - a communicative role. Another role is connected with ideology. Maurice Bloch saw ritual in this context as a form of ideology which provides an alternative to “normal” everyday life (Bloch 1989). Bloch uses many examples to illustrate his formulation, of which indicate that ritual is essentially conservative or mystifying. This is a common point: Kertzer described a “ritual election” staged in El Salvador “to demonstrate to the world that El Salvador was indeed ruled by the democratic masses” (Kertzer 1988: 49). Political ritual does not merely represent social structure, but acts upon it and becomes the significant site of political contest between different social groups. Because political rituals involve symbols, they can lead to change as much as they can evoke tradition and continuity. In this paper I would like to interpret the Yugoslavian Relay of Youth as specific form of action “wrapped in a web of symbolism”, which has a communicative and also an ideological function, and through the category of a cultural game with a particular history and local tradition.

Richard Klein was one of Adolf Hitler’s favourite artists. He designed Hitler’s famous post stamp likeness and the right profile of the führer was printed in mil-

lions of copies. In addition to these stamps, the artistic output of Klein included a number of projects used by the state offices of the III Reich, such as special occasion medals (e.g. the Anschluss Medal), trophies and emblems. 1937 marked Klein's greatest public success- the design of a poster advertising the "Great Exhibition of German Art" presented in the newly opened Munich Haus der Kunst (the poster was later used as a cover of the new art magazine titled "Kunst im dritten Reich"). The picture is a combination of realistic and mythological elements; it is a composition presenting the profile of Pallas Athena (the goddess of war, wisdom and art), the Nazi eagle, Promethean fire and a swastika (Michaud 2004: 92-93). The picture depicts struggle, determination, confirmation of one's greatness and all the values regarded as the perfect artistic expression of Nazi ideology. It is worth emphasising that the aforementioned exhibition was opened by Hitler himself on the eve of the official public opening of another art exhibition, Entartete Kunst (the First "Great German Art Exhibition" 2012). The collection presented works of degenerate and sick art that questioned the spirit of National Socialism. Together with Hermann Gradl, Adolf Wissel, Karl Leipold, Heinrich Knirr and many others, Klein openly supported art line with the discourse then prevailing in Germany.

The memory of Klein and his court art would have lasted probably only in narrow circles of art and ideology historians were it not for a certain event, apparently, very remote from the times of the III Reich and its aesthetics. In 1987, in Belgrade, a commission reviewing the works submitted in a contest promoting the Yugoslavian Day of Youth debated as to who should be awarded the prize. A great favourite of the jury was a project prepared by a small, yet popular, artistic group from Slovenia called Novi Kolektivizem. The poster simply titled "Youth Day" was different from other works. It was harsh in appearance as it used a limited number of colours, i.e. white, black and different shades of grey. It represented an athletic, naked young man carrying a torch and a fluttering banner with a star on it. The young man was boldly marching forward without paying attention to obstacles rising up under his feet. He looked into the future and his entire posture was a manifestation of determination and dedication to the cause. The entire jury concurred that this unusual work should be awarded first prize; moreover, the poster had already been reprinted by a number of magazines. Only then did somebody observe, with horror, that the work was an almost perfect replica of Richard Klein's picture created nearly half a century earlier. The changes introduced into the original work were only slight: the swastika on the banner was replaced with a five-pointed star, while the black eagle (the national emblem of the III Reich) on the flagpole had turned white, with the title "Dan Mladosti" being the only new element. The case was soon condemned as a scandal giving rise to fierce discussions not so much devoted to the general condition of art, but rather to the condition of a state, where the most appropriate embodiment of its prevailing ideology had turned out

to be a poster submitted to its largest propaganda festival, that in fact reproduced signs fascist totalitarianism. The alleged comparison of Tito to Hitler gave rise to outrage and the imprisonment of the poster's authors was even considered. In the end, after the matter - had seen the light of day, the prize was awarded to a work which left no room for any doubt - it was a green leaf (green as the colour of hope) on a red background with a socialist star integrated into its composition.

