

COMMUNICATING VESSELS: FORMS, POLITICS, HISTORY:

INTERVIEW WITH DARKO SUVIN*

(18,700 words)

By Sezgin Boynik, May 2014, Lucca

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Sezgin Boynik: *Can you tell in which way the discussions concerning Brecht and Formalist issues in late fifties and beginning of sixties were related to politics and to Marxist theories, in general and particularly in Yugoslavia?*

Darko Suvin: I started writing about literature, fiction, poetry and drama roughly in the second half of the fifties. I finished my studies in '55/56 and then went to army service. So I started to write somewhat as a student, but mainly after 1957. At that moment I didn't know much about old battles (socialist realism versus modernism) that had been fought and won by modernism, more or less. If you read Sveta Lukić's book *Savremena jugoslavenska literatura 1945-1965* (published as a whole in 1968, but his theses were known earlier) you will see these things. The battle was won on the basis of a compromise between the Left intellectuals and the Party politicians. The political top was not much interested in arts or literature, they realised these were politically of secondary importance if you hold all newspapers, radio, and TV. So they offered a *quid pro quo*: as long as you writers and intellectuals don't question present-day power; we will let you in peace to write in whatever form you wish. This implicit compromise had two components (of course I realised this retrospectively, I didn't know it then): first of all there was a genuine revulsion against the arbitrary Stalinism, both on the top of the party (Kidrič, Djilas, Tito, Kardelj, probably also Ranković, but he never spoke much publicly, so you couldn't guess what he really thought) and in the masses -- not so much in between, in the middle party cadres where Stalinism was strongest. And second, the central Party Agit-Prop commission lost all effective power even during Djilas's heading it in the early '50s, it was dismantled in the drive against USSR Statism, and especially after his ouster in 1954. Even though Agit-Prop commissions remained in each federal republic's central committee, they didn't do too much, they were more or less *vatrogasci* (they put out fires), but they weren't good enough to start any fire on their own. I knew some guys in the Agit-Prop of the Croatian central committee, for example Marin Franičević, a good poet from Dalmatia in his youth, or Vojin Jelić, from Kninska Krajina, a very interesting and tormented novelist – but they just didn't know what to do in cultural politics, and they had practically no research apparatus. Of course they were all in the Partisans and many of them, depending on age, in the Left underground movement even before the 1941 occupation by the Axis. They were all brought up on Lukács in the best case and Todor Pavlov (a Zhdanovian esthetician in USSR) in the worst case. The best knew also what Second International people wrote about culture, such as Plekhanov and Mehring, and some Lenin, as filtered by Stalinism. And they knew oodles of Engels, and of course of Stalin. Retrospectively, Engels is all that remains from those theories, and he never wrote specifically about the arts (though when he incidentally did, he could be illuminating, I remember a bit about Ibsen having the

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background of values from free Norwegian peasantry). I think also some Lukàcs about French realism remains; his really first-rate work up to the mid-20s we didn't know, I discovered it in the 60s. Engels is a great genius in my opinion, but he was not applicable without great changes to a mutated capitalism and world: a great genius with great mistakes, such as finding dialectics in nature or believing in scientism.

In brief, the climate in SFR Yugoslavia was in the 1950s very open, right up to the late 60s, to all kind of neo-Marxism. We young ones were at that time calling it an 'open Marxism': I theorised the openness in theatre by using Brecht's "open forms" (also the title of Eco's first theoretical book, which I used). It was like a plant on which you could graft many new things -- the Soviet selectionist genetician Michurin was very popular, also the American Burbank. For example, I remember one of the things which made me less than popular in the Faculty of Philosophy (that is, Arts) in Zagreb: we had a debate on the first theory of literature which was published in Zagreb, based on an introductory book by several hands coordinated and edited by two professors, Zdenko Škreb and Fran Petre – the former was a Germanist and the latter a real "cemented" or hard-line Slovenian Party member, follower of Zihlerl, the Slovenian Zhdanov, who fortunately didn't have that much power. So we had a discussion in *Hrvatsko filološko društvo* (the Philological Society, a kind of professional organisation of people dealing with "language arts") at the beginning of the 1960s. I was then a young assistant in Dramaturgy and Theatre Arts, I stood up and said, "The whole book is based on the idea of difference and interaction between form and content, could you please explain to me how do these work in literature? Is it for example like a glass of water, the glass is form and the water is content? And if so, how we could differentiate the form from the content in the novel?" They were extremely offended, because they had no answer; and I suppose I got the reputation of a disrespectful extremist. What we learned actually is what every critic already knows, that you cannot disjoin these two. If you write about anything, say in my case about Krleža or Brecht, you start where you can, what struck you as salient when reading, because criticism is not a science but an art, and you go where you can, following certain protocols of evidence and consistency. The basic modernist idea, which was theorized by the Formalists, is that the *izjava* (the message) of any work of art is to be understood through its form, and at that point the relationship of form to content becomes uninteresting. You can say that what remains from content are themes, for example Balzac has a theme of avarice in *Gobseck*. But the same theme would have a totally different effect in another novel by Balzac, not to speak of Molière, because it was written up or about in different way: in other words, it had a different form.

My generation came to know about Russian Formalists through the work of Aleksandar Flaker in Russian studies, who was my personal friend. I knew him from political conferences before I came to university; he was a very active and engaged researcher. He published a fantastic book, *Heretici i sanjari* (*Heretics and Dreamers*) in 1954, which was an overview of all non-socialist-realist writings in Russia in twenties. Also there were other critical approaches which Škreb mediated from postwar West Germany, such as those by Wolfgang **Kayser**, maybe second-rate stuff but useful in order to know what is grotesque and such studies (it is actually important if you think that half of Krleža, our great writer, is grotesque, not to speak of Swift or satire in general). So there were no problems in grafting

other plants on the sturdy tree of Marxism, we had no fear; we thought that truth will win because of its inner persuasiveness, we didn't need a police, we just needed to upgrade the plant through its own inner juices. In short, the most important thing my generation learned – say in movies through Eisenstein -- is that any statement about art, including the politics of art, is to be arrived at through form. Somewhere I wrote that this is “the ABC of any materialist approach to art,” but there are 25 other letters, then you go on, to DEF etc. But if you don't begin with Formalism you don't get anywhere, while if you do begin with this, you have more chances to deal with your material and ideological circumstances.

SB: *While describing relation between Marxism and Formalism in Yugoslavia you said that you were then not scared by innovations, can you develop that?*

A: Of course we thought of ourselves as the avant-garde, as friends of the novelty. We are the novelty in backward peasant and patriarchal Balkans, and therefore we were communists. That was the idea in the young Left intelligentsia. I theorised this later for SF literature by adapting for it Ernst Bloch's Novum.

The problems in the Party were different; they had their hands full with economy and foreign policy. Also, culturally speaking the Party was very provincial in Yugoslavia; they just didn't know what was happening in the world. For example I was a kind of *protégé* of Marijan Matković, a prominent middle generation dramatist who was editor of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences' periodical *Forum* in Zagreb where I published. He was a “krležijanac” (disciple of Krleža), formally rather a pre-Modernist realist, and an extremely loyal fellow-traveller of socialism. I gave him some stuff about Brecht, and he made a grimace and exclaimed, ‘Darko, Brecht in Yugoslavia!?!’. This was ambiguous, maybe we weren't yet up to Brecht, maybe he was too severe for us, but at any rate he was asynchronous to us (in his opinion; I disagreed). Or when I translated Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade* in the early 60s, he refused to print it: ‘I cannot spend socialist money for a piece against socialism’, was his reply. I tried to persuade him that the debate between Marat and Sade was exactly one of the things we needed to graft on our tree, but I failed.

Q: *You have published in 1965 a text on Brecht where you say that in Yugoslavia there is still resistance toward Brecht ...*

A: The staid theatre people hated him, both the bourgeois and the Party...

Q: *...yes, and you say that in Yugoslavia in the mid-sixties Brecht was thought of as too sociological, and not enough Formalist to be taken into consideration.*¹

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“Naši ‘socijalistički larpurlartisti’, kako ga više ne mogu, kao što su to ždanovci činili, nazivati formalistom, sada mu paradoksalno zamjeraju sociologiziranje, nedovoljni formalizam, neučestvovanje u ‘vječno-ljudskim’ problemima’.” Darko Suvin, ‘Paradoks o čovjeku na pozornici svijeta (praksa i teorija Berta Brechta)’, *Forum: Casopis Odjela za suvremenu književnost Jugoslavenske Akademije Znanosti i Umjetnosti*, 1965: 7-8, p. 586. (ed. note)

A: Well that is my vocabulary. Because in Russia in the twenties there was a big battle between sociologists and Formalists. The synthesis of that was a kind of socio-formalism with people like Bakhtin and Voloshinov. You may know that Bakhtin, who was censored, has published much of his writing under the name of his friends Voloshinov and Medvedev; at any rate the decisive ideas in those books were his. Some reactionary US Bakhtinists say that these things published under the name of Voloshinov and Medvedev are Marxist and Bakhtin was anti-Marxist, so he wouldn't have written them. But this is nonsense, Cold-War stupidity. Even Formalists like Eikhenbaum, Tynyanov, and Shklovsky were also interested in sociological aspects and Marxism. I think that both approaches in itself are insufficient, both Formalism and sociology. In literary studies, sociology means relationship of writings to its own production and politics; Formalism means inner workings of writings (or art) in general. The inner workings of art apply in the moment of writing and in the moment of reading, so in the moment of production or in the moment of consumption. But of course these workings are shaped by so-called sociology, that is to say by ideology: what and how do you choose to write, what and how do you understand. Therefore you cannot have a Chinese wall and say, here is society and politics and there is pure art. Pure art sounds fine, but it is only a *fin de siècle* fantasy, at the end of 19th century, *l'art pour art*. I think this is intrinsically nonsense. There is a group of poems in English called "nonsense poetry"; that is great fun, but it's not really nonsense, it is just a refusal of dominant sense. Or for example *zaum* poetry in early 20th-Century Russia; or even *Alice in Wonderland*, one of the greatest books in English literature. It does not make sense only in the sense of Dickens and George Eliot, or even worse of bourgeois and if you wish capitalist positivism. But surely there are other ways of making sense.

SB: *Apart from not having sense, these limit cases of literature always have some social background. They are always somehow related to the ideology.*

DS: Partly what they want to do is some experimental probing of limits of literature. For example, is it true that the limit of poetry is a word? Well maybe not, maybe it is a syllable. But at least it is a valuable experiment, even if it is proved as a negative experiment.

SB: *In which way it was negative?*

DS: A "negative experiment" in science is a failed one which is useful because it points out which way not to go further. And the limit of poetry is a word, not a syllable, because the syllable has no semantic dimension. But why not try it and see how it works, as say in Khlebnikov. I see no problem for anybody in power to let the kids play with these kinds of experimentations. By the way if you look at the political attitude of Futurists in Russia, they were communist *sputniks*.

SB: *What do you mean by communist sputnik?*

DS: The original Russian meaning of *sputnik*, before the little machine sending beep-beep from the sky in 1957, was "fellow traveller": one who will go together with, accompany the Communist Party, in Croato-Serbian *suputnici*. They were intellectuals, much too undisciplined (maybe fortunately, we have to say today) to be Party members, but agreeing with the Party line. I read in a book published in Russian in sixties, called *Lenin and*

Literature, how Lunacharsky persuaded Lenin to go to a recital of Mayakovsky in 1921. After the recital Lenin said that it was very interesting; it was “hooligan communism” – *khuligan* in the very Russian sense as dangerous people on the margins of society, bohemians... Which I would gloss as: why not bohemian communism, each class should have their communism! If there is workers’ communism, intellectuals’ communism, why shouldn’t there be a bohemian communism? We are all alienated by class society, even the workers are no saints... So why not put together our fragments and hope something more coherent will emerge? Consider that bohemians as a social class were anti-bourgeois, they were poor for one thing and also despised (if you see the opera *La bohème*, taken from a French novel, they are all starving). They are poor because they still don’t want to or cannot sell their services to the bourgeoisie. Sometimes they are on the Right, mostly on a kind of anarchoid Left, but always against the dominant class. Considering this, we can talk about the contribution of the bohemian class to the revolution.

It would be interesting to examine swearword nouns in general, the obverse of your positive slogans. *Bugger*, say, the contemptible word for homosexuals, came from the French *bougre* applied to Albigenian heretics, whose religion was supposed to stem from Bulgaria (*bogomils*). Hooligan itself was adopted from Irish Gaelic as an English slur on the Irish rebels (*houlihan*). And *loot* is Hindustani slang for plunder, which entered English in 18th Century when the East India Company simply appropriated the Moghul emperor’s treasury, evaluated today at 273 million British pounds (of which the modest company chief in India Clive took personally only 8%). The same holds for *thug*, only it was Indian rebels that time (the “Thuggee” sect). By the way Lenin and the Dadaists met in Zurich in 1916 ...

