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Serbia – from Miki and Kupinovo to Europe: Public Performance and the Social Role of Celebrity *

This paper deals with the analysis of public performance and social role of a media star in the post-socialist Serbia on the example of Miki Đuričić, the participant of the first series of reality show *Big brother* in this region. The issues are regarded through the prism of theater anthropology of Erving Goffman, corrected and complemented with Baudrillard's concepts of simulacrum and simulation. Discursive, symbolic, social, cultural and political practices are discussed as well as the impact of that performance and the efforts of their representation in the light of "new face of Serbia".

Key words:

Miki from Kupinovo, celebrity, public performance, social role, postsocialism, second transition, Serbia, Europe

In September 2006, for the first time, the broadcast of the world famous *reality show Big Brother*¹ started in Serbia, achieving the highest watching rate already during the first days. It is considered that the greatest merit for this belongs to the one of the participants, Miroslav Miki Đuričić, a beekeeper and woodcutter from the village in Srem, Kupinovo. It was because of him that numerous spectators followed the events in the house of *Big Brother* either on TV or on the internet. They were retelling his conduct in great details, and "mikisms" – his famous quotations appropriate for any situation (such as "my day smells Paco Rabanne way"² for the morning or "If I knew why I was afraid of dark, I wouldn't be afraid of it at all"

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¹ This is common Big Brother for Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Hertzegovina.

² Serbian word for day – "dan" makes rhyme with Rabanne.

for the evening) entered the repertoire of the popular culture instantly. A star was born. “Beekeeper as penicillin, beekeeper on the prescription!”³ was the slogan of the Big Brother audience these days. His fans decided that his leaving the house of Big Brother with the song that reminded him of his birthplace Kupinovo (“Come, baby, to Obedska bara”) overshadowed the adoration of the new Constitution. They also decided that this should not be the end of his career. As one of delighted participants of B92 forum suggested: “Let's go everybody for the ZEN lessons to Kupinovo!” Thus, this paper is not devoted to the analysis of the phenomenon of *Big Brother*, but rather to the analysis of performance of Miki from Kupinovo as a celebrity. Why he, and why in this key?

Miki's performance on the media scene and in the social field is sometimes considered as something that reexamines every normative, dominant and excluding model of thinking and acting, representing in a wider sense the criticism of identity formations and politics of identity, inclining to transgression of each dominant and normative discourse that is imposed and proposed to any society. Image and act of “uncrowned king of the *Big Brother*” are therefore important here exclusively in the sense of their discursive, cultural and political outputs. The fact that cultural and political outputs allegedly, symbolized by Miki Đuričić are represented and interpreted in the light of “new face of Serbia”, cleared and emancipated from the Balkan “mud”, wars and nationalist discourse, deserves, at least, careful questioning that will be made in this paper.

The aims of this paper are to do a formal analysis of the performance of the celebrity, thus initiating the debate on the “social role” of Miki Đuričić in the post-socialist mass-media simulacrum of the so called second transition in Serbia. First I will focus on theoretization of mass-media culture in the beginning of articulation of mass-media mass consumer society in the Western culture in the middle of the last century, and afterwards I will point to the change in the reflection on media phenomena by introducing more contemporary concepts of simulacrum and hyper-reality.

Methodology that I used for the formal analysis of the performance is based on Goffman's theatre anthropology⁴ made by using dramaturgical i.e. theatrical principals in the analysis of social life. However, this text does not represent literal application of Goffman's concept of theater anthropology, but rather questioning possibilities of its usage in the contemporary context. Reason for this is culturalogical aspect of this concept according to which “social role” is not reality, but representation and reservation of reality.⁵ However, Goffman also claims that the role does make an impact on reality, participating in the production of identity of its owner. By this conclusion, the borders between real (natural, everyday, real) and

³ This is a commentary from forum RTV B92 about Big Brother.

⁴ Erving Goffman, *Kako se predstavljamo u svakodnevnom životu*, Geopoetika, Beograd 2000, 29.