The Day of Youth in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was a great event with many ideological and cultural meanings. Although the Day of Youth became an official holiday in Yugoslavia in 1957, the origins of the relay race can be traced back to 1945. At that time, a youth organisation from Kragujevac organised an event called Tito's Relay ("Titova štafeta") (*Slovenci prvi prestali* 2005), with Croatian Kumrovec, the place of Tito's birth, as its starting point. Its distinctive features would, in the years to come, become a distinguishing signs of the youth relay races. The first characteristic was the route combining all the key geographical points in the geography of Tito's system into a symbolic network "all the historic cities and battlefields of our revolution" [*Titova štafeta – Štafeta mladosti* 1986]). The second was the special hollow batons in the shape of a torch, holding a greeting card for Comrade Tito. And the third was a festive culmination in the presence of the leader on May 25th (regarded erroneously as Tito's birthday). In 1945, over 12 thousand participants, with young people constituting the majority, were engaged in the race. The runners covered a distance of over 9 thousand kilometres. At the finish of the race, Tito was given the first 9 batons and a specially prepared book with 15 thousand signatures of young people from the region of Šumadija. 10 years later, the number of participants was estimated at 14,000, with the entire route reaching nearly 100 thousand kilometres (Čolović 2012: 19).

Each year, the relay race would start in a different city of the federation, one that would stand out in the recent history of the new state. It is worth mentioning that until 1956 the final of the relay race and hand-over of the batons would always take place in Zagreb. The running of the previously determined route could take up to a few months. Engaged in this collective effort were different professional groups; the relay batons were carried to mountain tops, across rivers and lakes, were given to scuba divers and parachute jumpers and their miniature replicas were carried by post pigeons. Statistics show that over the first 12 years of this ritual, over 10,200,000 thousand runners covered a distance of 877,000 kilometres, carrying 20,000 batons (*Danas je 25. Maj* 2012).

An interesting point about the beginning of the ritual is its social context. The building of a new socialist state took place within the framework of a discourse of unity and joint effort. An official document justifying the need for industrialisation and collectivisation was the Act on a "Five-Year Plan of Economic Development for Yugoslavia" (1947-1951). What were its practical implications? In 1947, within

less than a year, 6 thousand young *junaks* built a 242 km long Šamac-Sarajevo railway line. Another team drilled through the Montenegro scree between Nikišić and Titograd (now Podgorica), while another tunnel was forged between Doboј and Banja Luka. It was the youth who built the ironworks in Železnik, a rolling mill in Savojna, a steam boiler plant in Zagreb, and a metallurgical region in Bosnia. The statutory five-year term was concluded with frequent transfers of working brigades of young swashbucklers to new places of employment in coal mines, tasks related to road hardening, forest clearing or maize harvesting (Walkiewicz 2000: 157, 201). At that time, collective effort, competition and the fulfilment of obligations were elevated to the rank of a praiseworthy duty. Young people traversing new sections of a route around the country became a perfect element of an ideology-pervaded work landscape. The relay race was also a kind of labour.

1957 was the year of a breakthrough in the moulding of the image and cultural meaningfulness of the race. By decision of the Marshal, the relay race, previously treated as a birthday present for the leader, was integrated into the celebration of Youth Day. A new state holiday and a day off work was thus established. Its most lavish manifestation was still the Youth Relay (“štafeta mladosti”). From this point, the holiday thus defined and having the form of a state-licensed political ritual became a key element in the symbolic expression of the “new” Yugoslavia (Bringa 2004: 156-157). The relay race would start a month earlier and its finishing line was no longer in Zagreb but in the federation’s capital, Belgrade, in the largest stadium of the Yugoslavian national army. The race ran across the republics and autonomous districts of Yugoslavia, mobilising students, young workers, learners and members of youth organisations. Stops were established at universities, factories and culture clubs. Local celebrations were held in each of the cities and towns along the relay route. Their scenario would vary in details, but in the majority of cases it was similar: the ceremony was opened by reading greetings for Tito. The ensuing cultural and artistic part included songs dedicated to Tito, guerrilla songs and the folk dances of a given region. Once the ceremony was over, the race was continued until the next town and ritual stop.

The culmination of the relay was in Belgrade. The final ceremony of the Day of Youth was held in the presence of Tito, his wife (whoever she might be at the time) and party officials. A huge open air show with thousands of performers and spectators was organised in the stadium. The performance would include folk and gymnastics shows presented by young athletes, soldiers and students. Special groups prepared clichés such as: “Tito, we love you”, “Youth is the future”, or “Happy Youth Day”. Songs performed en masse thundered with refrains like “Tito is our heart, Tito is our sun”. And all was accompanied with a veritable forest of flags and, in the final years, firework shows.