SB: *I am not sure whether they met, but they were living in same quarter in Zurich in 1916.*

DS: Well, yes, we have no data they met (except in Stoppard’s play).² But why were they living in same quarter? They were against the war, they were against imperialism and the whole old world, and they had to flee where they could. These two groups were what the surrealists would call ‘communicating vessels’. To refuse that kind of energy is one of the greatest mistakes of later Leninism, not to speak of Stalinism: it refuses the energies available to it, it refuses present energies from workers and from intellectuals, because the new class thinks it is enough to have power. Speaking in Gramsci’s terms, they had constraint by force, but they didn’t have a consensus. The communist party in Russia had a majority consensus in 1917/1918, and following the Civil War which they won, this consensus lasted until roughly 1926 or so. After that the party ruled mostly by police terror. Why? Because they lost the energies from below – of course, not only or even mainly from the marginals but from the workers and intelligentsia (the peasants were never wholeheartedly for communists in Russia, as different from Yugoslavia, where they were the pillar of communist power from 1942 to 1949, the ill-guided attempt at working cooperatives).

SB: *My understanding of formalism is related to what you are explaining now. If intrinsic processes are not sufficient to explain the transformations happening to an art form, then in any case we will need some extrinsic factors such as a social field or ideology.*

DS: I think that terms such as intrinsic and extrinsic are misleading. Adorno once said “The social is where it hurts”. That is a gloomy way to put it, but the social is primarily inside us.

SB: *I agree with that. But I want to say that many formalists and socio-formalists were dealing also with explicitly political issues. For example LEF in 1924/5 published a special issue on ‘Language of Lenin’, the Futurist Kruchenykh published one year earlier small booklet with same title, etc, which is somehow related to the limits of the language, what we were talking about earlier, but also with the effectiveness of that language. So in any case even intrinsic Formalists were not entirely interested just with the shape of the artistic forms.*

DS: But these were only their personal opinions in politics. What matters is that if you want to understand anything in art, whether it is music, painting or especially literature, you have to talk about transformation. Writing is composed of the stuff of everyday life, because we use language in our everyday life communication, but it is composed in such a different way that it gains a cognitive autonomy: you can understand life in and around you better. When I was starting to write in fifties and in sixties the best people called this structuralism, or structuralist poetics. My dissertation on Ivo Vojnović has the subtitle ‘genesis and structure’, because I found I had to do a genesis, which I think is a very good thing in a dissertation. I would recommend to any doctorate to deal with the historical coming about of its subject-text: look at biography, letters, and all available material of its incubation period, which will help to understand the genesis. Then you understand in which situation it was produced, and then you can see what it is, how it reproduces and changes elements of its environment in what is actually a form, or structure. Structure is the sophisticated French version, maybe sublation, of form. Structure deals with limitations or inner constraints of the formal properties (as Lévi-Strauss described them in his work on kinship relations). The problem with a rigid understanding of structure is that it evacuates history: how do structures then change? In fact, how did they originally even come about? This is connected with the issue of variations, to begin with in the Darwinist development of species. I have in literature – and especially in theatre performance, where this is a focus -- always been fascinated by variants. What is an original, what is a variant? I have arrived at the position that I don’t think there is any original: this is a theological problem ...

SB: *I didn’t understand why it is a theological problem...*

DS: Well in monotheism your origin is in God, all origin comes from God. By the way I am in a perverse way rather fond of some well-articulated theologies, such as some variants of the Catholic and even more the Buddhist ones. Some of these variants lasted for half a millennium or longer as the only way of systematic thinking available in important civilizations, so they got to some insights that shouldn’t be sneezed at but maybe taken over and re-functioned. But if you are atheist then there is no origin; there are just variations, Epicure’s aleatoric (that is, historical and situational) swerves of atoms.

SB: *Isn't that also one of the main questions of Formalism which is dealing with historical transformations, or historicism? But before that I would like to know what you think about Formalist involvement with the literary movements. Because I have an impression that the advancement of their methodological approach had partly to do with their involvement in the most advanced literary experiments. For example Jakobson wrote a book about Khlebnikov, Shklovsky on zaum, and so on, they were always engaged with the newest forms in artistic productions.*

DS: They were a theoretical parallel to the Futurists, again a case of “communicating vessels”. But then they had also other interests. What was the supreme paradigm of Shklovsky in the novel? It was Laurence Sterne. Why? Because *Tristram Shandy* is always written in variants: my uncle Toby said that, and afterwards he said this, while this was happening, then it turned out like that, etc. It is sequence of variants or cases; it foregrounds what is hidden in a smooth pre-planned plot. In Aristotelian *Poetics* this is called episodes, situations not fully defined by the overall plot but with a certain autonomy, as in Brecht. All Formalists were fascinated by Gogol, a grotesque writer who proceeds by episodes, as Bakhtin was by Dostoevsky. The Formalists started by analysing and deconstructing phonetic features of poetry through Futurists and similar vanguardists, but then they had to invent their forebears. So who can serve better in Russian literature than Pushkin, Gogol or Dostoevsky? In the novel they reacted against realism, just as Mayakovsky's plays reacted against Stanislavsky.

SB: *Also they were against Symbolism, and especially literary theory coming from Symbolists.*

DS: Symbolism is an inadequate response to realism. It's a kind of uncle who tried to kill his brother but didn't manage: they were not successful, we the sons we will kill the father (remember the Russian fascination for the *Hamlet* constellation!). Basically they downgraded the Tolstoy-Turgenev line, wrongly believing that even Chekhov fit into it (but that was so only in Stanislavsky's interpretation of his plays, which Chekhov disliked). Now here is a dilemma: as you know, Lenin loved Tolstoy, and he wrote a very interesting essay about Tolstoy, regarding him as a “mirror” – the metaphor is dubious – of the peasants' horizons in the budding of Russian revolution, which in my opinion is correct, though insufficient. It is a pity that Lenin didn't have time to be a literary critic; he would have been a very good one. So we have (in Russia and elsewhere) in fact two vanguards in modernism: one is the Leninist party, and the other is Modernist artistic movements. It is very interesting to see the relationships between these two vanguards: except for a few examples, they generally refused to learn from each other, they were arrogant or suspicious. One exception on the political side is Gramsci, who understood the role of culture (in the widest sense, including advertising and brainwashing) very well, and was even a quite interesting theatre critic. Another exception on the intellectual side is Brecht, who tried very much to collaborate with worker choruses and the communist party. To my mind, the two most important Marxist thinkers after – and in the wake of but not confined to – Lenin of the 20th Century are in fact Gramsci and Brecht. I could add Benjamin but he is very much influenced also by Jewish mysticism and the Frankfurters: unthinkable without Marxism and very usable in it, but not quite inside it.

But who had the main influence in the workers' choirs for whom Brecht was writing his plays? It was the social-democratic party, not the communist party. Both Brecht and Benjamin thought hard about becoming members of communist party, but in the end they did not formally join, they were *sputniks*. They didn't want to be members of a party already rather ossified in 1928/29 when they were seriously thinking of joining. At that time and in the thirties the German Communist Party was in terrible shape, all good people were kicked out by Zinoviev and later Stalin, or they were exhausted by fractional sects and fights. But ideologically Brecht considered himself as communist; or, as one of his friends described Brecht in USA in 1941-1947: "a party consisting of one person, closely allied with the communists". I think this good definition of a *sputnik* is the best political definition of Brecht. As the early feminists were talking about a failed marriage of Marxism and Feminism, in general here too we have a failed marriage of Marxist avant-garde and artistic avant-garde. Surely this has to do with arrogance on both sides: partly by politicians who didn't have sufficiently sensitive antennas to understand Brecht and Benjamin, or Pilnyak, Belyi, and even Mayakovsky, who was rudely criticized for his theatre plays, which I think contributed to his suicide.

SB: *I have looked at the index of 'Lenin on Literature and Art' book where Mayakovsky is mentioned five or six times in very contradictory terms. Sometimes Lenin got furious at his poems, and in another instance Lenin thought that his poems are a better contribution to economy than the dull economist is offering.*

DS: That's the poem about too many conferences, *Perezasedavshiesia*. It is a sociologically interesting but I think innocent little poem, not very important. Though I may be wrong, it has a wonderful Gogolian grotesque image of the bureaucrat splitting in half to go to two conferences.

SB: *Going back to your previous answer that in fifties and sixties you were not afraid of novelties in merging Formalism and Marxism and that you were seeking for novel artistic expressions in Marxism, I would like to know what was for you a novel artistic expression at that time in Yugoslavia?*

DS: Miroslav Krleža. He was the idol of us youngsters. In high school we were all *krležijanci*, anybody who thought about art at all, or about committed art and Left-wing art, was a *krležijanac*. We didn't know much about painting.

SB: *What about initiatives such as Exat, New Tendencies ...*

DS: Let me rephrase it this way: I didn't know much about art. Even though I am very much interested in visual art, it is a new language to learn, and I never had time to do it systematically. Still, I am an inveterate goer to art events. For example if you look at my book covers, chosen by me, they are usually some art works or paintings. A book published in Belgrade has a painting by René Magritte, whom I like deeply, Nena and I went to several exhibitions of his all over the world (he too practices estrangement!). But at that time most energies were concentrated on literature. Some people at the Faculty of Arts in Zagreb had a review called *Umjetnost riječi* (*word-art* or *Wortkunst*), where I published a theoretical text on science fiction at the beginning of sixties. Those times were very active, with lots of

contradictory positions. I concluded in my latest book, largely dealing with the self-management epoch in Yugoslavia (*Samo jednom se ljubi*, Belgrade 2014), that the golden age of self-management was between 1958 and 1968. Here I am talking about self-management in production related to economy and politics. But in culture, self-management started a bit earlier, though it was sabotaged by the party. The first attempts at autonomous periodicals in the beginning to mid-fifties, as one in Zagreb Faculty of Arts, also in Slovenia, were forbidden. Even though at that time first attempts at self-management were made in factory organizations, the cultural attempts were thought of, I believe wrongly, as a bit dangerous. What you don't understand seems menacing. Thus you ossify.

However, from another aspect, the intelligentsia which was introducing the self-management experiments in culture was not "organic", as Gramsci would say, to workers and peasants; it was the classical intelligentsia coming from petty or indeed, though rarely, from high bourgeoisie. Many of the best people from these classes decided to adopt the Popular Front version of Marxism (for example my father, a doctor who went with the partisans). However its majority was in favour of socialism because it benefited them in economic terms, they had financial privileges, also it was patriotic, and their professional work was prized. There were a few people, like the *Praxis* philosophers and sociologists, who really believed (so did I) that in SFR Yugoslavia we had a kind of Hegelian sublation of all the best in the bourgeoisie without the worst, that is to say the *citoyen* without the capitalism. That was the Party cell in the Faculty of Arts in Zagreb, people like Frangeš, Prelog or Gajo Petrović, hugely influential writers and teachers. All was then new and open, very contradictory. Petrović and the excellent sociologist Rudi Supek edited then the bimonthly *Praxis*, but this started just before I left. Of course I read and mostly shared its views, I think they were politically right to insist on self-management and energies from below and contest creeping Stalinism from above. On the other hand the philosophers were rather exclusive, they didn't interact with us "art critics." Furthermore, they went in for a weird symbiosis with Heidegger, thinking he supplied the philosophical horizon lacking in Marx, so they were forever talking about Being, *Dasein*, *Sosein*, ontic, etc. That was similar to Sartre's thinking that Marxism applied to mass problems but not to individual problems, so it had to be compensated by Husserl and company, but to my mind (now retrospectively) much worse:

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Heidegger is the great reactionary thinker of the 20th Century, the brown Plato; his affinities to Nazism are not casual, I don't believe you can combine him with any Marxist horizon. (This is I think proved by similar attempts in the French deconstructionists.)

Finally, in regard to the Faculty of Arts itself, the *Praxis* people didn't have an adequate cultural policy. If you read my *Memoirs of a Young Communist* you will see that we in the Student Union had a cultural policy -- I wrote a position paper about it which I still think was pretty good -- that the upper echelon of professors was not happy about. We wanted to end the semi-feudal position of full professors (in Italy they call them barons). Those power relations were based on very concrete interests and a strong will to dominate, even in each little and unimportant field of culture and philology. There was so much libido involved in those fights, it was unbelievable. Whereas we in the Student Union said, let's have a teaching collective in each section (*Odsjek*), and the head of collective would be elected each year, or each two years, he or she could be professor, *docent* (junior assistant professor) or anybody;

normally it should be someone who has already published a book, so we acknowledged professional competence. This came to naught, the “barons” had much energy and the Party little for cultural matters, thinking it was all superstructure anyway, while we students and later young assistants were naive and easily deflected onto professional matters. The *Praxis* people thought in lofty general terms and didn’t want to waste their time on such piddling matters as pedagogy in the Faculty of Arts. So my relations to them were sympathetic but distant, they didn’t defend me when I was attacked. They behaved, maybe unavoidably, as an embattled little sect.