⁵ With this one should not forget that complete idea was conceived some fifty years ago, when some other concepts were impossible to think.

fictional (mass-media) are relativized. I insist on this when I use Goffman's theory in this text, holding to the criticism of Goffman's concept given by Ana Vujanović.⁶

Trying to define public performance of the celebrity in culture, I also introduce Baudrillard's concept of "simulacrum and simulation". Simulacrum is a copy without an original, the system of signs that continues to exist, real and true; its reality originates from itself. In a representation the sign only is real. In a simulacrum, real is only what is signed, while the system of signs refers to itself as a reality.⁷

Why do we need such revision of Goffman at all? Because his theory, as it is pointed out by Ana Vujanović, although represents very operative model for the analysis of public performances, assumes the gap between theatre scene of the social life and the reality of everyday life. The title of the study, *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, refers to the existence of two completely different and separated realities – presenting and living everyday life, artificial role and some "real" and stable identity. Only by redefinition of the relation between private and public, fictional and real scene where we live, do the theories of culture deprive the mass-media and media entertainment of an alibi of separation and isolation from real life. Contemporary mass-media, namely, transform and produce reality that is more real than reality, reality without cause; hiding its own media, they hide social processes of performing that reality.

According to such methodology, I regard public performances of Miroslav Miki Đuričić not as a transcendent and artificial phenomenon, but as a cultural reality which is a part of reality of our postsocialist everyday life, privacy and identity.

I identify "naturalness" as a dominant instrument of Miki's performances, so the main thesis of the text is that "naturalness" is the effect of almost perfectly hidden media, and almost perfectly hidden social process of producing that reality. That means that the performance practice of Miki Đuričić hides social reasons, procedures and mechanisms of its appearing. His "naturalness" (illusion of spontaneity, authenticity, closeness) is the crucial mechanism of censorship of his functions in a concrete society. In that sense, it will be important to identify particular phases in his performing. Mass-media societies of information and semiotic period (period known as late modernism: late capitalist, late socialist and late postsocialist) allow exceptional place for this social practice (mass-media scene), which never transcends society, but rather represents intrasocial operational practice.

How do Miki's story, syntagm of myth or dramaturgy of performance look like in short? We project the "beginning of the story" retrospectively. Everything that we know about him, we actually found out after Miki became a tenant of the

⁶ Ana Vujanović, *Javni nastup i društvena uloga*, Kultura: časopis za teoriju i sociologiju kulture i medija, br. 102, Zavod za proučavanje kulturnog razvitka, Beograd 2002, 54-62.

⁷ Ibid, 16.

Big Brother house. It came to us in the manner of dense comparative narration, while we followed what was going on in the *Big Brother*. After leaving the house of *Big Brother* Miki talked about his former life like this: "I work as much as I need. I go to the forest, I work three days as a horse and then I sell wood, take the money, and as long as I have the money I do not do anything else. I realized that I don't need this. I don't feel free". However, his life has completely changed during the last year. He almost never entered the forest, he moved from Kupinovo to Belgrade twice and it seemed that the freedom in his life gained completely new meaning. Miki said that his life in Kupinovo was difficult.