Children would present the Marshal with greetings in the form of poems or personal letters. Teachers would select the best wishes composed at schools and

Tito received a selection from each school and each republic. Some of them were read aloud during the ceremony. Naturally, the key moment of the holiday was presenting Tito with the baton. The person who was granted this honour was pre-selected from a group of the most active members of youth party organisations. As the appointment was regarded as a token of prestige, we know the names and surnames of these last runners in the relay race. They were from different regions of the federation, e.g. Nish, Titograd, Pristina, Skopje, Bihać, Zagreb and Sarajevo. Red pioneer scarves around their necks, each of the chosen ones ran up to the rostrum where they were met by the Marshal in the company of other officials. In 1979, when Tito participated in the Youth day for the last time in person, Sanjija Hiseni, a student from Pristina, had the privilege of meeting him and delivering a laudatory speech in which she praised socialism, Yugoslavia and Tito in Albanian, later switching to Serbo-Croatian. Tito returned the favour with a series of kisses and handshakes. Finally, the whole stadium applauded and chanted the name of their leader.

The ritual of Youth Day was broadcast throughout Yugoslavia; first on the radio, and later on TV. The show enjoyed vast popularity and had millions of viewers. The race continued until 1980, when it was interrupted for the first time as it was passing through Croatian roads. »Comrade Tito is dead!« - the sentence pronounced on 4 May that year reverberated throughout the media and literally shocked the people of Yugoslavia. The leader of the Federation died in Ljubljana. Thousands gathered along the rails along which his body was transported to Belgrade. Given the circumstances, the continuation of a race in the honour of Tito, or the following of the well-known scenario of Youth Day, was no longer possible. Tito's death did not however put an end to the festival.

The already well moulded ritual was successfully converted from a celebration of the leader's birthday into a commemoration of his death. On May 9th, 1980, at 11 a.m. sharp, the door to the building of the Assembly of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was drawn slightly open. Inside, placed on a podium and covered with the national banner was a coffin holding the body of Josip Broz Tito. Eight young people: seven boys and a girl, each clad in black, approached the casket. They represented all the »constitutive elements« of Yugoslavia: Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Metochia and Vojvodina. This was the last change to the 36th Relay of Youth, disrupted unexpectedly a few days before by the death of the Marshal. As usual, Tito received the greetings from the young people and relay batons, except that this time purely on a symbolic level. A representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the republic which the relay race failed to reach, placed a decorative baton at the base of the coffin. Inside, there was a letter with a message from Yugoslavian youth. The final wishes of the pioneers and young people of Yugoslavia were not noticeably different from those of preceding years: »Youth was close to you. You created the future for the

youth. You have made the world closer to us. Our dearest and kindest friend... We will continue your work«¹.

Indeed, despite Tito's passing away, the idea of the ritual relay race was still practiced. In the years following 1980, the organisation of Youth Day was continued preserving the key elements of the usual scenario. What needed correction was the final ceremony in the stadium. Again, with batons in their hands, young people would run up to the rostrum, but now the batons were no longer handed over to the Marshal, but to the head of the organisation called the Young Communist League of Yugoslavia (Savez socijalističke omladine Jugoslavije), which was the youth extension of the ruling party. The last runner reported the completion of the relay race which was a symbol of love for comrade Tito. In 1987, a twist was added to the final; with the benefit of hindsight, this could be regarded as an attempt at adjusting the old ritual to new circumstances. The baton handed over by the runner emerging from a crowd of young people making up a five-pointed star on the grass of the stadium was passed from hand to hand (this time with two bunches of yellow flowers). It was finally handed over to a student, Rejmonda Broćaj who, quite conventionally, announced the conclusion of the "Tito trail" thanking the late leader in all the languages of the federation. It was, we have to add, the final Yugoslavian Youth Day combined with a relay race traversing the entire country².

The Youth Relay was held for the last time in 1987; the same year in which Slobodan Milošević took power in Serbia (shortly afterwards, in place of the relay symbols of political power, brotherhood, and unity of another type would appear: relics of saints and poets [Čolović 2012: 19]. At that point, it seemed that the Youth Relay would finally be laid to rest in the history of the collective rituals related to the cults of great leader. By then, Tito had been dead for a few years. Also, the Federation of Yugoslav Republics he had ruled was gradually disintegrating. It was first exposed to ridicule three years after Tito's death; when scientists, writers and columnists who gathered in Zagreb (not so long ago swearing an oath that they would follow the path set by the Marshal) spoke of "mandarins of consciousness" and "heirs of Stalin". In 1987, the foundations of the federation were being questioned (and exposed) by the artists from Novi Kolektivizam. On May 4th, 1990, at three o'clock, the hour of Tito's death, sirens went off for the last time; later, his mausoleum was simply closed for a couple of years. In 1991, the values, essence and territory of Yugoslavia were veiled in a shroud of disintegration and ruthless war. There was no reason for continuing a ritual which could become absurd in the new political social and cultural environment. The cultural and social history of

1 See: Štafeta mladosti na odru druga Tita 4.maj 1980, video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkzD51JOV6g>, 08.03.2012).