The main trouble with the Party was that, not having an adequate cultural policy, they didn’t know what to do with contemporary collective creativity. Instead they wanted to give the heritage of the past to the masses; so you had cheap novels of Balzac and Fielding and Tolstoy, you had free exhibitions, cheap theatres, literature, cinema, discounted visits for trade-union groups, etc.; however, everything shown was belonging to the past or to a present stylistically continuous with the past, that is, pre-Modernist (this changed in some fields from the mid-50s on). They knew how to deal with that, because Lenin liked Gorky, and Marx and Engels liked Balzac. But they didn’t know how to deal with the new stuff. So it was easy for the Zhdanovians to call Joyce, Proust or Kafka decadents. I must say in Yugoslavia there was little of that, maybe from 1946 to 1951.

SB: *Are you talking about the post-1945 situation and the fifties?*

DS: This begins in the workers’ movement even earlier. It is a philistine or subaltern tradition which passed from the Second International to the Third International, basically: let’s take the best that exists and give it to the masses. But what is the best in this case is what the bourgeoisie has done, sifted, and codified. Remember the huge laudation of the bourgeoisie in *The Communist Manifesto*: ‘the bourgeoisie built things more imposing than the Cologne dome, etc’ -- that logic was still active in the fifties in Yugoslavia. But that logic of a productive bourgeoisie is not valid anymore, the bourgeois logic is entirely destructive now; it is responsible for imperialist wars, huge desolations, mass killings -- just look at the two world wars, at the hundreds of “small” mass killings since 1945, at West Asia today. You can’t admire solid bourgeois virtues anymore, they don’t exist; now it is all suicidal. The First World War is to my mind the beginning of modern history, everything changes after that, violent barbarism is in command (which then infects “really existing socialism” too). The Left cannot any more seek anything affirmative in bourgeois horizons, though of course I am all for Enlightenment and *citoyen* virtues – but updated as socialist or communist.

SB: *What was your cultural policy at that time? Concretely I would like to know how you thought of Krleža’s formal innovations in relation to cultural policy you were interested in.*

DS: You have to know that Krleža begins his literary career as a quasi- or semi-Expressionist at the time of World War 1; he wrote long Whitmanesque unrhymed expressionist poems, expressionist plays and prose. In the thirties Krleža was involved in a conflict with the Socialist realists, that is the orthodox (illegal) communist party, regarding art and literature, known as “the literary conflict on the Left” (*sukob na književnoj ljevici*), and this was a reason why he never went to Partizans. He was generously rehabilitated after the war by Tito,

not by Djilas who hated Krleža and even reportedly wanted his execution. (Djilas was a real maximalist; first he was a maximalist inside the party and later on he was a maximalist against the party. To my mind he was a good historical writer, by the way, but a very limited politician and bad political writer.) At any rate we didn't know much about Krleža's involvement with the 1930s cultural struggles, this was only clarified in the sixties. However, he learnt his lesson, and later didn't meddle in non-artistic politics. After the war Krleža evolved this Enlightenment plan of summing up all knowledge about the Yugoslav lands in a *Yugoslav Encyclopedia (Enciklopedija Jugoslavije)*, was given ample finances for it, edited this huge work, and wrote more novels and a play. I knew Krleža slightly, I visited him, and we had discussions. An example: a congress by the Union of Writers of Yugoslavia was due in Titograd in 1964. I went to Krleža and said, why don't we organize some small group including you, Marijan Matković, and your disciples, and propose something about the current cultural policy. He looked at me with pity and said: 'Have you seen the TV performance of my play *Gospoda Glembajevi* a few weeks ago?' (One of the principal actors in it was Fabijan Šovagović, who was from rural Croatia; in his way not a bad actor, but not for *drame du salon* of Ibsenian provenience.) 'They do not know how to wear a tuxedo!'

That response of his was the same as Matković saying 'Brecht in Yugoslavia, Darko what are you thinking of? We are not ripe for it.' Though I think he was wrong, we had a mass basis for understanding Brecht in self-management, had we had much support and patience to show the working people how to understand itself (maybe different from how we understood it). True, it was not a traditional working class; it was a peasant-derived new working class, lacking for example common workers' traditions such as trade union organizations, etc. They had to be constantly lifted out of the momentary serious problems of personal and their enterprise survival, lodging in cities, education, and so on. And my elders and betters implied that first we have to do the job of the Enlightenment, and maybe after one generation we can get to the Brechtian, that is truly communist agenda. I disagreed, I thought both agendas were the same: communicating vessels again, or maybe the DNA double helix. And I think I may have been right: postponing communist elements means they never come.

SB: *But isn't this a contradictory position, to ask for cultural policy in such a situation; to insist for a cultural policy for workers who were lagging behind the self-management? Wasn't the party behind the mass movement which initiated self-management?*

DS: There would be no contradiction in cultural policy had the Party allowed changes to happen. To begin with, let me point out it was only one little group at the top of the Party who were in favour of self-management; it was proposed initially in 1948-1950, by people like Boris Kidrič, when they were afraid of Soviet invasion and they were still enemies with the West. So they needed a mass basis, to activate the people four or five years after the war, and they picked up the workers' spontaneous idea to have factory councils. Basis democracy was the way to mobilize and motivate for reconstruction and unity very tired and exhausted people in the post-war situation. Later on Kardelj and Djilas claimed that they were mainly responsible for this idea, but whatever their input the genuine articulation was clearly Kidrič's. And it worked for 10 or 20 years. Maybe they had difficulties in first five years to make people to understand what all this change was about. Then they passed a law in 1958 that it was possible to veto the director, the manager, and through such experiences self-

management got a more concrete shape. Though we cannot talk about full workers' management; it would be more appropriate to call it workers' participation, but there was great participation: I calculated in my book on SFR Yugoslavia *Samo jednom se ljubi* that perhaps 25% of the 4 million workers at the time passed in a dozen years through membership of the Workers' Concils.

SB: *Even if there was a platform also to discuss art in relation to the self-management theory, it seems that there were not so many attempts to do that.*

DS: There were two problems. Number one is *kulturna zaostalost*, which means that we were really backward, except some artists and writers around Krleža and the pre-war Belgrade Surrealists; people didn't even know that somebody like Brecht existed (you must know that before post-1945 mass education the majority was illiterate or with a bare 3-4 years of elementary schooling). Maybe I better say the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia didn't know, for when I published my book on Brecht in 1970 I got a letter of thanks from a woman worker saying she sang Brecht songs (I suppose with Eisler's music) in the workers' choir before 1941. Brecht means also Bloch, Benjamin, all Weimar culture; they only knew that Lenin disliked Mach, where actually he was half right and half wrong. Lenin was right on the political fallout of the Machists in Russia, but he was not right about Mach himself. There is no modern physics without Mach, and there is no Einstein without Mach; basically Leninists, as different from Lenin himself, never digested Einstein. What does Einstein mean? In science he means whatever his equations mean; but in philosophy he means that your situation co-determines your world, the place you are situated in (your locus).

SB: *It radically contextualizes the position.*

DS: Exactly. Here we get to the second problem, which is an ideological aberration. Engels and Lenin are always based on the assumption that there is a general and overarching scientific truth, but of course one which we don't fully know yet, because we are fallible people who fell from Eden -- or translated into Marxism, we fell into class society, so we cannot know the full truth -- but we are getting there asymptotically. That is a method which can work, as Marx would say, in a society based on the steam engine (capitalist competition), but it cannot work in society based on electricity and electronics.

SB: *You just mentioned asymptotic. I have read in your early article, published in journal 'Delo', on the asymptote in Krleža which opens up unforeseen possibilities or radical futurity, through Lenin. Can you say more about this?*

DS: Well this is a fantasy Lenin -- which doesn't mean some important aspects of his cannot be caught in this way. These early plays by Krleža, the *Legends*, which I argued amounted to the image of an asymptote to infinity, were all written between ca. 1917 and 1920, nobody knew anything about Lenin, except either what the bourgeois press wrote about him, as a maniacal sadistic killer, or hymnic praise. Krleža accepted the "demonic" aspect, but turned it into the tradition of the fallen archangel, the rebel Lucifer; he uses the 'lighthouses' metaphor for Michelangelo, Goya, Lenin and Columbus. Krleža then visited Russia as you know in 1925, at the time when a very solid bureaucracy was beginning (there is a short story in his *Glembayevs* cycle, where one of them is a communist and goes to Russia and becomes part of

the State trust). Krleža was very dubious about all kind of things going on in revolutionary Russia. I think he knew Stalinism from the inside, at the very beginning of it. I have a feeling that he was rather pleased with Bukharin but I don't know. So the Party could not expect much politically from Krleža after 1945, he did what he had to do at the Ljubljana congress of Union of Writers at the beginning of fifties where he gave a great keynote speech about socialist misunderstandings of culture, which he camouflaged by talking about the Second International. Clearly he knew that there was continuity between Second and Third International, culturally speaking. Politically there was a big difference between them, indeed opposition: shall we make revolution or shall we not. But culturally they were living in the same world. Lenin was living in the world of Kautsky, more or less. Yet at the same time he was Einsteinian enough to forge the hypothesis of 'weakest link': the weakest links of imperialism are backward countries. That was totally Dadaist; everybody in the Second International told him he was crazy. It was a great flash of genius, and this is what happens: Russia, China and Yugoslavia are all proof that Lenin's crazy idea could work. In other words, the working masses of Western and Central Europe, Germany, France, England and even USA, at least tolerated, and often supported, the World War of imperialists against other imperialists. So the Russian Revolution showed that Marx, who reasonably for 1848 and maybe even for 1871 claimed that the revolution will happen in the West, was wrong. This is the thesis of Gramsci in his article *Revolution against Capital*, which he wrote in 1917/18, that the Russian revolution is a revolution against *Das Kapital*. This was to say that Lenin had to change some basic concepts of Marx regarding revolution, but sticking to the main trunk of Marx (to go on with my botanical analogy), which was getting rather dry at that time. Lenin was grafting new stuff on that trunk which helped its energy to vitalize, to flow.

SB: *How would you describe this main trunk, is it the concept of class struggle?*

A: No, the main trunk is to me alienation and dis-alienation; it is the concept of freedom, self-determination of each and all. But in order to be dis-alienated, to gain the freedom, we have to have conscious class struggle. In my terms, dis-alienation is the horizon towards which to move, the goal; class struggle is the – alas -- necessary vector of how anybody can move from the present alienated locus towards that horizon (see "Locus, Horizon, and Orientation: The Concept of Possible Worlds as a Key to Utopian Studies (1989)" in my *Defined by a Hollow*). As Brecht once wrote, in order to have a handful of rice, the coolie has to bring down three empires. Since we are living in the world of class struggles from top toward the bottom leading to huge barbarisation, we have to reverse this and turn it the other way around, as class struggle of bottom against the top and against barbarisation. This is actually an Einsteinian idea. In my opinion, Marx is the great forebear of Einstein as far as situated thinking goes. Marx still has some elements of the old, as "iron laws of society" in preface to *Capital*, which I think is more Newton than Einstein. This is actually Roman Law (*lex*), which Newton transferred to a physics based on eternal truths. Einstein deconstructed the eternal truths, just as Marx deconstructed the eternal truths of Smith and Ricardo and the bourgeoisie.

SB: *We have skipped one topic that I would like to know more about; namely the concept of history and critique of historicism in the work of Russian Formalism. This anti-historicism,*

which is often discussed in Viktor Shklovsky as the zig-zag history of literary changes, etc. is somehow related to the discussions of Marxism.³

DS: I am not so sure about their anti-historicism, they were very interested in history inside literature but refused its mechanical dependence as a “superstructure” on an economic “basis” (which was right) and then exaggerated the autonomy. After all, they came from a very backward Russia and didn’t have the tools of a Williams or Jameson. Also, the Formalists are a very heterogeneous group, very much differing from each other. Shklovsky is different from Eikhenbaum, Tynyanov is different from Jakobson, and so on. But if we take a common denominator, I don’t think they were anti-historicist. They are against a certain dominant kind of historicism, that of Ranke who defines history as “*wie es eigentlich gewesen*”, as it really happened (he also wrote a book on Serbia and Bosnia). This typical German historicism is basically a laicized Protestantism, some kind of *opus dei in Germanos*, of God working by way of the Germans: a monolithic and determinist historical method, based on totally teleological conceptions. You have to understand that this concept of history is actually a quasi-delirious teleology, and its insistence on first-hand data is subordinated to that. Since Formalists have criticized these kinds of approaches to history thoroughly, me and my generation, as many others, have benefited immensely from them. In one of my first essays, published in *Umjetnost riječi*, on science fiction, I had used the Shklovskian theses you speak about, of inheritance from junior uncle to nephew (or niece), in order to propose a sophisticated way of treating the history of literary genres, and I still believe this is correct.⁴ How do historical changes come about in Formalism? They come about when a dominated (or oppositional) style of yesterday – the junior uncle -- becomes the dominant style of today. But how does that huge reversal happen? That is a class struggle for heaven’s sake, you only have to put a little bit of Marxism into it and everything is clear. Of course the Formalists didn’t say this, they were not interested in macro-politics. There is a wonderful apocryphal anecdote, which I like to quote, an imaginary dialogue between Shklovsky and Trotsky, the most intelligent Formalist and the most intelligent Leninist. Shklovsky said to Trotsky, and the first half is a real sentence of his, “I do not care what flag flies on the fortress, I am a literary critic and I don’t care about the war ,” to which Trotsky replies “But war cares about you.”