Numerous representatives of his generation may identify or sympathize with these elements of his narrative. He spent his youth in the period of transition and he had never traveled out of Serbia. He did not finish high school because his family did not have enough money. He quarreled a lot with his father, and he was "a good pal" only with his grandfather. "Everybody told me that – we will send your sister to school because she has to get married, and you will stay in the village, so you don't need anything. Half of the property is already sold out and now I've started to sell the rest"⁸ because "a monotonous life when you've got everything is not worthy". He worked in the forest, he collected bees, he was betting at the bookies, played cards. That is how Miki's life looked like until the September 2006. Soon after first several days of his staying in the house of *Big Brother*, Serbia (and several bordering countries) were infused with *mikimania*. He became the most famous tenant, and his "jokes" and adventures were intensively retold. He was considered the main favorite for the winning. After only several days, he got a fun-club web-site. Even rumors about him as a candidate for the president appeared. However, after two weeks in the house, Miki decided to leave. After this he was a guest in many TV and radio shows, entertaining but also political (including *Impression of the Week* and *Polygraph*). He filmed two advertisements for peanuts (first one brought him 55 000 Euros, which is more than a half of the money of the prize in *Big Brother* – without VAT), he played for the first team of Football Club Tehničar, trained by ex-coach of the representation of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Santrač; he became the first man in Serbia who appeared with two girls at the cover sheet of the prestigious men's magazine "Playboy", he bought a grange, traveled out of the country for the first time (before that he did not have a passport; according to some estimations, it is the case with 75% citizens of Serbia), he hosted *Big brother*, radio-show *Miki's ŠNIP* (Shocking program with no reason) on B92, he was a guest star in the popular series *Mile against transition*, participated in the poker tournament in Istria, received the offer from the Ministry of Environment to become the promoter of their actions⁹... In September 2007 he returned to the house of *Big Brother*, entering it as a star, and leaving it again on his own initiative, after forty days. Since March 2008 he has participated in Radio Television Pink TV show *Dancing with the Stars*.

⁸ M. Radojković, *Miki se vraća u kuću*, Blic, Beograd, 28. oktobar 2006.

⁹ He had to give up on this, because he did not have the necessary high school diploma.

Miki's performance might be roughly divided into two phases. The first phase comprises Miki's staying in the house of *Big Brother* and his first performances after leaving it. In the second phase I include his gradual integration into the media (entertainment) scene of Serbia, which, as we may conclude from some forums, coincided with the decline of his popularity and losing money, culminating with his re-entering the house of *Big Brother* – a thing he said he would never do – and with his participation in the show of RTV Pink, for which he claimed that he would never be its guest. The changes in the performance might be indicative for a change in the whole cultural model they represent (index). Before I turn to each of these phases in particular and to the changes that separate these phases one from another, I am going to give several common remarks about his public performance during the last year and a half.

Performance, i.e. performing the social role, means, according to Goffman, two types of activities. In his study, Goffman points out that “Expressivity of individual includes two extremely different types of the sign activities. One includes expressions that are *produced* by individual, and the other type are those expressions that *reveal* him or her”¹⁰ Ana Vujanović rejects expressivity, suggesting instead of it the concepts of production and offering.¹¹ However this does not reduce the importance of Goffman's classification. There is, respectively, activity that is constitutive for a certain role and the one that falls out from it and disturbs it. According to Goffman, the second one is “revealing”, falling out from the symbolic armor which performance offers.

Both mentioned activities, or in poststructuralist terms, textual productions, are present in Miki's performance during the regarded period. However, the second one, in his case, does not corrupt his performance, as we might expect according to Goffman. It is impossible to read in it anything that the produced signs intentionally hide. Miki's (physical) flaws and errors are not at all more discrediting than what he consciously offers. There are numerous examples for that. During his stay at the *Big Brother* house, he, for example, calls himself “natural idiot”, and very similarly he addresses the audience (this way he revolutionizes one-side reception show into interactive one). He says to himself: “My nose is a bit curved, because, when I was little, I used to fall down rectilinearly”, “give me the shirt, I can't go so naked, look at my spoilers “aesthetics does not count, the message does”, “I played marbles until five, six years ago; people were telling me – you idiot, leave marbles to the kids...”, “among us here, I'm the most stupid, but you're stupid as well”, “old horse doesn't learn in the car. I ask 'Big Brother' to go to my home, to dig out my diploma from primary school and to bring it here”... These are some of his most popular quotations.¹² He is the one who breaks the rules of the house most often; he

¹⁰ E. Gofman, op. cit, 16.

¹¹ This actually is the essential for Goffman's method that keeps quite clear border between performance of social role and real identity of public person.

