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Cyber Yugoslavia: from the World of Nations to the World of Cyber Countries[1]

Abstract: This paper examines Cyber Yugoslavia, a state created on the internet, after the fall of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). Located in cyberspace, Cyber Yugoslavia belongs to the corpus of virtual countries appearing as a subversive response to the nationalism and wars that led to the disintegration of the SFRY. The ludic and parodic character of CY makes it a unique example of the way in which it challenges and questions deep structures and ideological mechanisms of nation and nation-state construction. Using parody and laughter, CY deconstructs the concepts that are essential parts in creating the ideology of nation. The very same concepts are the focus of the theoretical approach to nation, wherefore the paper focuses on the intersection of theoretical and IT creative work.

Keywords: Cyber Yugoslavia, nation, nation state, ideology, subversion, theory

Introduction

It is nothing new to say that we live in a world of nations, or precisely in a world of nation-states. It is also nothing new in saying that the concept of nation is so naturalized and essentialist, and so much still instrumentalized also through the mechanisms of a banal nationalism that it is difficult to explain and discuss it outside the domain of Academia. It goes about the ideology of nation that creates nation states, which are (as with nations) represented as 'natural'.[2] "Nationalism embraces ways of thinking – patterns of common sense discourse – which makes this boundedness and monopolization of violence seem natural to 'us', who inhabit the world of nation-states."[3]

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[2] During the twentieth century the nation-state became the dominant political formation throughout the world. Although the contemporary globalized world reveals tendencies of the wrecking of this paradigm, as Thomas Erikson emphasizes, they are followed with parallel contrary processes, such as the revival of ethnic and national identity in Western Europe. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism* (London, New York: Pluto Press, 2010), 3.

[3] Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London, New Delhi: Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications Ltd., 2002), 20.

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However, the nation is an 'imagined community' as Benedict Anderson explained, while the glue elements that enable this community to create the feeling of belonging (which of course is not based on the factual relatedness and knowing of other members of the community) are national rituals and symbols (flags, anthems), common territory, common history, language, etc.[4] It is important to emphasize the research of Michael Billig and his conclusion that we should not neglect nationalism which is not burdened with affection. All in all, in its structure there is not much difference between waving the national flag with strong nationalistic affection (*hot nationalism*) and the flag on the petrol station or printed on some cosmetic product, for example shampoo (*banal nationalism*).[5]

These very basic theoretical points are fundamental for anyone dealing with the issues of national identity and nation (both in the meaning of state and in the meaning of national community). The ideology has its roots in the Enlightenment and the invention of the secular state, which was intended to create continuity and overtake the Church's dominant role in society at the time. The national state has become a project of modernity that has spread from Western Europe throughout the world. The fact that the concept of nation is ideologically grounded opened huge space for developing different political, anthropological and social theories of nation, which inspired Roger Brubaker to pose the question whether nation and identity should be theoretically regarded concepts at all, because by the mere act of researching them, we also prove the existence of something that is an ideological construction. Therefore, he suggests approaching these issues with extreme subtlety and refinement.[6]

Another issue that partly inspired this paper is also closely related to the ideological nature of nation, especially in regards to the difficulty in recognizing ideology when we live in it. It goes about the attitude towards nation shared by people who do not approach it theoretically. Researching this issue in the region of Yugoslavia after the 1990s and comparing it to the context of other European states, I came to the conclusion that in the context where nationalism is less *banal*, giving more serious and obvious consequences in wars or any kind of national discrimination, there are people (still a minority), who might become sensible and critical about it and aware of its ideological grounds. In the contexts where nationalism is more *banal* and less dangerous, questioning of the concept itself is, logically less present out of the theoretical domain. However, nationalist ideology is structured similarly, for both hot or banal nationalism. The differences are in its manifestation and further implications.

My aim in this paper is to illustrate one cyber project that emerged in the atmosphere of *hot* nationalism, a project of a virtual state called Cyber Yugoslavia,[7] that poses, although in a different genre and consequently in a different manner, a similar question as Rogers Brubaker in his book *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the*

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[4] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Community* (London, New York: Verso, 2006).

[5] Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 20.