2 See: Dan Mladosti 1987. - predaja štafete - Druže Tito mi ti se kunemo, video (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bC_PpGj8Jg&feature=relmfu, 30. 3. 2012).

Youth Day could therefore be embraced in three consecutive scenes: (1) Tito's Relay, "Титова штафета" (1945-1956); (2) Youth Day, "Дан младости" (1956-1980); (3) After Tito-still Tito, "И после Тита-Тито" (1956-1987).

The relay race accompanying Youth Day more than any other holiday in the Tito calendar of rituals embodied the idea of "Brotherhood and Unity", which was key to the ruling of the multinational federation. In the official discourse, the race was synonymously referred to as the path to "Brotherhood and Unity"; in virtually every city of the multinational federation, squares and streets were named after it (Borowiec 1977: 27). Its function was therefore to baste multi-cultural Yugoslavia together, a role manifested not only through propaganda clichés but also through the physical act of the relay race across all the republics. Naturally, the stadium culmination is reminiscent of other political rituals, so well known from other Eastern Bloc countries: May Day, harvest festivals, the celebration of Nicolae Ceaușescu's birthday at the end of January³; it also imitated ceremonies that accompany, for example, the opening of the Olympic Games or other notable sports events. It was this mass spectacle that was to become the carrier of ideas, a festive and community manifestation of ideological precepts.

Surprising in this context were the reports of information agencies which on May 4th, 2008 relayed the news of thousands gathering in Belgrade ... on the occasion of Youth Day! 20 years after the last official celebration of this holiday, people who wanted to reactivate it emerged in public spaces. What is more, in each consecutive year the demonstration grew in size, attracting more and more participants. 2010 was particularly important - it was the year of the 118th anniversary of Tito's birthday and the 30th anniversary of his death. Among the visitors to the Marshal's grave were representatives of all the post-Yugoslavian states. In front of the entrance to the House of Flowers, guests from Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Hercegovina and Macedonia gathered. A group of motorcyclists came from Novy Sad, and the legendary footballer of Crvena Zvezda Belgrad, Dušan "Dule" Savić, also appeared. Old Yugoslavian banners were flown and some of the participants were clad in uniforms commemorating the Second World War. Songs associated with the fallen state and its community and guerrilla image were sung, e.g. "Po šumama i gorama", "Od Vardara pa do Triglava", or "Zizvela Jugoslavija" (they are recognized by participants as "Yugoslav", "war", "partisan", "revolution", or "Tito's" songs (Hjemdahl, Alempijević 2006: 165). The organisers of the ceremony were the Josip Broz Association and the recently formed Communist Party with Josip Jozzka Broz, the grandson of the late Marshal, as its leader. In his speech to the gathered crowd, Tito's grandson said that Youth Day should reinforce the relationships between people from all regions of the former Yugoslavia; relationships destroyed as a re-

3 "If you tell the worshippers of Tito that Stalin's birthday was celebrated by organizing relays, and Hitler's birthday with stadium drills, and that only Kim Il Sung was showered with flowers as much as Tito was, the answer you will get is: he was different" (Jančar 2012: 32).

sult of the war in the 1990s. “The crowd listened to records of Tito’s speeches with reverence,” reported a journalist. “Subsequently, his grandson and namesake took the floor. (...) To the accompaniment of long lasting applause, he welcomed a delegation from the embassy of Libya and ensured everyone that a united Yugoslavia would rise from the ashes and that Serbia would never join NATO” (Dérens 2011: 33).