¹²<http://sr.wikiquote.org>. Most of his quotation is possible to find on this web address.

is the one that rarely controls cursing and he is able “to criticize everyone” “he is able to tell everything looking straight in the both¹³ eyes of *Big Brother*. All this is the constitutive part of his naturalness. Simultaneously and explicitly he works from the both sides of production. Defects and errors are welcomed. They construct his spontaneity and immediacy that are the basis of his performance. By this (at the first sight, paradox), such a performance makes strong and stable “symbolic armor” that, practically, protects itself from the cracks that might appear as a result of “revealing”, unintentionally produced signs. Every exaggeration is desirable because it is already integrated in the system that allows it and anticipates it. In the final instance, however, this usage, and even, emphasizing errors might lead to the contra effect, in the case when it is not seen any more as slipping, which, it seems, started to happen in the second phase.¹⁴ This, however, does not mean that, behind the “personal façade” (according to Goffman) which seems to be consciously and intentionally offered, we might find the “truth” of society, its suppressed contents that cause the process of production behind this “façade”. There is nothing behind it, and the complete signifying practice happens on the surface. The way of performing includes the content and its organization. There is discursive membrane that promises the meaning and sense for people of late postsocialism who, through offered “entertainment and not only entertainment” search for the solution – or, at least – the possibility to suppress the problems of everyday life. But, resistance of material media is already shown and its demystification is not necessary. It is revealed as something that constitutes performance, and not as something that would bother this constitution. The media itself become illusory transparent.

Beekeeper Has Just Left the Building ...¹⁵

I consider that the first performances of Miki are not only first performances in the house of Big Brother but also the first performances after leaving it. They are characteristic of, in Goffman’s terminology, so called undignified appearance. His »personal facade« is far from the glamorous media ideal of the “real man” – representing maybe even its opposite. He is chubby, he does not exercise in the gym, and his wardrobe is totally „out“. On TV, in press, but also on forums that follow *Big Brother* he is described as typical example of “ordinary man”, “typical represent of Serbian folk”, “honest Lala, jokester”, „nice guy from Srem” and “clever, openhearted and intelligent Serbian peasant”. During his stay in the first series of *Big brother* (15-29 September 2006) and in the shows in which he was a guest immediately after leaving the house (which happened on his own initiative, although, according to forums, polls and betting places, he was the main favorite for winner),

¹³ So called left and right eyes of *Big Brother* are monitoring systems used in the show.

¹⁴ The content of the posts at B92 forum from the last three days of the first series of *Big Brother* that mention Miki with negative connotation might be summed up with a commentary from the forum: “Why is he surprised that PINK Serbia accepts him – he belongs to them!” <http://forum.b92.net/lofiversion/index.php/t18508-1700.html>

¹⁵ *Shepard has just left the building* is famous song by Rambo Amadeus, one of Miki’s favorite musicians, about the leader and his herd, i.e. swarm.

he was constructing and strengthening such an appearance. He insists on honesty and he answers all the questions ready and “openly”. His appearance and manners are completely “out”: his cloths are unconventional, his language as well, in front of the cameras he behaves “spontaneously” and he does not hide his “inglorious” past (he did not finish high school, he was a beekeeper and woodcutter and he spent most of the time in the bet places etc.) This is the quotation of the first Miki’s appearing in *Big Brother*: “I screwed up 28 years of my life. I live with my father, mother and divorced sister... She has a son. Kid is the fan of Zvezda, and I’m the fan of Partizan; he put the posters of Zvezda all around the house... Everyone gave up on me. You’re my chance to blow them all in one moment and never come back!”¹⁶

What is the most obvious in this performance is the mentioned work with the flaws. The effect of such a work is the explicit display of defects, and their intentional inclusion in the performance (instead of suppression and hiding), transform them into the constitutive part of the performance, and not into something that corrupts it.

Great attention and some kind of cultural shock¹⁷ were provoked by his statements on the account of politicians and show business stars,¹⁸ his political attitudes, music, film and media preferences.¹⁹ In that sense, extremely emphasized was the fact that he was much better informed and had completely different way of thinking than other tenants of the *Big Brother* house – mostly students and artists (four of the tenants actually graduated from the university). “Why would my parents pay for school, when you may, as good Will Hunting says, go to the library and take the book you want to read!”, is one of his famous statements. He works with his flaws: “I ask mister Ivan Klajn to publish in the next NIN if there are any spelling mistakes, or this is ok! I’ve never written this! You need high school for everything!”