[6] Rogers Brubaker, Frederic Cooper, "Beyond Identity," *Theory and Society* 29 (2000), 1–47.

[7] www.yuga.com

National Question in the New Europe published yet in 1996, questioning nationhood that is typically equated with citizenship. Brubaker claims:

> Countless discussions of nationhood and nationalism begin with the question: what is nation? This question is not as theoretically innocent as it seems: the very terms in which it is framed presuppose the existence of the entity that is to be defined. The question itself reflects the realist, substantialist belief that 'a nation' is a real entity of some kind, though perhaps one that is elusive and difficult to define.[8]

I wish to relate Brubaker's position to the fact that the national projects is modernist one and that the shift from the modern to postmodern paradigm has led to its challenging and questioning. Exactly in this context, I would like to introduce the perspective of a philosopher who is not specialized exclusively in the theory of nation, but whose thought is grounded in rethinking the ideas of Enlightenment (and nationalism is definitely one of them) which has been shaping the world we live in, that being Rosi Braidotti and especially her theory of the posthuman.[9]

Because Cyber Yugoslavia is a state located in a virtual sphere, I will enter the world of cyber countries in order to roughly map this sphere. However, my paper will not focus on virtual communities. Rather, its focal point is the overlapping between Cyber Yugoslavia and theories of Brubaker and Braidotti. Furthermore, since parody is important element of Cyber Yugoslavia, an additional aspect will concern humour theories that will be introduced as we arrive at the parody and humour within the text.

Cyber Yugoslavia – The State without Borders

On virtual state *Cyber Yugoslavia's* website it is stated that it is "the home of Cyber Yugoslavs".[10] With a population of 14,964 it is the stat large 0m² being located on the Internet, with variable national symbols, and a variable constitution. It was founded on September 9, 1999 and it still exists.[11] The population of CY (the acronym used also by the website's creators) did not grow since May 2001, when it last documented

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[8] Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and national question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 14.

[9] Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman* (Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press, 2013).

[10] Ibid.

[11] http://www.juga.com/find.php, accessed June 23, 2016. Lovink claims that this kind of internet creativity and activity was dominant in the period between 1993 and 1997 that is considered to be "the golden age of Internet hype", when cyber space was used mainly for promoting liberating and utopian ideas and marks it as techno-libertarianism, which by the mid-nineties started to be dominated by the right wing and neo-liberal agenda. Geert Lovink, *Dynamics and Critical Internet Culture: (1994–2001)* (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2009), 5–6.

that someone applied for citizenship. However, there is information on the website that the activities are being renewed, and that the website will become active again.[12]

As stated above, the territory of Cyber Yugoslavia does not exist. However, as written on its website, once the number of citizens reaches five million, Cyber Yugoslavia will apply to the United Nations for member status and ask for a piece of land, which could be located anywhere in the world and not for inhabitation for anything but to keep a server there.[13] This ironic twist that refers to country deconstructs the naturalized relation between a nation and its territory and is a prime example of the kind of parody that Cyber Yugoslavia utilizes to radically question the concept of nation that is grounded, among other things, on possession of territory, over which wars are fought. Thus the territorial criterion that characterizes the global map of national states is deemed unnecessary for Cyber Yugoslavia, thus challenging the idea of the relation between state and nation, as well as the concept of borders that exists between the states. Using parody, creators of Cyber Yugoslavia encourage visitors to question whether the relation between people and the territory of their nation state is really as natural as it seems. It also raises question about the division of people within nations and states, and their separation between the borders that mean and represent different things for representatives of different countries.

As it is obvious from this example and the entire project, the ludic approach taken by Cyber Yugoslavia is not grounded merely in the idea of making fun. As in many other situations, "humour is serious business" with a thoughtful background and aim.[14] Here humour appears on different levels, one of which is a reaction to concrete political context and events, ridiculing and questioning the appropriation of power. Also, humour is the reaction to the usage of national ideology in the construction of war narratives during the 1990s and national discourses that were grounded in the idea of distancing from Yugoslav supra-ethnic identity that went parallel to the differentiation of the Yugoslav nations.[15] Being a concrete ludic reaction to the above, this project at the same time is a brilliant example of deconstructing the well-naturalized concept of nation, comparable to Burbaker's mentioned theory. In that context, I will focus on the strategies of Cyber Yugoslavia regarding national symbols, national rituals, language, territory and even common history – in other words, to all elements that are in theory marked as constitutive for the nation.