SB: *But Shklovsky himself was in the war!*

DS: Yes he was; he was SR [Socialist Revolutionary] commissar and commander of an armoured battalion, and afterwards he was for a time in Berlin. In his personal life he cared a

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“These ruptures in literary history takes place for reason that have nothing to do with chronology. No, the real point is that the legacy that is passed from one literary generation to the next moves not from father to son but from uncle to nephew”, Viktor Shklovsky, ‘Literature without a Plot: Rozanov’, *Theory of Prose*, Dalkey Archive Press, 1990, p. 189-190. (ed. note)

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Darko Suvin, ‘Naučna fantastika i utopizam,’ *Umjetnost riječi*, 1963:2, pp. 113-115. (ed. note)

lot about the war, and this dichotomy is interesting in a negative way, the dichotomy between a personal and official posture. When he is a Formalist, then the Holy Ghost comes down upon him and he does not care about war anymore...

But formalist historicism is all about that zigzag transformation of dominated to the dominant, which is about a real driving force in history. I would like to see a whole history of literature written through this dynamics. I tried to do that in my writings on science fiction. But concretely to trace and discuss these transformations, or to prove the theses of Formalists, you need a huge group of scholars, some kind of Einsteinian Socialist Academy of Science, which does not exist anywhere. Raymond Williams tried later to do this with his "Social Theory of Literature".

SB: *I was just going to ask about the concept of 'residual elements' in Williams, to whom you refer frequently in your texts.*

DS: Exactly. Williams is my *maitre à penser*, not the only one. I have others too, Lucien Goldmann, Krleža, Brecht, Bloch, most important Marx, and so on. Finally my contemporary Jameson.

SB: *Can you please schematize the relation between the historical concepts of Formalists and the Marxist sociology of Williams?*

DS: Well, Formalists gave you a form, and Marx gave you classes.

SB: *No, I meant the relation between the concept of 'residual elements' of Williams and the idea of uneven historical transformations in Formalists?*

DS: The Formalists didn't know enough about society, except when they were studying the history of their subject, for example the history of Russian poetry or something similar; but in general they didn't have much knowledge of social history. When Shklovsky is writing about

Sterne he does not care about England in 18th century, for him Sterne is an extra-temporal or eternal paradigm, an *exemplum*. Williams comes from a Left which was ideologically not Leninist. He began as a kind of Leftwing or Left Labourite modification of F. R. Leavis, an interesting literary critic, a petty-bourgeois rebel who fought against the dominant high bourgeois tastes (he loved for example D.H. Lawrence). At some point Williams read Marx, not through Lenin but through Leavis or through the class struggles that he knew very well in Britain, coming from a Welsh worker family. Of course you know that Marx himself got the idea of class struggle primarily from England and France. True, struggles between classes go on everywhere all the time, see for example Heine's poem *The Weavers* or Brecht's *Questions of a Worker Reader*; but in Germany they were masked by the (exactly "residual") feudal elements. And when we talk about Williams we have to remember this historical importance of class struggle in England, from at least Cromwell's revolution on. So I think that the concept of residual in Williams is coming from two sources. One is English or UK history, that is quite clear, the Non-conformists are residual; and second, it comes from Marx and Engels who said that Balzac by being on the Right and hating the bourgeoisie, understood it very well, and his descriptions could be used by the Left. What is Balzac? He is ideologically residual – not in his writing technique, his technique is on the frontline of the

future, but his ideology is completely reactionary, a bourgeois monarchism. I found Williams very congenial, I read all he wrote before I met him while on sabbatical in Cambridge in 1970/71, he was then in Jesus College. Also I saw him in the seventies-eighties when he was teaching part-time at Stanford University, he would stop often in Montreal where we arranged a lecture for him, for example on Brecht's *St. Joan of the Stockyards* we were performing at McGill. He was also interested in science fiction, he wrote even a novel of politics set in future and some historical novels, also an essay on utopian science fiction. But I think his magnum opus is *The City and the Country*.

SB: In your article 'Can People Be (Re)presented in Fiction?' you say that 'Formalism is the A and B of any integrally materialist approach to art, from which should then proceed to C, D, and so on, ' this C and D meaning dialectics.'⁵

DS: Yes, I mentioned that earlier; also meaning semiotics and narrative analysis (agents, chronotope). I would today stress more this historical component, or dialectical component as understood by Marx (not by Hegel). As you know Marx took dialectical logic from Hegel but adapted it to the circumstances of capitalism, which means to a macro-historical situation. I have been struck by Braudel's *longue durée* vs *durée événementielle* (long before Badiou). *Durée événementielle* is for example the French Revolution, it lasts ten, maybe fifteen years, as one generation. *Longue durée* is the key for solving the problem which Marx faced in his famous passage about Greek literature in the introduction to *Grundrisse*.⁶ how can we still enjoy the Greek tragedy? We can, I would say today, because we are in the *longue durée* of class society. That means that a duration of the last five thousand years is united by some macro-continuities, for example by dominant and dominated, killers and killed, exploiters and

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Paradoxically, all the lessons of Russian formalism without which we can't begin making sense of action, belong here under the heading of materialism (albeit a partial and inconsistent, not yet a dialectical one). Formalism is the A and B of any integrally materialist approach to art, from which we should then proceed to C, D, and so on." Darko Suvin, 'Can People Be (Re)Presented in Fiction? Toward a Theory of Narrative Agents and a Materialist Critique beyond Technocracy and Reductionism', *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (eds.) C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988. (ed. note)

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"In the case of the arts, it is well known that certain periods of their flowering are out of all proportion to the general development of society, hence also to the material foundation, the skeletal structure as it were, of its organization. For example, the Greeks compared to the moderns or also Shakespeare. It is even recognized that certain forms of art, e.g. the epic, can no longer be produced in their world epoch-making, classical stature as soon as the production of art, as such, begins; that is, that certain significant forms within the realm of the arts are possible only at an undeveloped stage of artistic development. If this is the case with the relation between different kinds of art within the realm of the arts, it is already less puzzling that it is the case in the relation of the entire realm to the general development of society. The difficulty consists only in the general formulation of these contradictions. As soon as they have been specified, they are already clarified. ... But the difficulty lies not in understanding that the Greek arts and epic are bound up with certain forms of social development. The difficulty is that they still afford us artistic pleasure and that in a certain respect they count as a norm and as an unattainable model", Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*, Translated by Martin Nicolaus, London: Penguin Books, 1973, p. 110 - 111. (ed. note)

exploited. Of course there are big differences between the Homeric aristocracy and Wall Street today (the former risked their lives and the latter never do); but on the other hand, dialectically speaking, in this history there is also continuity; you can find this in Benjamin's idea that ruling classes have their continuity. This could be seen very clearly in the transformation of the bourgeoisie: they entered the scene of history as anti-aristocratic, but soon started to act as an aristocracy, because they took the same role of a ruling class. This is a clear example of continuation of domination. In order for this to happen ruling classes need certain apparatuses of domination. Althusser didn't invent the ideological apparatuses, discussion regarding ideologies and apparatuses existed before him, but maybe he, for the first time, put these two concepts together. For example the *salons* in and around Napoleon's time are ideological apparatuses, as centres of a kind of power forging the tastes of what is acceptable or not in discourse – say, on art. If you adopt the key of *longue durée* versus the short duration versus the medium duration (one has to have a hierarchy of durations), then the way how we understand historical transformation will change. If you look at my book *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* you will see that in the theoretical part there is one scheme describing how science fiction deals with time. Time/temporality is for me a very important issue.

SB: *How do you treat these different temporalizations, distinct durées in your theoretical work? Do they co-exist, or are they in some kind of constant struggle, in kind of contradictory relations?*

DS: They are in dialectical relations. Of course they co-exist. I would say today that of my three levels in agential theory, the actants are long duration and unchanging, half a dozen narrative functions. I can't imagine any narration without actants, in history or pre-history or even species-specific, as Feuerbach would say. The types are probably a long duration of class history but they change according to major "geological" shifts – some become marginalised and a few new ones arise; and the characters are related clearly to the individualism, which begins partly the end of the Antiquity, as in Plutarch's characters for example, Alexander the Great versus Caesar. Christianity adopted this as the concept of one single soul; whereas Greeks had many souls, or Socrates had his *daimon* speaking to him about his community, the *politeia*; but characters then got backgrounded until the Renaissance, the rise of the cities and merchants. So to answer your question I would say that dialectic is methodologically the starting point, but one must historicize, as Jameson said "always historicize!" This means that the *durées* sometimes mesh and more often are in contradictory oppositions.

SB: *But I was speaking more of teleological historicism ...*

DS: As I argued earlier, teleological historicism is essentially a theological problem. If we are not willing to accept the theological answer, then we have to find an alternative to teleology. Either we get communism or we get savagery, to adapt Rosa Luxemburg. That is to say, instead of teleology you have a bifurcation, Hercules on the crossroads... It is a time and a vision of catastrophic choices. This also means social struggles never end. I have realized while writing my last book on socialist Yugoslavia, that I cannot imagine any society

without politics, and I think Marx was wrong there (maybe we should say semantically imprudent).

SB: *Can you clarify this ...*

A: Marx thought that politics was all about class conflict; so that after the abolition of class conflict there will be no politics. But if politics means primarily how society or any collective distributes its material resources, when, how much, for what and to whom, then it will always exist. There is a novel by Wells set in a future where all our problems are solved; but still there is a conflict between scientists and artists. The scientists want to go to Mars or Venus and so on, whereas the artists want something else here and now. I think that human wishes and desires will always be larger than our material bases. So, do we now build a huge expensive accelerator, or do we go to Pluto, or do we let the sea into Sahara? There must be politics to solve this. In class society you solve this with violence, and in classless society by argument: as Brecht said in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, with pencils, not pistols. But important problems to be solved will remain in classless society. In that case you need politics to solve them, as Montesquieu said by “pressures, checks and balances” -- I am a big fan of Montesquieu.

SB: *You describe this dialectics needed for an integrally materialist approach to art, referring to Bakhtin and Mukařovský, as social formalism.*

DS: I would not call it that now. These are traces of my intellectual genesis.

SB: *Then in the same text you offer a criticism of Greimas's theory of actants by proposing instead a Marx's model of history from '18th Brumaire'.⁷*

DS: Marx speaks of “character mask”, which is a type: the capitalist, the worker, etc. In the *18th Brumaire* you have the best description of how Marx characterizes the classes.

SB: *What you find as most objectionable in Greimas' model of actants is lack of any social and ideological context.*

DS: I am less and less fond of the word ideological; I would rather say historical, and if you wish a lack of historical semantics. I mean by this even macro-historical: I think it is perfectly fine if you have chosen to talk about overarching transformations happening in the time span of one or five thousand years. But you must have some kind of fundament, what the French would call *assiette*, a place where you are seated, a seat in history. For us time is history, we don't exist outside of that. This does not mean that you are Robinson on your island and history is an ocean, or any other metaphor in which you are here and history is there. History is in your language, in your dreams, in your body, everywhere. If you have grown up during the war and you ate badly, history is then in your bones – you will have trouble with your health when you are forty or fifty. Only when you are striking and the police shoot at you, history is at the moment outside and getting forcibly into your inside. The so-called biological inside or “inner environment” is 90% historical. That's why I think that the

discussion around genetics is one of the greatest bourgeois operations of ideological obfuscation. I have nothing against genes, but it is used in very reactionary ways to obliterate the importance of history. A good example of this is Dawkins's book *Selfish Gene*. I rather like his conceit by which individuals are nothing but seed-pods for chromosomal propagation, but on the whole it is sheer nonsense.

SB: If we assume that history is everywhere, then any literary theory which avoids history is actually violence toward the literature it analyses. Could you say about Greimas that too?

DS: The basis for Greimas's analyses and his system are Lithuanian folk stories. In Lithuanian folk stories the main agent is usually a Catholic priest; is that not historical!? Whereas a few hundred kilometres or years away that would be an orthodox or a protestant or an animist priest; which would make things completely different. I find Greimas very obnoxious, though he has one advantage: he has brought his system to the point where it becomes so self-contradictory and top-heavy that it is ready to collapse into materialism and history, which is what I try to do.