Tito’s grandson is a person of symbolic significance. He declares his interest in uniting all Serbian communists into a single party. His intentions and words do not fall on barren soil. Over the past few years now, a number of associations openly alluding to the traditions of the former Yugoslavia have been established, such as the General Consulate of SFRJ in Tivat, Montenegro; the Association of Yugoslavians in Zagreb (struggling for the right of members to call themselves Yugoslavians), the Josip Broz-Tito Association in Bihac (coordinating the activity of 48 communal branches), and the Our Yugoslavia Association with branches established in all the states of the former Yugoslavia (Herman-Milenkovska 2010). These facts indicate that Yugonostalgia is not a sufficient concept to explain an increasingly manifested longing for life in Tito’s Yugoslavia. Slovenian sociologist, Mitja Velikonja, was the first to describe this phenomenon; he said that in parallel with Yugonostalgia, we are witnessing the development of “Titostalgia” (Velikonja 2009). What do these terms refer to? “Titostalgia” has a few coinciding and complementary dimensions: it is a political symbol, an artefact of pop culture and an element of discourse but also a part of current social and political practice. This nostalgic discourse includes melancholy, drama and kitsch. It revives a symbol which is so important for the visual culture presented by museums, graffiti, tourist souvenirs and portraits. Naturally, “titostalgia” can take different forms depending on the local context: republic, district, protectorate, enclave or, as Velikonja ironically puts it, “banana” or “mongrel” republic. Sometimes it can be associated with freedom, at others with occupation. “Titostalgia” is being quickly adopted in Serbia; its best-known manifestations include the museum and park in Kumrovec named after Tito, the recently re-opened House of Flowers in Belgrade, or a museum in Drvar. However, limiting the influence of the phenomenon only to Serbia is not justified. There is “Tito” cafe in Sarajevo, “The Maršal”, a luxury restaurant in Podgorica, “Tito” bar in downtown Umaga, “Broz” cafe in Skopje, and “Tito” and “Nostalgija” eateries in Ljubljana. Despite different forms of artistic expression, Tito is idealistically represented in all these venues as a symbol of friendship, solidarity and security. This new contextualisation of the late leader predetermines his attractiveness in a world which is distant from solidarity and full of risk.

Commemorations related to the consecutive anniversaries of Tito’s birth and death, taking the forms described above, could easily be regarded as a specific political folklore, as picturesque as it is marginal. The festival was organised without the parades, shows or live TV broadcast, so popular years ago. There is how-

ever one fact that makes us look at the assembly gathering in front of the Belgrade House of Flowers from a different perspective. For the celebrations were accompanied by a Youth Relay. The organisation responsible for the re-enactment of this ritual is “Titova republika” from Rijeka, the organisation responsible for re-enacting the festival for the first time in 2008. The Marshal’s grandson, as his father before him, was there to provide the final culmination. The original ritual, which began in 1945, was thus continued well over 60 years later!

The 2010 relay race came to Belgrade from 6 locations of the former Federation - Umag, Rijeka, Bačko Gradište, Podgorica, Skopje and Sarajevo and represented 4 former republics: Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro and Macedonia (*Danas je 25. maj* 2012). Having reached the finishing line of the race, all the participants laid wreaths and flowers on Tito’s grave. As in the relay’s previous incarnation, wooden batons with the red star image and the “Brotherhood and Unity” motto were carried by the runners. The participants also evoked a mood long gone by wearing red pioneer scarves on their necks and “titovkas”, small red hats, on their heads. Some of them had small badges with the image of the ex-leader of former Yugoslavia on their lapels. One of the race leaders, 49-year-old Štefica Srića Žic, declared: “We have brought our baton from Croatia and Slovenia. The baton covered the distance from Umag to Belgrade in eight days, travelling by train, car and on foot” (Janjatović 2012). The scale of the 2010 relay race is certainly much smaller when compared with what it was in the past and so is the number of participants and the logistic momentum. It is also worth emphasising that what is described in this paper is a process. Over the two subsequent years, the number of cities, or starting points, grew in number to include Tivat, Subotica, Nish and the villages of Rumenke (in the region of Novy Sad) and Kolut in Vojvodina. Observers notice that the ritual is accompanied with growing enthusiasm. It is estimated that in 2011 the finish of the relay race in Belgrade was welcomed by a crowd of about 20,000 people. Also, locally-organised relay races attract growing crowds. 10,000 thousand spectators watched the relay start in Tivat, at the headquarters of a non-government organisation called the General Consulate of the SFRJ, which issued passports of the former Yugoslavia to interested applicants (nearly 5,000 applicants submitted their requests).