Common history, one of the crucial elements by which national and state memory are shaped, does not exist as a content on the website.[16] The only historical event relevant for the creation of Cyber Yugoslavia is the breakdown of the Socialist Federal

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[12] http://www.juga.com/find.php, accessed 10 January, 2017.

[13] http://www.juga.com/find.php, accessed January 10, 2017.

[14] Walter Nash, *The Language of Humour* (London: Longman, 1985), 1.

[15] About the Yugoslav supra-ethnic identity see more in Vesna V. Godina, "Supra-ethnic identity in multiethnic societies: the case of Yugoslav multiethnic identity," *Ethnoculture*, Commission on Ethnic Relations, http://www.emich.edu/coer/Journal/Ethnoculture.html 2007, accessed January 20, 2017.

[16] On *invented traditions* and the role of historians in their shaping, especially regarding "to that comparatively recent historical innovation, the 'nation', with its associated phenomena: nationalism, the nation-state, national symbols, histories and the rest." See Erick Hobsbawm, "Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Erick Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004), 13.

Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) which appears as the motivation for the appearance of the virtual state, a project and a voice against nationalism in its extreme form, the kind which led to the Yugoslav wars. History that emphasizes its absence may be interpreted as an intentional act of omission. In the website's text we may read only the absurd act of marking a place of common past and leaving it empty. From the theoretical perspective, common history is actually necessary for constructing a nation. It is an integrating element that uses past narratives to 'prove' the existence and act as a 'guarantee' of a nation. A content of the created history is written in the presence and fulfils the demands of the present politics, regardless of real events from the past. It is invented, created, shaped and controlled by the hegemonic structures of the state. Regarding this ideological potential of common history it becomes clear that Cyber Yugoslavia chooses to reject an ideological mechanism of shaping its power with the creation and usage of dominant past narratives.

Apart from the idea of dividing state from territory, thus creating distance between the concepts of common history and the ideological potential this creates, there are several levels in which the deconstruction of national ideology may be mapped on Cyber Yugoslavia's website. Among others, these include its attitude towards official languages, plus the site's offering of citizenship to anyone interested.

For example, the constitution of Cyber Yugoslavia is written in 20 languages, one of which is a programming language called "C" (while others include Serbo-Croatian, Croato-Serbian, Slovenian, Portuguese, Japanese, French, English, Italian, Spanish, Slovak, German, Japanese, Dutch, and Macedonian, among others). The large number of official languages available, plus the fact that anyone wishing to translate the document to another language is free to do so, reflects a crucial concept explicit in the constitution of Cyber Yugoslavia and mirroring the agenda of the entire project and its radical questioning of the concept of nation and the components necessary for its construction. Therefore, the great number of official languages should be regarded as an example of direct subversion of the politically promoted idea that the language is one of the crucial symbols for the construction of national identity.[17] Namely, this usage of language as a symbol of the nation stands in direct conflict with the complicated situation found in the world language map, where the "one nation, one language" formula is impossible to apply. On the other hand, we have witnessed how one language that people speak and understand is split into several languages because of the *political* need for symbolical 'exploitation' of the language. However, it is interesting that Serbo-Croatian (Croato-Serbian)[18] is colloquially often called *naški* (*ours*) in almost all regions of Yugoslav area, especially when people want to avoid national demarcation. And although the term Serbo-Croatian is still used in linguistic circles, officially, in the state constitutions, it is split into four languages: Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin. This political change regarding language may be approached from two different linguistic points of departure. On one hand, there are

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[17] The complexity of this claim as well as the relation between a nation and a language is brilliantly problematized by Dubravko Škiljan, *Govor nacije. Jezik, nacija, Hrvati* (Zagreb: Golden Marketing, 2002).