SB: When you discuss the text through three agential levels, then the problem of representation alters from the usual discussions which consider the artistic work as reflection of reality. Thus I would like to know your position regarding the discussions on realism?

DS: When Aristotle speaks about mimesis, he at some point asks, referring to zither I think, what kind of reflection is that when you represent somebody's state of mind by musical sounds? It certainly is not a reflection in the ordinary sense of how a mirror works. The worst book Lenin ever wrote is *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, or at least half of the book. The *pars destruens* is ok, as I said, but his *pars construens* is terrible, very Engelsian at his most reductive. I much like Gramsci's finessing this in his *Quaderno 11* (1930-32). He substitutes "translation" for Lenin's infamous "reflection" as the basic principle of Marxist philosophy. This gets interesting: for him it is a principle of productive convertibility between two texts (so this is a general approach not confined to translating texts between two different languages, though he himself did that from German). His *exemplum* is that there must in fact exist a convertibility between the specific languages of philosophy, politics, and economics since all three share the same stance towards the world. This is then, I would say more precisely, a general epistemological principle that gives dogmatic priority to none of such languages: and though he doesn't say so aloud, out goes the primacy of economic basis as against philosophical or political "superstructure"! For example, he situates Lenin's term of "hegemony" into a translatory oscillation between philosophy and political practice (the Greeks would allot the latter to *sofrosyne*, practical wisdom).

You see, reflection is based on the metaphor of mirror, whether it is an ordinary mirror or a mirroring in water, as with Narcissus. But once you start to reflect on reflection, even the simplest reflection has *seine Tücken*, as Marx would say, its complications or malices or vagaries: for example, left becomes right in mirroring. What did this mean; that a revolutionary party becomes right-wing in literature? Of course not (necessarily)! But you see it is a very complicated question, the change of shapes or anamorphism (much beloved by the Baroque). What Stalin and Zhdanov meant by reflection is some kind of imagined political

correctness: to say good things about us, and bad things about enemies. That is a self-reflection – to reflect our own opinions, horizons, and point of views, to repeat and confirm them. In this case what is being reflected is nothing material, it is the apparatus *idea* of the ruling party; not the things or relationships between people. We have several questions here. There is a very good book written by another Lithuanian, Jurgis Baltrušaitis, an art historian who wrote on many different varieties of morphing, such as anamorphosis, metamorphosis, etc. Anamorphosis is describing distortions; like in the famous Baroque park Bomarzo near Rome, where all wall horizons are distorted. Well, in any mimesis, which is a metamorphosis (and it is not a coincidence that my best known book is called *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, which means changes of shapes in it), there are various way of producing distortions, such as one to one, one to two, upside-down, inversion, eversion, conversion, subversion, etc. Then there are convex and concave mirrors, as in fairgrounds (and one of my latest books is again not by chance called *Defined by a Hollow*). This business of mimesis is horribly complicated; just imagine imitating a state of mind by playing music, by having the chorus dancing. It is a simple fact that the dance does not imitate in any precise way the war before the Troy; it is a dance that must follow its own laws of a body traversing space – gravity, kinds of leaps and turns, etc., even if you give spears to the dancers. It is absolute petty-bourgeois stupidity to say that imitation is a kind of one-to-one relation. Let me take the canonic Socialist Realist example: Gorky's *Mother* (a book I am sentimentally fond of, and it is not the author's fault it got into such a canon). Gorky wrote about the mother of a revolutionary in Russia, because there were revolutionaries in Russia outside of literature. But not all revolutionaries, probably not even too many, had a mother that would carry on their work. So what Gorky did is to make a type, which is a Mother of the Revolutionary, and very near to an allegory, the Revolutionary Mother, if not indeed The Mother of the Revolution. If we agree that type is kind of form, then it has its own laws, just like distortion (say perspective) in painting has its laws. Therefore you must investigate the form, and that is the materialist part. Form is not, as my elder colleagues at Faculty of Arts would have said, the glass outside holding the water inside.

SB: *Brecht said that if something had a good form we have to take its content. You are quoting this as well.*

DS: All of us are children of our epochs. Brecht for example thought that he was doing anti-Aristotelian theatre. Because German Aristotelians, both in theory (such as Gustav Freytag, a theoretician of drama) and in theatre practice claimed their basis lay in Aristotle's *Poetics*. In fact they were not Aristotelians, they were 19th-century bourgeois Positivists. So Brecht being anti-Aristotelian meant anti what was meant by Aristotelianism when he was young. Brecht is also a child of his time, of the discourse of his time. In fact if you read his poetics, in many ways he is Aristotelian as well, as I mentioned his overall structure is episodic, etc. Aristotle didn't theorize enough the episodic nature of theatre, but he recognized it as such. Brecht wouldn't have the concept without Aristotle. So if Brecht was speaking in terms of form and content, it is because he was raised in a German school in the first decade of 19th century, poor guy! And so were the listeners to whom he was trying to get something across.

SB: *But it seems that he wanted to break from that legacy.*

DS: Of course he saw the limits of that education very soon, he almost got kicked out of school when he wrote against the World War. But one question is centrally important here: what is estrangement (his *Verfremdung*), is it form or content? It's a way in which form makes you look at your world.

SB: *You write that the most formalized analysis can become precise, instead of formalistic, if only enters into feedback relation with the environment?*

DS: I am great admirer of the feedback metaphor. This is a cybernetic metaphor which Marx didn't have. I understand it as two entities which interact. A changes B then B changes A, which become A1, and so on.

SB: *Feedback is possible because there is a flow of information from one source to another.*

DS: Exactly: flow of information, or of anything else. This is a semiotic concept, which begins with thermodynamics.

SB: *If we talk of reformulations of reproductions of agencies, then usually discussion goes toward the re-articulation of artistic text, which you also mention occasionally.*

DS: You have here basically the old question: which one is first, chicken or egg? This is what some anthropologists, such as the interesting Gregory Bateson, called a double bind. Whatever you answer will be a wrong answer. The solution is that you have to step out of the double bind, that is, to say "I don't agree with your question." Thus, the question whether artistic work is a reflection or not, is also such a double bind. In some ways it is, in some it is not, and anyway what is meant by reflection is most imprecise and unproductive. We have to recognize it as such and refuse to recognize it as valid question.

SB: *How is it possible to do that?*

DS: By using imaginative freedom. My entire last book (*Samo jednom se ljubi*) has advanced to foregrounding this concept of freedom, meaning dis-alienation.

SB: *Can you tell briefly how Brecht became your intellectual and artistic horizon in the fifties in Yugoslavia?*

DS: Very simple, through student theatre. I was deeply engaged in student theatre, which was one of the democratic forms of self-expression in socialist Yugoslavia. First I was involved in the Zagreb Youth Cultural Society *Goran Kovačić*, which had its own theatre troupe. Later on it became the famous SEK (Studentsko eksperimentalno kazalište, Student Experimental Theatre), whose main director was my friend Bogdan Jerković. I was a kind of dramaturge (art director) of SEK, and we were part of the international body of Western and Central European student theatres, which was an incubating space for the '68 movement. You know the '68 youth and student movements didn't come out of nowhere, they were incubating since the fifties. So we had four festivals each year, at Easter time in Parma, Italy; in middle of May in Zagreb, in June in Erlangen, West Germany, and in October, we had it first in Istanbul, but the Turkish police didn't like that, so we shifted it to Nancy, in France. It was called UITU (Union Internationale des Théâtres Universitaires). The head of the student

theatre and festival in Nancy, Jack Lang, later on became a famous Socialist Party minister of culture. At that time there was a big Brecht renaissance in two student theatres of West Germany, Frankfurt and Hamburg. This was in the fifties, the time of SDS (Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund, people who were later demonstrating). They also produced some very interesting discussions, with theoreticians in Germany such as Karlheinz Braun or Claus Peymann (who much later became *intendant* of Brecht's Berliner Ensemble), and in France some like Chéreau who later went to direct films. They were focusing mostly on the peripheral Brecht; not *Galileo*, not *Mother Courage*, but *Lehrstücke* (his 1930s' "plays for learning"), the early *Drums in the Night*, *Der Tag des Großen Gelehrten Wu*, one of his school's adaptation in 1940s from Chinese, and mostly on early anarchist Brecht. After I saw these plays I started reading Brecht.

We had a huge scandal in Erlangen when Brecht's son-in-law, the great actor Ekkehard Schall, came as a guest and recited some of Brecht's most communist poems in 1961 just after the Berlin Wall; right-wing students in the audience booed it with hate, a real theatre scandal in a nice 19th-century theatre. I was vice-president of UITU, an organization consisting mainly of Western Europe countries and Yugoslavia. The Russians were outside that organization; only in some exceptions, Polish student theatres would come to UITU events. Therefore the Student Union of Yugoslavia forbade me to be president, they were afraid of Russian disapproval; it was part of Tito's balancing policy. So, to answer your question, I haven't met Brecht inside Yugoslavia, but in Germany, Italy or France; as you know Brecht's greatest world success was with *Mother Courage* in 1954 in Paris, when Roland Barthes and a whole group of intellectuals became Brechtians. After that I was collecting books and publications related to Brecht. I was spending my per diems of 25 DM for buying books while abroad in these UITU meetings. These festivals had also debates. I was head of the debate programme of the Zagreb May IFSK festival (Internacionalni festival studentskog kazališta), which I have eternalized by putting into my mentioned book the cover-image of our publication, made by Mihajlo Arsovski, famous Macedonian graphic designer in Zagreb. I was editing the *IFSK Bulletin* with these debates, heavily influenced by Brecht. For us Brecht was anti-Stalinist and anti-capitalist, that is to say totally analogous to socialist Yugoslavia.

SB: *Were you at that time then drawing this parallel between Yugoslavia socialist self-management and Brecht?*

DS: No, then I was not thinking about the Yugoslav situation as a problem. I was, as all of us, very naïvely of the opinion, quite wrong, that the revolution had happened, we have solved all antagonistic problems, and we are left only with material difficulties, cultural backwardness, and remnants of the past that would be solved due to science, our wise leadership, and all that. OK, that was crap, we all had to mature! But I think Brecht was identical to the furthest horizons of the Yugoslav revolution, that is to say radical refusal of alienation. *Verfremdung* actually is a refusal of *Entfremdung* – the estrangement counteracts

alienation. By the way this was very well discussed by Ernst Bloch in his essay *Entfremdung/Verfremdung*.⁸

In the student theatre there was a very interesting fight between formalists and nihilists, say the Brecht wing and the Grotowski wing; Grotowski was soundly beaten. Then he went to New York and became world-famous by being followed by US theatre people such as Schechner and company. And he beat Brecht worldwide just based on American ideological export. Of course Grotowski has some interesting things, he is a great director of actors, he knew quite a bit about Asian theatres, and he has this kind of Catholic existentialist background, which has its own strength. But I didn't like that much, it's all revelling in Christ's passion – blood, sweat, and snot, no women allowed except as mourners. Thus, when I came to the USA for 1967/68, I had to decide whether I wanted to continue with theatre criticism. During that year I taught in Amherst, Massachusetts, which is five hours by bus to New York. Nena and I went on weekends to see all plays of that season in New York, Broadway, off-Broadway, off-off-Broadway, and the leading theatre journal, *TDR*, gave me the money for all the often expensive tickets. At that time, ever since the US public was shocked by success of Sputnik in 1957, a lot of money was being thrown at the universities, to invest into research. Of course most of the money went to the weapons industry, arms technology, space, hard sciences, and similar, but even the small portion given to Humanities and Social Sciences was relatively huge. So there was no problem getting funding and grants for halfway decent proposals. But I didn't like the atmosphere and horizons of the US theatre, and to systematically criticize for years something you don't like is counter-productive, you become what is in German called a *nörgler* – a nagger or moaner; that is boring to read and boring to write.

Therefore I returned the money, and I stopped being a theatre critic. There were also other reasons, one was that I was busy with my academic work (lecturing and writing). However, I could have stayed in New York City. Because universities were hiring a lot of teachers, in '68 I had four contracts awaiting signature on my desk. One was to stay in Amherst, at Massachusetts University; it was a progressive State, the only US one with protective labour legislation and so on; another in San Francisco; and a third one on the outskirts of New York City, on Long Island. And the fourth contract was from McGill University in Montréal, Canada. Now I liked the hustle and bustle of Manhattan, but I didn't much like the USA. It was a very violent country, with wonderful oases which you could also call ghettos – the campuses. In New York a lot of things were happening, like later the siege of Columbia University; I went to see that, but I didn't much believe in those student revolts (paradoxically: the rich kids were striking, and the proletarians in police uniforms were putting down the strikes). Of course their strong revulsion against both consumer capitalist and Stalinist forms of human relationships was correct, and they pioneered the revulsion against life being absorbed by getting more and more things, against reification – though that was easy in a country of most abundant production. They were sincerely on the Left without

quite knowing what this was or should imply (say clearer ideas, more organisation). When a strike happened in Amherst I felt my duty was to solidarise with the students, but they were basically anarchists, they were only against the war and sexual or drug repression, and what they were for was unclear. However, I didn't believe in smoking marijuana, it obfuscates the mind which we need. Certainly some of the general US fights were worthy fights, those against the Vietnam War and against racism, but they were not fights in which I could as a foreigner participate, not my fights. So at the end I went to Canada and I didn't become a theatre critic. A few years later I experienced some of the 1968 student leaders, whom I defended, turning into Post-Modernists and attacking me.