¹⁶ <http://sr.wikiquote.org>

¹⁷ Obviously, peasant with eight grades of primary school who watches the films by Jim Jarmusch is being recognized as some kind of dissonance in the local cultural cognition. When Marko Vidjokovic asked him “about the type of the village that we do not know”, he said “there are more ‘peasants’, as you like to call them, in the cities, than in the villages. There are two thousands people in my village and twenty of us like Jarmusch, and are there twenty thousand people in Belgrade who like Jarmusch?” http://www.b92.net/kultura_old/index.php?view=61&did=20752&plim=20

¹⁸ Some of his most noticed and the most commented statements were those about folk star Ceca and the prime minister Koštunica, about politicians Dejan Mihajlov and Dobrivoj Budimirović Bidža, psychologist Jovan Marić, TV B92 and its director Veran Matić (although this was not broadcasted, but one could see it on the live stream).

¹⁹ Among his favorites are Jarmusch, Wenders, Kaurismaki (film), Murakami (literature), Nina Simon, Janis Joplin (music)... I mention each of them separately, because the members of the forum about *Big Brother*, especially on B92 forum reacted on these names very strongly, especially concerning the film directors who are usually not concerned as a mainstream, having a status of “cult”.

Magazine *Danas* notices that as such, Miki gains popularity of so called first and so called second Serbia.²⁰ Among the tenants of *Big Brother* he is a friend with a big Serb (Montenegrin?) Nikola and with a Muslim Edin, saying: “nationality doesn’t matter. Edin and Dragana are the same for me – Bosnians”. Not long after that he says: “Hey, I’ll be honest with you. You’re cool for me, how can I not like stupid Bosnian?”

Although one may argue about what is first and what is second Serbia, and refute (with the strong points) that such structural setting may be relevant model of Serbian society,²¹ it is enough to say that the first ones recognize, in Miki’s courses and the attitude “nothing human is strange to me”, resistance towards the new world order, and their own locally oriented phantasms. The others emphasize his critical remarks on SRS, the prime minister and the church, as well as the fact that he is informed about alternative²² art scene. The first emphasize his primary school, life in the village, „folk spirit“, while the other see him as one who is an expert in alternative (film) arts and poker, getting delighted with assumed dissonance of his origin, level of education and cultural affinities. This is the reason why “both” Serbias find in him the monitor for their own social projections and see him as culturally preferable.

As formally uneducated, but being familiar with different media pop-cultures that are more or less present, versed peasant, interested in different cultures who never traveled out of his country, represents that painful spot that is suppressed by society, being however reconstituted and revealed exactly on the cultural scene (scene of the exceptional mass-media signifying practices such as entertainment, sexuality, arts and even religion) that actually has a function to hide it. “I am a likable peasant who doesn’t hesitate to say what he thinks. And then again, I’m completely acceptable.” He is supposed to index cultural changes that are considered to come with “new face of Serbia”, face that is turned to both “European” and “local” values. That is why we talk about “Serbia from Miki”²³, and Serbia as a “country of peasants in the Balkans”, but also peasants that accept European values. Miki himself claims that “there are many Mikies in Serbia”, he declares to be a leftist, “but real left, not what is considered to be left in Serbia”. The last statement is not a reliable indicator that “there are many Mikies in Serbia”. His presence in the media is represented as an effort to produce plurality of voices and to inscribe in our reflection already present multiplicity of possible voices.

My thesis is that his popularity in media might look like breakthrough of the voice of the Other into the dominant cultural discourse. However this voice is socially accepted only because it interiorized everything that keeps it in the position awarded by the dominant discourse. It brings a dimension of “exotic” into contem-

²⁰ Aleksej Kišjuhas, *Mikizam ili Treća Srbija*, *Danas*, 12.10. 2006, 17.