[18] Officially the language had two names: Serbo-Croatian and Croato-Serbian.

linguists, among them Ranko Bugarski, who, describing the influence of national ideology on language definition, divide criteria according to which a language is defined on two different levels, either taking into account strictly linguistic criteria (regarding structural and genetic level), or focusing on sociolinguistic criteria (approaching language on the symbolical level). Depending on the correspondence of these criteria, the languages might have simple or complex identities, and the solutions for naming and defining the language of complex identity are numerous and intricate.[19] On the other hand, Snježana Kordić follows the linguistic stream of thought which argues that it is wrong to differentiate between linguistic and symbolic aspects of language, emphasizing that sociolinguistic criteria may never be absolutely independent of linguistic criteria (just as the sociolinguistic is just a branch of linguistics) and that the above-mentioned differentiation of Serbo-Croatian into four languages is exclusively political.[20] Both indicated theoretical positions might be strongly defended – firstly because the political domain has included language in the engineering of nation, and secondly because it deconstructs this relatedness. However, the argumentation of Kordić that insists on understanding the relation of nation and language as superficial and even irrelevant coincides with the attitude towards the language of Cyber Yugoslavia that rejects the idea of one official state language thus exposing this symbol for nation construction without political function.[21]

The free and ludic approach of Cyber Yugoslavia to its constitution and official language does not change much regarding national symbols or anthem, essential for signifying the national state. Again, nothing is fixed or ideologically grounded regarding the symbols of Cyber Yugoslavia. Each citizen has the freedom to change the anthem or any other symbol of the state,[22] which otherwise always function as fixed. Thus national symbols do not create dominant national narratives that shape ideology and influence the citizens from above. On the contrary, citizens are free to create their own symbols that are unstable, changeable and unburdened by ideological inscriptions. Under the category of symbols we find also weapons (the strength of which depends on the pixels that they have, which influence the quality of the picture seen),[23] flags and banners.

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[19] Ranko Bugarski, *Jezici* (Beograd: Čigoja, 2003), 28.

[20] Snježana Kordić, *Jezik i nacionalizam* (Zagreb: Durieux, 2010), 105–9. Cf. David Crystal *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 286–7. Bernhard Gröschel, *Das Serbokroatische zwischen Linguistik und Politik. Mit einer Bibliographie zum postjugoslavischen Sprachenstreit* (München: Lincom, 2009).

[21] In the beginning of 2017 appeared on Cyber Yugoslavia a Declaration regarding common language, which signed more than 8000 people from the Yugoslav region. This Declaration claims that it is one language with a polycentric structure, meaning that it may have different standards, different names, but that it should be linguistically recognized as a language without restrictions for its speakers. This would enable the language to function as a connection between different Yugoslav nations instead of creating obstacles between them, which, as such, may be used for emphasizing differences and discrimination. http://jezicinacionalizmi.com/deklaracija/, accessed May 10, 2017.

[22] There are two anthems on the website: one is a pop song from 1977 titled *My Father Cuts the Grass* (Moj otac travu kosi) by Iver, and the other is sung by Ambasadori, *I Can't Hide My Pain* (Ne mogu skriti svoj bol).

[23] Again, there is transference to the virtual sphere that enables parody, where the weapon does not belong to physical reality and has no physical power of destruction, but a power to laugh at it.

The emblem of Cyber Yugoslavia resembles the emblem of the SFRY. Framed with the stripes on which the date of its foundation is written, this emblem is of different colour and image than that of the SFRY. Namely, inside mentioned strips, we see the night sky with stars, which is framed by a nautical floatation 'life' ring, in blue and white. It suggests the dream, the creation of fantasy out of the realm of politics that opens up the possibility for imagination, laughter, and to save oneself and even, as we see, to comment on political concepts incorporated in the nation-state.