The reenactment of the relay race consists of an as close as possible copying of the old ritual scenario. Let us examine this using the example of the race to Belgrade starting in Umag (Fable 2012)⁴. In the very heart of the city situated in the Istria peninsula is situated “Tito’s” cafe. Members of the local “Josip Broz Tito” association and the earlier mentioned “Titova Republika” Association from Rijeka gathered in the vicinity. At around 13.00, they jointly started the Croatian and Slovenian relay race of brotherhood and unity. The former iconography was re-

4 See also: Udruga Josip Broz Tito Umag”, video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOotUzl8kuk>, 17.06.2012).

constructed with great care, i.e. pioneer uniforms, batons with the image of Triglav, the Croatian chessboard and portraits of the Marshal. The race was initiated with the passage of an open-top Mercedes which made possible the presentation of the baton to all passers-by. The car, designed as a medium of the future, was decorated with pictures of Tito and slogans written on the bonnet, such as “Tito je u nama”, “Tito legenda” and “Socijalizam ne umire”. Gathered around the vehicle were several people holding portraits of the leader. Their statements leave no doubts as to the nature of the event; its essence is the nostalgic memory of a time when life was better, when apartments were readily available, bills lower and moods optimistic. The relay race had to cover a distance of 650 kilometres covering, among others, such places as Rijeka and Kumrovec. The objective was to arrive at the Tito Mausoleum in Belgrade on 25th May.

From the point of view of social and cultural anthropology, as inspired by the works of Victor Turner, Erving Goffman and Richard Schechner, the contemporary re-enactment of the Youth Relay Race appears to be a manifestation of a specific social process falling within the realm of the “performative turn”. This trend in the humanities makes us look at culture as a semantically open, change oriented and performative process, as opposed to textual approaches which often led to an a-historical “freezing” of the meanings explored. Key terms in this approach include rituals, social drama and, naturally, performance and performativeness. The above-described events are also an interesting example of stage politics. Taking into account these few features only, i.e. repeatability, a festive nature, detachment from simple direct utility and symbolic comment on the values making up a certain outlook on life, the relay race can be defined according to the category of a political ritual that sensitizes viewers to the existence of social mythology, propagates political myths, creates, or reinforces, political symbolism, legitimizes historic/religious/folk/cultural traditions, evokes the effect of political community and creates an atmosphere for achievement of certain goals presented as ‘supra-party’ elements (Naumović 1999: 216-217).

In an attempt to understand the motives encouraging the residents of different countries to participate in the organisation of a holiday to honour the late leader of a non-existent state, let us refer to the proposal of Denis Jeffrey (Jeffrey 1998: 111-125). Jeffrey argues that a ritual should perform three key functions: (1) security, (2) transition, and (3) transgression. The first is intended to marginalise the sense of uncertainty and being lost, the second one is activated during crises and transformation in an attempt to ritualise social emotions, while the third aims to facilitate a breaking with the *status quo*, negotiating changes and introducing an element of risk. Jeffrey emphasises that contemporary ritual must fulfil all three functions, lest it become boring or fall into the realm of preposterousness. I have no doubts that the re-enactment of the relay race satisfies these functions and faces the dilemma which Jeffrey so accurately pointed out. The boredom of non-pro-

ductive recurrence and falling into the realm of puppet performance are but two extremes that titostalgics have to face.

Political ritual as defined by David Kertzer not only has a cognitive influence on the general definition of political reality, it also has a persuasive emotional effect, which is extremely important in mobilising people and groups to undertake specific actions. The theatrical and performative nature of rituals usually has a broader social effect than argumentative debates (Kertzer 1988). Naturally, the re-enactment of the relay race is far from the lavish, state authority licensed official ritual organised in the times of Tito. Its social reintroduction is, however, a fact not to be underestimated. In the former Yugoslavian republics, a very specific dialogue with the Federation's heritage taken up by writers, poets, columnists, playwrights, architects and creators of monuments continues. This post-Yugoslavian debate (post-modernistic and post-feministic in other contexts, too) is an attempt at giving second thoughts to what has become a failure, understanding why the great project turned out to be disaster and why the great narrative of Yugoslavia proved ultimately to be so short-lived. The Youth Relay is merely one of the topics of this debate. The near future will show whether it was but a grotesque component of social life, or a serious ritual signifying political mobilisation.

In the end of my paper, I would like to formulate some working conclusions. Firstly, ritual, especially political ritual, is not a traditional subject of anthropological studies. Rituals today carry enormous political and ethical potential. Their political dimensions are realised in many different forms. We should take note of the reflexive nature of the traditions that surround us and make increasingly active attempts to co-create a common, culturalised world. This is – in my view – the essence of contemporary political ritual that raises a challenge for the work of anthropologists. The chief problem presented by the new meanings of the Youth Relay phenomenon is how to place it within other forms of common life: democracy, human rights, domestic law, freedom of speech, national policy, etc. In this light, the most important question is not still “What is ritual and what is grotesque?”, but rather “When, where, how, for whom and under what conditions is it so?”.

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