²¹ A reaction to the dual structural assumption about Serbian society might be the same critic/joke as for any other dispute about number of the poles – “is two too little, or too much?”

²² Alternative, again, but it depends on a perspective.

²³ Not to say that it is Serbia after Miki.

porary media picture of Serbia, offering phantasm that is grounded on self-exotization and auto-orientalization²⁴ of rural.²⁵ Namely, Said suggests that all discourses *about* cultures are always ideological and that discourse and the process of orientalization and colonization never happens “somewhere else”, but that it is present whenever the center and the periphery intersect.²⁶ But, through the recognition of “healthy, folk spirit”²⁷ and in the reasoning about its appearance, Serbian culture is being reminded of the alleged “alienation from its own roots”, giving to itself almost sedative dose of pastel, integrating these “good old values” into the new identity of Serbia. Interpretation of the “new face of Serbia” (that recognizes European system of values) through the performance of Miki Đuričić on one hand actually represents the production of identity of the world of the Other that *is possible to see and to be seen*, that might be translated into the dominant discourse and system of values in order to receive a sense. The Other, the periphery, are always visually *pre-represented*, while “real”, “correct” citizens of Serbia/Europe (among whom, on the other hand, Miki should be integrated, even as preferable pattern) at least watch television (if they do not go to museums or circus) in order to get familiar with their periphery, their own (inner) Other, who are always – ethnically, racially, by gender or by any other orientation – determined. Miki is not the Other in ethnic or in the racial sense, managing thus to satisfy more successfully the wide diapason of the local phantasms about own identity, while cultural fiction that he symbolizes is easier integrated into the desired and assumed center, i.e. in more of them. After all, he offers his own model of peaceful coexistence: “I love Kupinovo more than Srem, I love Srem more than Vojvodina, I love Vojvodina more than Serbia, I love Serbia more than the rest of the world, but I also love the whole world! That’s the true globalism.”

He constructs the figure of the clever Serbian (Vojvodian?)²⁸ peasant who is supposed to show that the “province is not on the map, but in one’s head”, the figure that becomes paradigm of identification. How paradigm is constructed and does it exist in the media? Yes, the media do construct reality that is true, that is hy-

²⁴ At this place we may remember of one more Goffman’s concept – auto-stigmatization.

²⁵ About the romanticists' cry for the missing void of the “real nation” and rural authenticity, symbolic of peasantry in Serbia and its role in political mobilization and instrumentalization see, for example Слободан Наумовић, *Устај сељо, устај роде: симболика сељаштва и политичка комуникација у новијој историји Србије*, Годишњак за душтвену историју II/1, Београд 1995.

²⁶ Edward Said, *Orijentalizam*, XX vek, Beograd 2000.

²⁷ During the time when the story about the offer of the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, the sociologist Ratko Božović said: “He is perceived as a man who does not stand the type of the Orwellian imprisonment such as *Big Brother*. He is natural, persuasive, spontaneous and as such he is the closest to the definition of the man from nature, and a man for nature.” S. M. Stajić, *Miki u vladi*, Press, 10. 7. 2007. Once again the associating line and semantic polygon is established: spontaneity-naturalness-nature-peasantry.

²⁸ Popular are also his commentaries with the strong local (Srem) reference. “These are like those that go tomorrow to Ruma for fair!” (describing how the tenants of the house dressed up for the Saturday broadcast), or “this doesn’t exist even in Đurđenovac...”, turning these places into the “new mythical topoi” of jargon speech.

perreal – more real than real. The media construct harmless peasant that impresses everybody and who does not bother anybody. But, it is not him who does not bother others; he constructs expected *role* of the one who does not bother. He identifies what social margin can and may be. He built an ideological curtain over the margin, showing it as acceptable, even nice. Actually, the idea of a “nice and acceptable friend of the Other/ours” that is imposed through the media picture (about) chosen representatives (entertainers) from the margin by the dominant centre is the real code, *point-de-capiton* through which the position of centre is revealed.