Picture 1: Symbol of Cyber Yugoslavia (http://www.juga.com/symbols.html)

Picture 2: Emblem of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Similarly, contrary to those of other nation-states, the constitution of Cyber Yugoslavia states that citizenship is available to all people of the world regardless of their place of origin, or the citizenship(s) they already hold. The only condition to become a citizen of Cyber Yugoslavia is to invent a ministerial position, and thus become not only a citizen, but also an active participant of state governing. Again the site's ludic character reveals itself through the questioning and ridiculing of political power, of its irresponsible usage and its (ab)use. Ironical citation enables humorous criticism.[24] This is achieved through the above-mentioned unconventional political power distribution. Namely Cyber Yugoslavia does not have any politician distinguished above all others (such as a king, a queen, a president or a prime minister), but equally distributes power among all citizens, each of whom is obliged to hold a ministerial position. All these 'secretary' positions are imaginary, self-created and comic – either ironic, hedonistic or both, such as the Secretary for Brandy, the Secretary for Wine and Cheese, the one for Bossa nova, and the other for Sunset; the Secretary for Bad Movies, the Secretary for Wages in Failed Companies, the one for Extra Weight, and there is even the Secretary for Everything Else, to name just a few. This concept promotes the humanistic ideal of equality between people and equal power distribution, as well as the appreciation of innovation and originality, and love for life.

Every aspect of Cyber Yugoslavia is approached with humour, but as stated above this humour bears irony with a critical sting, as its content is directed at crucial elements of national identity construction. Treated ironically, these concepts and their effect on people are thus called into question. Inverting these concepts, Cyber Yugoslavia establishes distance between them and makes a point that corresponds to the position of Michael Billig who recognized that nationalism in the world of nations occupies people's way of thinking, causing them to accept all premises of the ideology without questioning it.[25]

Regarding the fact that humour has the ability to radically question things, this extremeness brings the project of CY close also to Brubaker's theory that questions whether nation should be a theoretical question at all, because it is imagined concept. In an interview given to BBC Sci/Tech, by a Ministry for Interview of CY Slobodan Simke Simović said that the idea and the concept were elaborated while Yugoslavia was falling apart:

> For us, the only reality that could be real was virtual. The last ten years look like a dream, an illusion. People might say that the site was made by nostalgic ex-Yugoslavs but I don't see us as that … this site doesn't refer to the country or the politics, it's supposed to be fun.[26]

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[24] Claire Colebrook, *Irony* (London: Routledge, 2004), 3.

[25] Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 20.

[26] Chris Nuttall, "Birth of a cybernation," BBC Schi/Tech, 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/413420.stm, accessed, January 8, 2017.

This statement emphasizes creativity and a willingness to depart from the political context in which the creators lived, by making another reality. However, claiming the distance of Cyber Yugoslavia from any country or politics does not make this project apolitical, since referring to and ridiculing the enumerated mechanisms that shape the nation actually do make a political statement. After all, as Zoran Bačić, the creator of the website said in an interview:

> We are looking for active, committed citizens … People capable of founding a new kind of country, a new kind of nationality that has stripped bare the trappings of state and placed its future in the hands of humanity.[27]

This explicitly relates this project with citizens who are committed and actively participate in political life. A 'new' country is created through the effort to overcome weaknesses of the nation states, particularly regarding anything that may distance them from humanism, as its creator says.

Another political statement concerns hierarchy and uneven distribution of power, which is achieved also through the idea of distributing power equally between citizens who all have ministerial positions. According to the words of the Minister for Interview:

> People are making several types of communities on the Internet […] they can be based on money or some type of common interest. We are making a state that has no hierarchy.[28]

Maja Mikula relates the humorous tone of Cyber Yugoslavia to the Bakhtinian concept of the carnivalesque that claims that its "laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives."[29] Apart from that, Cyber Yugoslavia is an example of a world turned upside down, and this, according to Bakhtin enables crossing the borders and the annulment of hierarchies.[30] However, the main target of this web carnival is not an individual politician, but an ideology that dominates the world based on nation-state division that necessitates production of the Other. One mechanism crucial for national identity construction is grounded in dichotomization that is never an independent process, happening always in relation to the other nations, claims Thomas Eriksen. Eriksen also emphasizes that exactly this procedure represents the kernel for the appearance of the extreme versions of chauvinistic nationalism[31] In opposition to this, Cyber Yugoslavia is

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[27] Ian S. Bruce, "Birth of a cybernation," Cyber Yougoslavia, http://www.juga.com/publicity/scotsman_300899_en.htm, aaccessed January 10, 2017.