SB: Why did you leave Yugoslavia?

DS: They didn't vote to prolong my assistant status job in the Faculty of Arts after six years, in spite of my having had a special dispensation to teach courses and published 5 books. There were all kinds of intersecting reasons, personal and political, the nationalists were already on the rise, the Party didn't protect me; I fell between two stools so to speak. I believe I got about 47 votes as against 25, but out of a 100 members of the faculty Council (all teachers), the rest was absent, and we operated under a utopian self-management rule that you need to get an absolute majority of 51 votes. There were some irregularities in the meeting, so I sued them and might well have won. But you cannot be in a university on the basis of a court ruling instead of peer approval, I believed, and I was very disgusted. On top of some other conflicts I had had earlier with theatres and so on, I concluded I could very well be an alienated intellectual anywhere in the world. So though the Faculty got frightened and gave me a one-year paid leave (at the time I was also very sick and mainly in hospital), I resigned in 1967 and applied for a job through friends in the USA -- which I then got in Amherst as described above. I had been in the USA in 1965/66 on a Ford Foundation grant, had had lectures all across the country and followed courses at Yale University, and refused with patriotic indignation offers of employment in various places. Now I had to come back with tail tucked in.

OTHER WORLDS, OTHER SEAS

SCIENCE-FICTION STORIES FROM

SOCIALIST COUNTRIES

Selected, Edited and with a Preface by

Darko Suvin



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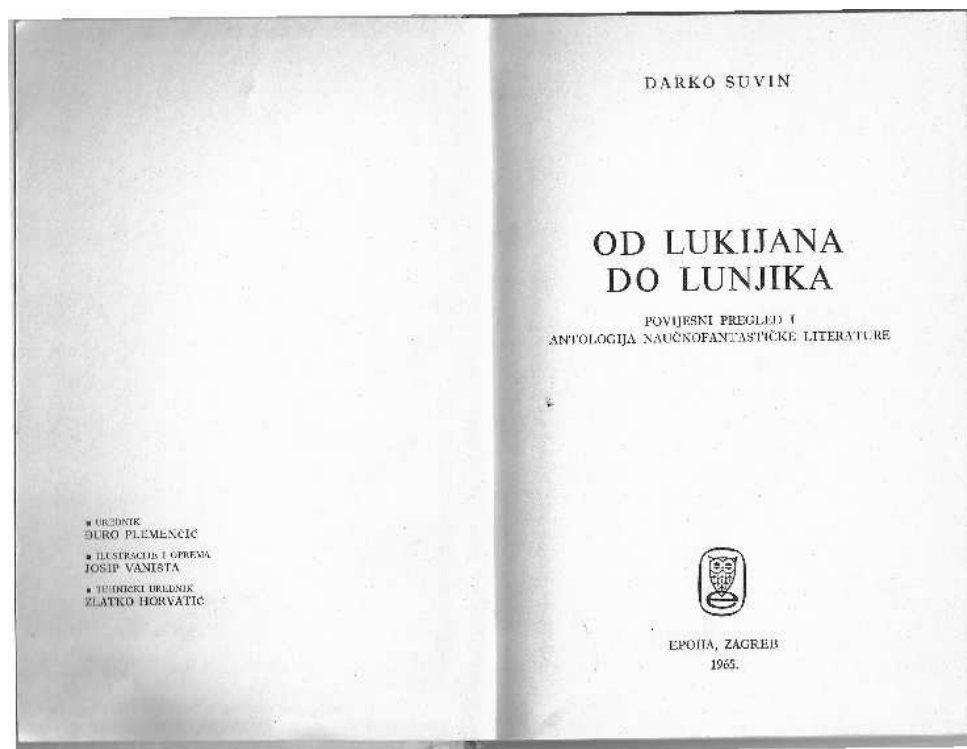
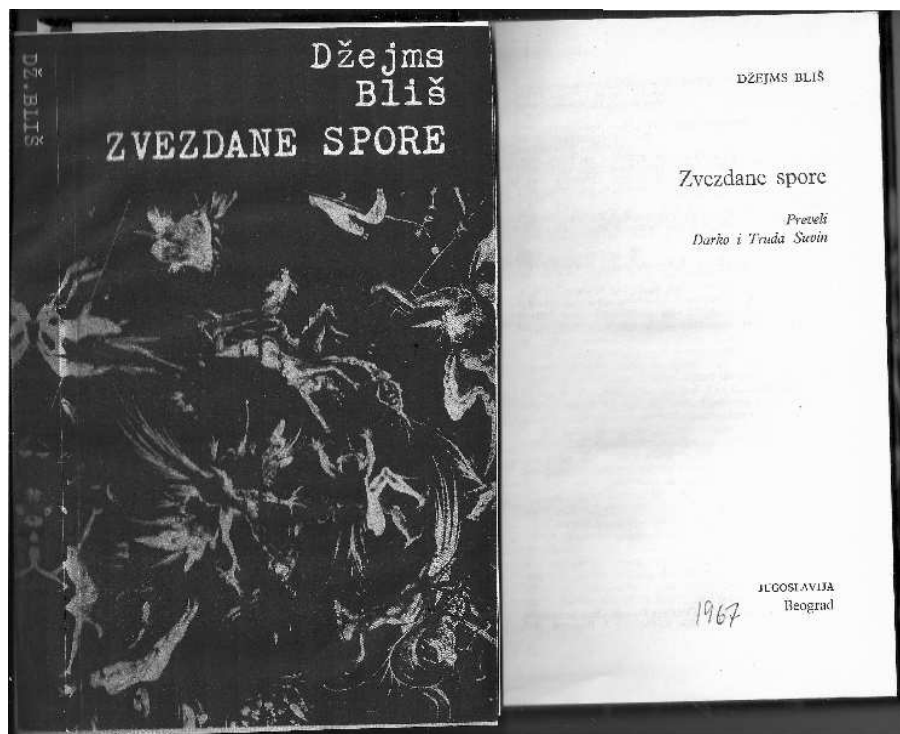
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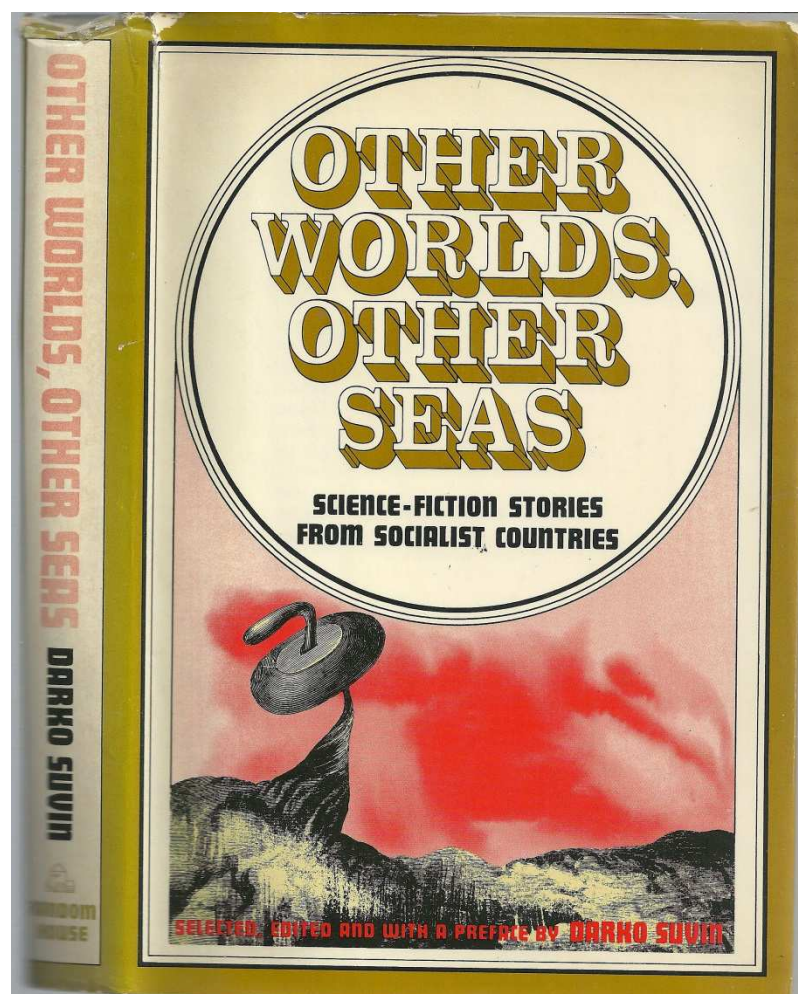
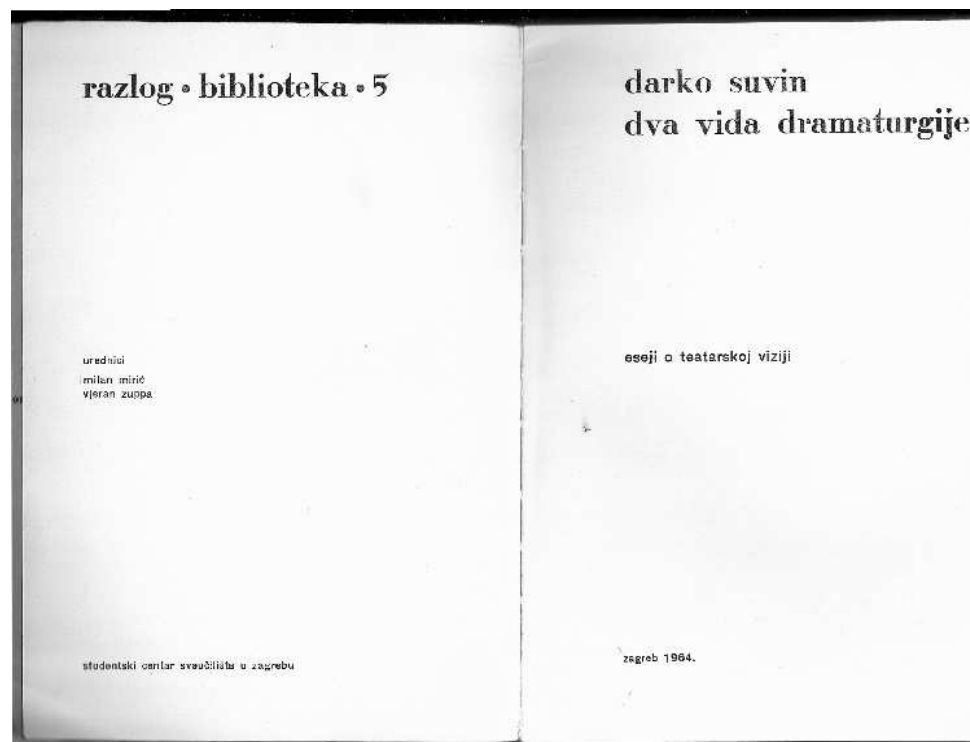
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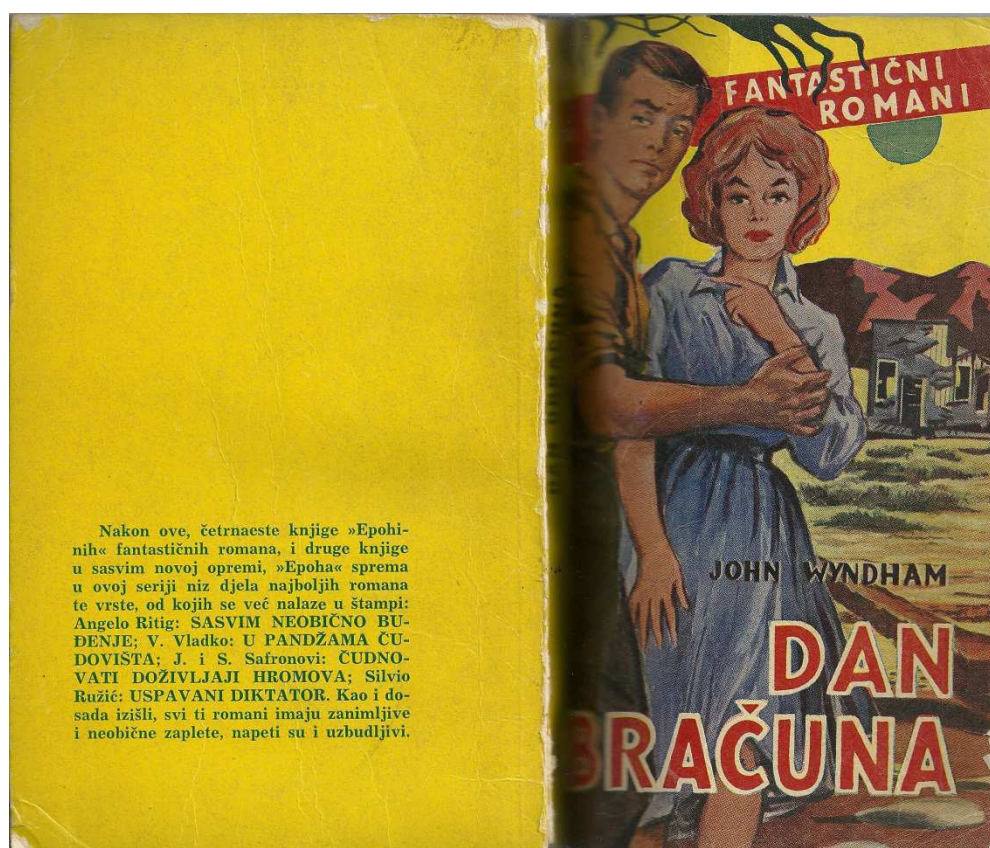
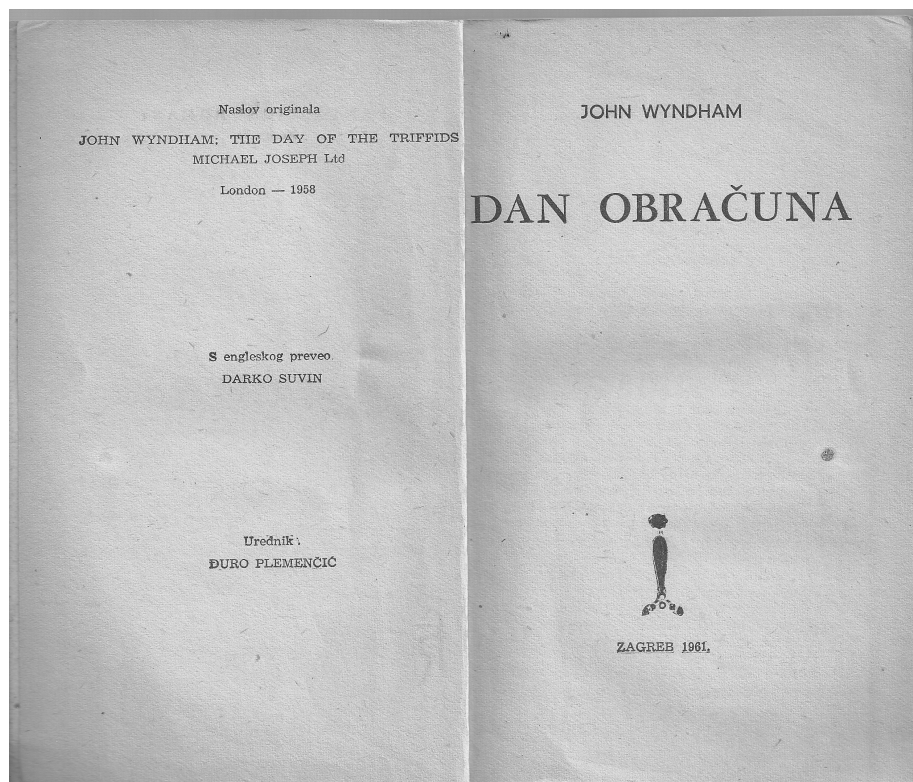
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SB: *I would like to continue the discussion with your translation and analysis of Brecht's verse poem 'The Manifesto'. You relate it to cognitive faculty of estrangement: "Poetry is here not only in strong opposition to the stifling superficial babbling of the reigning, totally ideologized doxa of the capitalist media or brainwashed common sense; it is above all a "stumbling block" (formulation of the poet Giampiero Neri) to the hegemonic babble—one*