All this tactics (dramaturgy) of scene performances was very effective. Goffman emphasizes that if the “performer” hides some aspect of his identity being afraid that it will become visible at some moment, he endangers his performance. In the situations which are, in Goffman’s terminology, completely harmless – which means in the situation that do not represent direct danger for such uncovering – he will show tension, nervousness and insecurity. Miki never seems nervous or insecure. He satisfies criteria of the successful performance that Goffman set – coherency and consistency. Not only did he not hide what might have been considered as a flaw in the bourgeois society, he rather insisted on these faults, emphasizing them rhetorically. The audience was familiar with the “game rules”, having a choice – either to refute him as an indecent buffoon or to accept him “as he was”.²⁹ But, he offered himself as a confirmation of tolerance of the audience itself. The audience constructs its identity of the polemic, polyphone, civil society on the grounds of accepting his “buffoon provocations” and “congeniality”. Not only did they accept him, but he has grown into a legend of the local entreating scene. The audience accepted him, because they needed him; as “our Other”, as the object towards which they could constitute a subject of a normal, healthy, tolerant and critical society. Thus, there has been already-prepared-and-desired-social-role,³⁰ which Miki successfully played.

This place, the role that he accomplished was the role in relation to which the audience confirmed its identity and its actual wideness, openness and plurality. His social function was ideological in the sense that we might be relieved: „He is the Other who does that for us... He is so nice (humorous-jokester) in his criticism and so acceptable that we love him, which means that we love the other people who are like him and we love subversion³¹ that he likes; although we will never include

²⁹ Generally, it seems that almost all participants of the *Big Brother* in this region, insist on sincerity, naturalness and “being what you are” as qualities that should make the winner. As a member of B92 forum noticed about first series of *Big Brother*, commenting “strategies” of some tenants “all they think – everybody should vote for me – I’m not clever, I’m not educated, I’m not decent, I’m not a good person, but bro, I’m so sincere!” <http://forum.b92.net/index.php?showtopic=18508&st=7005>, 25. 2. 2008.

³⁰ According to Goffman, performers create roles for themselves; and when they find themselves in the situation for public performance, they chose one of the roles that society had prepared, performing them more or less successfully.

³¹ Whichever of Miki’s preferences we mark as a subversion – if we do this at all (this of course depends on the groups which makes evaluation and whether they want subversion) – political vot-

them in our world. Of course we love them, we proved that through Miki!” The society allows his performances to take a special place and close the gap in the field of the social practice. His social appearance is not fictional, but he uses fiction to constitute reality. He is a constituent of the symbolic order of everyday reality of Serbian society. He is a part of our everyday life and the only thing that he hides by his sincerity is that the truth of the society is revealed exactly through him, through his “manifestation” and role. Like Baudrillard’s Disneyland, he offers illusion that reality is out of him; but it is not. In that sense, from Goffman’s theater anthropology to Baudrillard’s simulacrum, only one generation step in theory was necessary, one move was done – the one in which it became understood that the media *do not represent*, but *produce* reality, reality more real than real (hyperreality), if we understand that real is some immediate, objective reality by itself.

The Beekeeper Has Just Left the Building

Miki’s status has been changing through time. The media dilemma is not anymore whether he is a “natural idiot” or “ingenious farmer”, but “good Schweik” or “fat cunning guy from Srem”.³² Although, in his first performances, he claimed that he “hates pretending” and he tried to keep distance from the stage mainstream, as time went by he became incorporated into the stage mainstream, he started to go out in Belgrade’s floating boat pubs, and to talk about some show business stars as his friends. He achieved some kind of American (Hollywood) dream in a local, Balkan, postsocialist way. He showed his richness and a certain power of the successful figure. His originality is verified by the fact that he became a brand. He achieved the illusion of American (Hollywood) dream: from the beekeeper and woodcutter without a permanent job, through the *Big Brother* participant up to the media star. He became successful and the culture, in which he succeeded, is therefore characterized by power and tolerance. He proved that we live in an open society, in which intelligence, sense of humor and originality certainly pays off (although this does not refer to the hard work). Is it really so?