[28] Nuttall, "Birth of a cybernation."

[29] Maja Mikula, "Virtual Landscapes of Memory," *Information, Communication & Society* 6, 2 (2003): 169–86, accessed January 23, 2017. Mikhael Bakhtin, *Rebelais and his World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1984), 11–12.

[30] Bakhtin, *Rebelais and his World*, 10–12.

[31] Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 134.

open to anyone who wants to become its citizen overcoming the mentioned process that enables producing the Other, who is easily perceived as an enemy, and not as equal to us.

The social cohesion of a community based on the definition and relation towards the Other is not an exclusive characteristic of the nation-state, but of any collective. The exit for this blind alley might be found in Rosi Braidotti's theorization of the posthuman, which departs from her critique regarding the humanistic aspects of the Enlightenment regarding the selective promotion of ideals of equality, freedom and tolerance guaranteed only for those who are privileged. Concerning the fact that the project of nation is another product of the Enlightenment, Braidotti's theory appears extremely relevant. Namely, she suggests that marginalization should be overcome through Deleuzean affirmation of the Other, and through overcoming binary ways of thinking that always embody the difference and the mechanism of privileging/de-privileging.[32] Braidotti's philosophy is also characterized by its vitalism and optimism based on opportunities presented by cyborgs, while the citizens and creators of the Cyber Yugoslavia, whose social act is grounded in their relation to computers and the internet, i.e. machine, are definitely cyborgs.[33] Her interpretation of "becoming-machine" by Deleuze and Guattari rests on the idea that it goes about a "technologically bio-mediated other […] that is no longer cast in a dualistic frame, but bears a privileged bond with multiple others and merges with one's technologically mediated planetary environment."[34] Braidotti emphasizes that this should not be regarded as any kind of holism, but rather as an always active, transversal generative process of becoming the subject.[35] Applying her theory to Cyber Yugoslavia and its citizens, we recognize the existence of internet technology that enables construction of new subjectivity, which rejects despair, and acts through humour and laughter, creatively trying to systematically uproot any process that enables privilege.

Theorizing posthuman and post-anthropocentric attitudes, Braidotti emphasizes that it is not nostalgic or passive, but creative and doable. That corresponds to the quoted interview of Slobodan Simke Simović, who denies nostalgic motivation for Cyber Yugoslavia and rejects passivity. It was exactly the political position taken by Cyber Yugoslavia, that of rejecting conflict based on ethno-nationalist grounds,

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[32] Braidotti, *Posthuman*, 66.

[33] According to Donna Haraway the term "cyborg" represents an organism created when the machine and organism meet, melting into one entity as a creature who belongs both to social reality and fiction. Haraway emphasizes that cyborg is uprooted from history, operating through irony, intimacy and perversion. All this is characteristic for cyborg citizens of Cyber Yugoslavia who challenge this naturalized concept of nation. Thy cyborg citizen is the same as Haraway's cyborg, uprooted from history Both cyborgs and cyborg citizen are oppositional and utopian, enabling "permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints". Both are challenging essentialism. Crucial for cyborgs and cyborg citizen alike, is the transgression of the borders between human and the machine that enables her and him to politically express their standpoints. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (London, New York: Routledge, 2001), 291–324.

[34] Braidotti, *Posthuman*, 2013, 91–92.

[35] Ibid.

which brought forth the idea to construct a state that eliminates concepts that, due to the relational nature of national construction, might lead to war as in the SFRY. This kind of creativity also has a therapeutic effect, as stated by Toma Longinović who claims that: "The ironic power of the site translates the magnitude of the trauma survived by its citizens into a promise of non-nationalism and non-violence implied by the non-serious nature of the Cyber Yugoslavia as a portable cultural project."[36]