which forces the reader/stumbler to stop and look at what is really happening at his feet. (p. 19-20)”

A: Brecht did a transposition of Marx’s *Manifesto of the Communist Party* into verse; which of course, if you believe in form being meaning, makes it a different animal. This is theoretically too interesting, because the style of *the Communist Manifesto* is also very artistic, it is a prose pamphlet style. Otherwise it wouldn’t have lasted for 150 years. Brecht was turning it into a verse translation/adaptation in 1944, when the Red Army was approaching Germany (later on he doubled the initial adaptation). He read everything he could get, both US and German émigré literature, and was struck by the fact that no one rebelled during the defeat of Hitler when the Nazi army was on the front, so a rebellion by workers should have been on the cards but did not happen. He was horrified by this, and thought (rightly) that the German working class had forgotten Marxism. Therefore it had to be re-acquainted with it in a way which would be interesting, that is to say in verse. In my opinion he also thought that Marxist prose, due to the abuse by the social-democratic (and I think also communist) party in banalities did not work so well any more. He was giving it a new lease of life, so to speak, by putting it into verse. He used the hexameter form based on some German translation of Lucretius’s *De rerum natura* from 1820s, which he had known in the Weimar era and taken with him into emigration.

This raises the huge question of the relation of poetry to history. I wrote in that analysis: “Surely, charity begins at home: poetry cannot exist without a relation to its own history. The poet — and the translator — must be cognizant of it, but not necessarily the synchronic reader who has to fry today’s potatoes today. For the reader, the relation is basically one of poetry to what Marx and Engels called the only science they knew — the history of relationships among people, in different social formations, in the struggles of classes differently shaping each formation.” I wish I could go on, but this needs a semestral doctoral course... Maybe this can be approached a little by the essay I recently wrote and which I propose you print in the same issue of *RAB-RAB* as this interview, “Epistemology, Science, Narration/Poetry”.

SB: *Can we describe the adaptation of ‘Manifesto’ by Brecht as an instance of estrangement? In your text on the adaptation you describe it as a stumbling block, which is a term used by Russian Formalists.*

DS: Yes, that is a term used by Shklovsky. That is what Formalists called *zatrudnenie formy*, making the form difficult, which prevents distracted reading. It is based on the simple idea that unless you concentrate on text, you will not understand it. If you stumble over a feature, you come to pay attention (or perhaps you throw it away). Furthermore, the form is difficult not only or primarily because it is baroque and complicated, but because it introduces new images and concepts. Then you ask “what is this?”, you de-automatise your relation to the artwork. On the contrary, if you automatise the concept as a cliché, and discuss it through automatically expected images and concepts, then nobody will pay full attention to it. So the text or its style has to be refreshed by putting it in some other way, which will be vivid enough to make the reader stop (stumble) and ask about the text. As I said, Brecht also introduces some new things that were not in *The Communist Manifesto*. Of course they are

Marxist terms, concepts, and images, but certainly they were not in the original *Manifesto*. For example he introduces the “God of Profit”, something like Moloch or Baal. He sits there ruling the people, he is blind but very powerful. Literally, he is a blind God sitting in a temple, certainly a vivid image. Marx himself was not bad at finding vivid images, ‘the spectre is haunting Europe’ for example. That spectre is more or less a spectre of Hamlet’s father, because Marx loved Shakespeare whom he recited to his children when they were riding on his shoulders on Hampstead Heath. There are also spectres in German tradition, but with Shakespeare it is related to revenge righting an old wrong. Also Marx speaks often about theological or supernatural caprices of the Capital, a dead thing bearing fruit and so on. Therefore it is easy to make a parallel with a religious entity out of it. Of course Brecht reworks also Mammon from Bible, false god of gold and riches, since he was a very close reader of Bible, the Luther translation which is the beginning of modern German literary language.

SB: *In your book on Brecht you criticize the work of Lee Baxandall on Happenings as nihilist estrangement, as no more than a renewal of sensual perception without cognitive values. Or you even say that this is a right-wing estrangement.*⁹

DS: Well mythology is primarily, for us at least, an estrangement. By right-wing I mean basically some kind of mythical approach. For example Hitler believed in the occult science of I think seven moons, six of which have already disappeared, each in a catastrophe where the Earth changed; in the last one the Aryans had to retreat to North Scandinavia, but before that they were ruling all Europe, and they should come back and start to rule again. This myth I would say is an estrangement, of course this is not a part of the normal bourgeois world, but from the Right. So, there is nothing in estrangement which makes it automatically progressive or left-wing. It is a technique of perception. If you gave me a little time I could find you more sophisticated examples of right-wing estrangements from literature. Ezra Pound’s *Pisan Cantos*, say, have a section against usury, which is the right-wing, traditionally Catholic name for capitalism. Right-wing is, to put it in general terms, a reaction against French revolution, freedom, equality, and democracy from below; it can easily be ideologically anti-bourgeois too. Fascism has always had a left wing, such as the SA of Nazi Germany whom Hitler had killed in 1934. They were sincerely anti-capitalist, so they thought, and horrified that Hitler made a compromise with capitalist industrialists. They really thought that it was a national socialist party. So, right wing estrangement exists too.

As to nihilist estrangement: by the way, I was a good friend of Baxandall, he was a left-wing guy in New York. And I got interested in these Happenings while in New York City. I saw a few, and they also published very good small pamphlets describing various Happenings by Kaprow and others. After studying them I wrote that critique for *TDR (Theatre and*

“It is a beatific vision of the discontinuous flux of things, related to a consciousness of the limits of philosophical humanism and of the positive meaning of alienation. As such it is the horizon of all consistent nihilist estrangement”. Darko Suvin, ‘Reflections on Happenings’, *To Brecht and Beyond: Soundings in Modern Dramaturgy*, Brighton & Totowa NJ: The Harvester Press, 1984, p. 253. (ed. note)

Drama Review). Basically I understood happenings as a-political estrangement, that is to say, they are dealing with individual re-orientation to the world, and whether this has anything to do with politics is none of our business. Once we re-orient you can go out and do whatever you want, something or nothing, left or right. I thought that this was a variant of estrangement which was formally interesting, and up to a point maybe even useful, but certainly insufficient. I didn't know what to call it except nihilist estrangement, by which I was referring to Nietzsche -- certainly not to the Russian nihilists who killed the Tsar.

SB: *Baxandall's theory of Happenings is actually similar also to his interpretation of Eastern European political cinema (particularly of Makavejev) which he calls cine-marxism.*¹⁰

DS: In these writers it is all approximate, because they didn't know too much about Eastern Europe.

SB: *Apart from not knowing, they were also reproducing certain Western stereotypes of Eastern Europe avant-gardes. For Baxandall, Makavejev's estrangement techniques are better than Godard's, because he has a sensual, non-mediated, and non-cognitive approach.*

DS: I am all in favour of sensuality in arts. It can provoke a gut reaction. But gut reaction is, more or less, semi or un-conscious. How do you then go on, what can it orient you toward? Everything or nothing. Also I don't think that Baxandall is right about Makavejev. True, there is a little bit of what Baxandall was getting at. I can tell you that Makavejev was very much impressed by Deleuze and Guattari. While I was staying with him in Paris in his apartment I saw on his working table their *Anti-Oedipus* book, which he praised to me as a great revelation. I have some very basic doubts about them, even as I think that *A Thousand Plateaus* and also Guattari on his own are better. Certainly not all of Makavejev is as Baxandall wants to portray it. For me Makavejev is a utopian communist, as redefined by the New Left.

SB: *In your text you describe this nihilism as pseudo-biological values substituting for the historical ones.*

DS: Exactly. For they are not truly biological, as I was saying earlier that 90% of what is inside us is not biological. I don't have much to add to this text; probably today I would define more accurately what I meant by nihilism, but in first approximation it may be OK. I wrote somewhere that political economy, including politics pivoting on political economy, is our version of the Greeks' *ananke*, destiny. As you know in Greek tragedy destiny decides what will happen, that Oedipus must do this and that, and there is no escape from it. Our version of it is probably pretty near to the Greek one, but where the ancient Greeks said destiny we say political economy. It is what the actantial system calls the Mandatory, the supreme power which determines your world. I think that even the Marxist concepts of political economy describe a horribly alienated way of life. Of course, in order to change it, you have to first describe it. But in order to describe it well, which is from a value-based

point of view, you have to have lot of doubts about it – as Marx had. You simultaneously posit and deny, a tough thing to do formally.