In the world of cyber sates

Based in the world of IT, Cyber Yugoslavia is one of many online cyber countries,[37] although, unlike other cyber countries it is a successor of a state that existed in the world of nations. Although there are press accounts and academic evidence regarding the existence of such states at the time of Cyber Yugoslavia's creation,[38] the precise data on this issue is difficult to find.[39] This is due to the relatively short lifespans of virtual online countries. Apart from that, the nature of the internet is such that although it is inexpensive and easily accessible, once the content is removed from a web domain the data are difficult to access outside of Web Archives.[40] This actually points to one more characteristic of the internet, and that is its dependence on money or individual interests to influence rapid changes. However, although today virtual countries are inevitably related to internet, such countries existed even before the IT revolution. One such example is NSK (Neue Slowensche Kunst) state, an artistic and theoretical project created in 1992 that nine years later also became a cyber-state.[41]

A recent example of a virtual state representing a choice for those discontented with their country is called Wirtland, and as such is comparable to Cyber Yugoslavia.[42] This country "claims to be the world's first internet-based sovereign country. Wirtland is an experiment into legitimacy and self-sustainability of a country without

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[36] Tomislav Longinović, "Internet Nation: The Case of Cyber Yugoslavia," *Internet Interventions, Sarai Reader* (2001): 117.

[37] There is even a website with instructions for creating a virtual country. See more https://mrjonesict.com/tag/virtual-countries/, accessed June 2017.

[38] Lovink, *Dynamics and Critical Internet Culture: (1994–2001).*

[39] Most often mentioned is Lizbekistan, an artistic virtual country project with the expiry date of 9. 9. 1999, which coincides with the birth of Cyber Yugoslavia. http://www.lizbekistan.com/index2.htm, accessed June 2017.

[40] Illustrative examples of this instability of web content are numerous parodic websites described in the *The Encyclopedia of American 20th Century Humor*, published in 2000. All seven websites parodying Netscape (Ninscape, Nutscape, Netape, Veggiespace) and Microsoft (Microsnot, Mike Rasoff, Micrososo) disappeared, while Microsnot appears in the Urban Dictionary as a term that negatively connotes Microsoft, while the term Micrososo is found on a new parodic website called MYBOTRUN, as a name of one of the users.

[41] http://www.nskstate.com, accessed June 2017.

[42] www.wirtland.com, accessed June 2017.

its own soil."[43] Recognizing the problems of limited freedom and the impossibility of self-identification in the world of nation-states, this project rests on the idea of transcending national borders and opening political alternative space for reaction. Founded in August 2008 with a current population of 6211 Witizens, Wirtland's constitution promises that this initiative will become a movement that will have a political impact on the world. The citizenship is, as in the case of Cyber Yugoslavia, open to anyone who is interested, with an emphasis on eliminating discrimination in terms of gender, race, national origin, or age. Although ideas similar to those of Cyber Yugoslavia are easy to recognize, the primary difference between those two virtual states is that Wirtland formally accepts and appropriates more patterns of world states as we know them than Cyber Yugoslavia, which critically questions the fundamental structure of the nation state.[44]

Acceptance of widespread (although differently defined) state rules by Wirtland is seen in the rule regarding citizenship, which may be acquired by sending a biography letter to the website in return for a residence permit or identity card. A residence permit costs 5 euros, while identity cards and passports are issued after three months of residency for a fee of 50 euros or 55 dollars.[45] Acquiring residency in Wirtland means that the resident gains the rights to vote and be elected for public positions; the right to register a corporation or a representative office of a corporation, a non-profit organization, an association, a political party, or other legal entity in Wirtland; the possibility to receive an identification card and a passport; the possibility to register a marriage and receive a marriage certificate; the right of nomination for national awards of Wirtland; and finally the possibility to contribute to "The Times of Wirtland".[46]

These very concrete rights, plus an effort to act politically[47] and participate in the free market relate to the structure and aims of this state, which seeks to introduce parliamentary democracy. At the moment it has one political party, the *Global Antiwar Party* (registered in 2009), as well as the *Wirtland Institute* (founded in 2010) which deals with the political life and movements of Wirland on the theoretical level.[48] Claiming that the model of the nation-state needs to be replaced, Richard Rosecrance argues that the states of today should be established on "economic culture and world market".[49] With such a starting position, Wirtland functions as an economically self-sustaining country that will, in addition to political freedom and space for free action, offer jobs. The first coin of Wirtland appeared in 2009 (Wirtland Crane),

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Nevertheless, the population of Cyber Yugoslavia is almost three times bigger.

[45] http://wirtland.agilityhoster.com/citizenship.html, accessed June 2017.

[46] http://wirtland.agilityhoster.com/citizenship.html#identity%20card, accessed June 2017.

[47] Namely Wirtland grants citizenship to Julian Asange and Edward Snowden, although it is not clear whether the two are informed about it. See more http://wirtland.agilityhoster.com/WOW/, accessed June 2017.

[48] http://institute.wirtland.com/, accessed June 2017.

[49] Richard Rosecrance, "The Rise of the Virtual State," on http://institute.wirtland.com/, accessed June 2017.

followed by a silver coin one year later. However, the multi-currency is characterizing Wirtland.

There is no doubt that pacifist ideas are equally related to both Wirtland and Cyber Yugoslavia, albeit in a different manner. Wirtland is practically and politically oriented: it filters the nation state of national elements.[50] On the other hand, Cyber Yugoslavia questions the structure and the mere symbolical construction of the nation as state and as people. If we apply Brubaker's theoretical thinking upon it, we may claim that Cyber Yugoslavia regards nation "[…] not as substance but as institutionalized form; not as collectivity but as practical category; not as entity but as contingent event."[51] This is achieved exactly through the project of virtual state that uses parody and irony. Commenting on the problems of postmodernity, Claire Colebrook claims that irony is adequate for the context we live in "because nothing really means what it says".[52] The most valuable skill of irony is to become clear and understandable for its recipients, which this project has undoubtedly succeeded.

Conclusion

The project Cyber Yugoslavia relies primarily on parody in the sense that it playfully comments upon the original, imitating it, turning it upside down, and at the same time calling its content into question.[53] Subjected to the different theories of humour, it actually contains the characteristics of all three relevant standpoints that are related to it.[54] Firstly, with a humorous approach Cyber Yugoslavia achieves a position from which it critically turns to concrete political events, which corresponds to theories that regard laughter as a sign of superiority as Plato defined it. Apart from that, it fits into the relief theory by Freud that focuses on the relief that humour and laughter bring when accumulated energy finds release, which in this case might be understood as a relief from political trauma. The third aspect is defined by Bergson and refers to the laughter which appears when the expectations are either unfulfilled or differently fulfilled, which is the technique recognizable throughout the website of Cyber Yugoslavia.[55]

Questioning the concept of nation-state, Cyber Yugoslavia deals with its core elements that, apart from enabling the organization of the world, may create division and antagonism. However, the idea of Cyber Yugoslavia can be interpreted in a numerous ways, and it is also possible to criticize the project for unprofessionalism lack of practical initiative. A commentator on a Slashdot wrote:

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[50] Even its flag and emblem resemble the standard images.

[51] Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 16.

[52] Colebrook, *Irony*, 1.

[53] Alleen Pace Nilsen, Don L. F. Nilsen, *Encyclopedia of 20th Century American Humor* (Phoenix: AZ Publication, 2000), 200.

[54] Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (London: Routledge, 2002), 2–3.

[55] Ibid.

> I was interested in this place … the politics and all that actually inter-
> est me, not repulse me … But I decided I don't trust a constitution that
> hasn't heard of the word 'quorum'. […] Sudden thought: … imagine if
> that sort of quorum (67%) was imposed on the US – we wouldn't proba-
> bly have had a single president in this century.[56]

Exactly the radical deconstruction of this project, that is not recognized in the
statement above, brings Cyber Yugoslavia close to the theory that is oriented towards
deep understanding of social phenomena. Similar to the sociological thought of Rog-
ers Brubaker, Cyber Yugoslavia helps us "to understand the practical use of the cate-
gory 'nation', the ways it can come to structure perception".[57] Via humoristic mecha-
nisms it subverts this perception exceeding the realm of abstraction and orienting it
towards the politics of acceptance and affirmation.

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[56] RomulusNR (29439) on Thursday August 05, 1999 @11:48 AM (#1763870) writes: https://slashdot.org/
story/99/08/05/135217/creation-of-a-cybernation, accessed June 3, 2017.

[57] Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and national question in the New Europe*, 7.

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