SB: *Can you tell bit more about your concept of cognitive estrangement, how it is related to knowledge and politics?*

DS: Brecht said once, in his optimistic phase before Hitler, that he wanted to make his audience into an audience of statesmen – in other words, people who are able to build and rule a State (there are astounding parallels between him and Gramsci, unbeknownst to both). We should today add to these people who know how to build a State also people who know how to keep and maintain this State as a non-State, a dialectical democracy from below. But Brecht was not so far wrong. What he meant is roughly similar to Lenin saying (in his fiercely utopian *State and Revolution*) that every cook, *svaka kuharica*, which is female, is going to be able to rule the State. In other words Brecht and Lenin take the plebeian society or classes and believe they can do what was the prerogative of rulers, which is to know how collectively to rule and maintain the State or a society. How do you do that? You must learn a lot, about finances, about military matters, about psychology, etc, which the ruling class knew, in their own brutal and imperfect ways. You cannot say that Disraeli or Bismarck didn't know how to rule. But we are talking about different kinds of learning and knowing. For plebeians or proletarians, to know how to rule is, if you boil it down to a minimum common denominator, to make people willing, interested, eager and able to learn by saying that what exists now is not the only possibility. So this is cognitive estrangement. For example, to see that what exists as State is not what it seems it is but is a machine of exploitation, or a killing machine. It is maybe a very rough kind of estrangement, but still it is an important estrangement. Basically today the State is two things: a machine for extracting money out of the ruled in favour of the rulers, for keeping and maintaining this exploitation and killing of people, and a killing machine; it kills people in prisons or in the wars. Marx somewhere says that each government has two basic departments, the army and the finances. That is, how to extract money from people and then how to dominate them and other people by means of moneys you have extracted from them, which is by an organized army. That is true for any State that ever existed.

SB: *So cognitive estrangement is to rethink about the world where we are living in.*

DS: Yes, to rethink, not only conceptually but also sensually, to see anew and to understand *what you see something as* (this is what the mature Wittgenstein was about). I arrived to this through defining science fiction. I disliked the adjective scientific, a futurological function, which was in the West identified with militarism – science and futurology work for the army. And in the East it was identified with a Stalinist type of pseudo-Marxism, which was also supposed to be a science. In both cases there was a 19th-century view of science that I disliked, which is this asymptotic arrival at absolute truth or certainty instead of situatedness. So cognitive, as adjective of understanding, suited me better than science as describing estrangement. It refers to a process, as cognition which has to be gained. But science usually meant something which already exists, and we had to apply it successfully. And the Stalinists

added that only the stupid bourgeoisie thought science was confined to natural sciences; whereas we know also that there is the social science of Marxism.

SB: *What you explain is part of your two horizons, Einstein and Lenin...*

DS: Yes: Einstein with Marx as precursor, and the best Lenin, which is the Lenin of *State and Revolution*.

SB: *Is communism a horizon for all utopologists?*

DS: Yes and no. Empirically no, utopological stances span the whole political gamut, though most of it is somewhere on the Left. But if you want to be radically consistent, and you refuse the status quo, then it is the final horizon. However, let us be careful and first define what we mean by communism! I wrote an essay three years ago, which I haven't managed to publish in English yet but should come out in *Critical Quarterly*, about the Janus nature of communism. There is the sense of Marx, Brecht, Bloch, Gramsci and the best Lenin, which I call C1; it is plebeian communism by direct democracy from below, the original Soviets. And then there is what was "really existing" communism as it ruled after the Russian, Yugoslav, Chinese, Cuban, and a couple of other revolutions, which I call C2; it is State communism by an elite (soon becoming a bureaucratic oligarchy and a ruling class) from above, and this is ambiguous: at first mainly liberatory, it grows into an alienated and corrupt form of C1. So what I am talking about here as a horizon, which means a final line when you look as far as you can, or as a Weberian "ideal type", is C1. This communism as the coming about of de-alienation is of course the horizon of all utopologists.

SB: *I found your text on Engels and Utopia very useful and interesting.*¹¹

DS: The essay on Engels is one I really like, I would today write it in the same way. It seems to me that I proved, at least to myself, that there is an unsaid part (a *non dit*, as the French say) in Engels, a blank where I put my question marks – if you remember – which falsifies his argument. I can understand why he and Marx were on the one hand very respectful towards people like Owen and Fourier, and on the other hand quite exasperated by their followers in practical politics of the 1840s. So, you have to say they were socialist, they were well-meaning, they had good insights, but they incorporated something that was insufficiently thought out. How do you call that which was insufficiently precise? Well, they called it as it was called by everybody back then in England, which is utopian, and it meant being nowhere (*u* is no, *topos* is place), being up in the air. That to my mind is, if you read *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, a bourgeois definition of utopia. It is wonderfully put by Macaulay, great ideologist of England in 1820 and 30's, he wrote the Indian Education Act, and so on: 'An acre in Middlesex is better than a principality in Utopia'. One is concrete and empirical bourgeois possession, worth a lot of money (London is in Middlesex); whereas the other is *fumisterie*, as the French would say, hot air. Well, this is very convenient from the

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"Utopian" and "Scientific": Two Attributes for Socialism from Engels' (1976)', *Defined by a Hollow: Essays on Utopia, Science Fiction and Political Epistemology*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010.

bourgeois point of view: utopias are cobwebs in the mind, get solid possessions! But that totally denies the emancipatory potential of utopia, which is exactly put by Raymond Ruyer: "*les choses pourraient être autrement*, things could be different". Thinking this way then, in Utopia you would have more than in Middlesex. You would have other and better things. Maybe you would not possess acres in Middlesex, but you would have use of the fruits of the whole country, plus solidarity with the other people who grow and use them. The whole Lockean tradition of knowledge and possession is turned upside down in the terms of utopia. This is the first point, that Marx and Engels had to find a bad adjective for Fourier and Owen, but not as being reactionaries and enemies, simply using a term available to them then that would describe them as not sufficiently "scientific". However, there are two problems here, and beyond the bad definition of utopia there is also a bad definition of science. The bourgeois definition of science is perpetual progress in the asymptotic form; it is the science (both science of society and natural science) which led to – or gave no problems in being used for -- Auschwitz, Hiroshima, today the bombing of Ukraine. I don't buy this! That's why I didn't like to use word science, and instead used the wider term cognitive, referring to the striving to understand.

This procedure of splitting a single semantic concept into a good and bad pole was first used by Hesiod in *Works and Days*, so far as I know. Of course you could use the same Hesiodian procedure I used for communism also for science, and have S1 as wisdom and S2 as corrupt bourgeois positive truth which can be capitalised. I wrote an essay about that too, called "On the Horizons of Epistemology and Science" (*Critical Quarterly* 52.1 (2010): 68-101; [//onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8705.2010.01924.x/full](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8705.2010.01924.x/full)). What does this procedure or stance basically imply? It implies that originally, in pre-class or lower-class or even liberatory intellectual semantics, there was a first usage and interpretation of the concept which was usable for de-alienation. Then in bourgeois or monopolistic capitalism, a second usage and interpretation came about, which was totally alienating and must be rejected if the human species is to survive barbarism. It is a historically well-known and most important development in semantics, in which for example *sub-iectum*, that what is below you and on which you base yourself, becomes the "subject" that looks at the now inert object; Williams has several more such examples in his wonderful *Keywords*.

SB: *You mention also a heuristic aspect of this estrangement.*

DS: I am very much taken by little games in psychological optic illusions, for example when you have a line which is put between arrows, and then you have same line which is put in reverse arrows. The lines seem longer between reverse arrows though they are exactly identical. If you extrapolate this to the huge illusions we are living in, then heuristic is to say "take a centimetre measure and you will see that they are the same." This is heuristic to my mind: take a value system, measure by it, and you find X.

SB: *What about your novum? In your chapter 'SF and the Novum' from Metamorphoses of Science Fiction, in order to delineate the singular condition of literariness of a SF you propose a term novum as "differentia specifica" of the SF narration. You distinguish SF "by the narrative dominance of a fictional 'novum' (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic." This specific novelty of SF, as far as I understood, has one very productive epistemological effect, which keeps the notion of empirical (i.e. science) and the notion of*

fiction (i.e. utopia) as in some kind of strange irresolvable tension. Further, this tension and unfamiliar relation implies also certain estrangement through novum of SF.

DS: Well, we hadn't yet got to turbo-capitalism which is full of fake novums every year. So what I later added to this text from my *Metamorphoses of SF* book, in an essay in *Defined by a Hollow*, is to again split it into the fake novum (continuous with the capitalist status quo) and the true novum, radically different. As you may notice, I love such dichotomies, though I think that this could be refined. So it would be nice to have a reasoned typology of novums, I wish somebody would do it.

SB: *In the reprint of your text in 2008 on defining the literary genre of science fiction (originally published in 1973) you add a new line concerning the discontented social classes. What was reason of this? The earlier text defines the literary genre of utopia as: "Utopia is the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where socio-political institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis." Now you add: "it is created by discontented social classes interested in otherness and change, in it, difference is judged from point of view or within their value system". How should we describe an interest of social classes in relation to the specific narrative of SF, which is novum? Is this an echo of Marxist thesis that class struggles are engine of history?*

DS: The earlier definition was up in the air without any social anchoring, it was supposedly eternal rather than *longue durée* (a fossile remnant of scientific universalism). The addition is in historical *longue durée*, "as carried by a discontented class". It is not enough to say simply a discontented group, then you can have reactionary utopias as well. I read a number of them by Russian White émigrés, for they too can be discontented. It must be a sufficiently important social class to produce a viable ideology. In other words if we accept a socio-formalist vocabulary, I lacked the social part in first definition.

SB: *From your 'Memoirs' on Yugoslavia: "In another place I hope to speak about the Communist Party vocabulary which on the one hand soon grew rather wooden but on the other had surprisingly spontaneous aspects." What would you say about political slogans from the perspective of conceptual discussions we had until now (estrangements, novum, etc.), especially about slogans in Yugoslavia?*

A: I never researched that in any systematic way. First of all I know of no collection of political slogans, there is no corpus of material on that issue, so that research still remains to be done; it may of course be difficult to collect this corpus. Second, I fear we would need a rather elaborate theory on ideology and language in order to do this. So I personally won't do any serious research about it. But I did remark on this issue here and there. For example in *Samo jednom se ljubi* I briefly discussed how the wartime (and later) slogan "Brotherhood and unity" (*Bratstvo i jedinstvo*) melds the French revolutionary *fraternité* with the necessities of 1941, of countering murderous fascist and quisling chauvinisms in an extremely divided ex-Yugoslavia (not so dissimilar from today's frozen exploitation). The brotherly unity has a connotation and a denotation – one can illustrate this with the old model

of the atom: connotation is the nucleus, and denotations are all electrons dispersed around the core. Connotations in this case are Croats, Serbs, Slovenes, Bosnians, Albanians, Montenegrins, Macedonians, all ethnic groups; and the denotation is that which can bring about the unity, which is nothing else but the Communist Party, an Aristotelian unmoved mover. It is a core which didn't assert itself openly; throughout the whole NOB (Liberation War) there is no talk about the Communist Party, except in very confidential documents. There are three reasons for this: most Yugoslav communists were formed in illegal circumstances during the monarchist regime when communists would be shot at sight without further reasons; so they had that reflex of secrecy in order to survive. You have to read Krleža's memoirs about meeting Tito in the late 1930s: it was in some village, veiled with mystery and precautions, Tito had a revolver in his pocket. The two other reasons were not to offend Stalin and the Western powers. I think this was a correct strategy until 1945/46, which afterwards turns to its opposite. It becomes what I call in my latest book abominable secrecy (*mrska tajnovitost*), meaning bureaucratic secrecy.

The French revolutionary *liberté* was present in the parallel slogan of "Death to fascism, liberty to the people" (*Smrt fašizmu, sloboda narodu*). Both of these are parallel constructions, much like the distichs in classical Chinese poetry, with identical syntax but variant -- in this case strictly antithetic -- semantics in the two halves. Thus, the unitary brotherhood fights for freedom (quite rightly not for *égalité*, which is both philosophically and politically dubious).

Or take the wonderful voluntary work brigades' slogan at the Youth Railways 1946-48: "We build the railway, the railway builds us" (*Mi gradimo prugu, pruga gradi nas*)! Of course this establishes the ideal horizon only, people are always more complex than slogans; I was there in all three years; you can read it in my *Memoirs*. This is a full-fledged case of feedback, similar to what we were talking about earlier. It means that while people change and renew things around them, these things and doings change and renew the people who do them. All three slogans are strokes of genius. No doubt, some agitprop section staffed by (published or not yet published) writers first coined them, but those particular ones survived a kind of Darwinian selection to prove very durable memes. I wish I knew who imagined them.

As you rightly remarked to me, there was also the Partizan song "Padaj silo i nepravdo, narod ti je sudit zvan", I well remember its mellifluous music. It has an especially good text, alluding to the Hvar Island revolt in the 16th Century, very Benjaminian (it can be found at <http://lyricstranslate.com/en/jugoslovenske-partizanske-pesme-padaj-silo-i-nepravdo-lyrics.html>). And yes you're right, "Fall down thou violence and injustice, the people is called to be thy judge" is the program of NOB, both a national liberation struggle and a plebeian revolution. This whole matter of the Partizan cultural revolution by means of songs, dances, little theatrical sketches, and a lot of improvised printed leaflets with articles, poems, and even black-and-white drawings is now being investigated, for example by the excellent Slovene essayist Miklavž Komelj. It is the matrix within which the slogans of the time should be considered.