In September 2007, in spite of spectacular escape (which was actually going out with permission) from the *Big Brother* house, with invitation for Obedska bara and proclaimed decision to finish with the *Big Brother*, Miki comes back to the *Big Brother* house as a participant of the second series. Is the reason for his comeback hidden? Of course not. He is in debts and he does this for earning money and increasing popularity. In this phase, Miki performs with the new identity and incredible (hyperreal) spontaneity and open boastfulness – “See what I had and what I lost!”³³ However, several days after his father Mirko entered the house and after Miki’s fight with other tenants, Miki left it again.

ing for LDP or insisting on not opting for any political party, love for Rambo Amadeus or tambour players, sports activities as protests during the 1990s, or gambling with big losses etc.

³² Saša Jovanović, *Miki Đuričić: moj poslednji intervju (4. deo)*, Press, 14. 12. 2007, 26.

³³ According to some press information, Miki is in dept for 55 000 Euros, which is the same amount of money that he received for the first recorded commercial. Of course, this information

After the second leaving *Big Brother* house, Miki shared with the audience his dreams about life in a village/Vojvodina grange idyll³⁴ or an escape to the nature/mountain where he would find “his lair and grow a beard in order to be unrecognized”,³⁵ far from the “big dirty city”. Furthermore, he plans to publish a book about his media Odyssey with the title *How I was systematically destroyed by idiots*. In the meantime he takes part in the TV show of RTV Pink – *Dancing with the stars*. He does not make a sharp difference between RTV Pink and RTV B92 any more. “I would host a ‘Grand Show’,³⁶ I have already been in one ‘Grand show’ that is called ‘Big Brother’”,³⁷ says Miki.

However, something is omitted in this hyperbolic transparency. The other “who succeeded” (businessmen and Serbian politicians) will never do it like this. And not only because they do not lose. Real power (political and economic) will never be demonstrated in this way.³⁸ That is why Miki exists. He speaks about our society: “It is possible that dreams come true in Serbia. If you try hard, you will succeed. In this society everyone has equal options.” But he shows: “In this society dreams may come true only for those who unproblematically reproduce dominant paradigms. Look at me, for example.” As Slavoj Žižek says, truth about society and truth of the society are never and may never be identical.

should not be taken for granted, but I emphasize it here because of the discourse created in/by the media about the rise and (temporary?) fall of Miki’s lucky star. The fact that the same amount of money is mentioned as his first big fee and as his (at the moment last) big loss, represents symbolic closing of this cycle.

³⁴ As an illustration of this rural romantic utopia of the second transition in Serbia I quote an excerpt from Miki’s “last” interview: “Every night I dreamt like that at the house. I dreamt awake, before I fall asleep. I saw myself: orchard, some sheep, some pigs... Granges in Vojvodina are now very cheap. This has to be nicely organized, near the river, near some canal. Everybody needs a pig for Christmas, and a lamb for slava; everybody needs honey. I would have fruits there, I would make raki, and because it’s difficult to sell it for everyone, I would have an advantage, because people know me. Wherever I go, everyone would buy from me. I would have some benefit from this so called brand “Miki from Kupinovo”. Of course I would make labels with my picture and I would put it on the honey bottle. I would do these kinds of things and live easily. If somebody needs my opinion, once a week I would write something from the perspective of a relaxed peasant. As a grange chronicle. That is what I’ve dreamt about all my life. I could have done all of this, but also I wasn’t able, because Belgrade ate me. We all have plans, dreams, but life is a different player.” Saša Jovanović, *Miki Đuričić: moj poslednji intervju (4. deo)*, Press, 14. 12. 2007, 26. Or, as Miki explains, referring to the popular culture, to the corpus of knowledge familiar to everyone: “Yes, yes to drive a sled. You all like to listen to Đorđe Balašević, but you don’t understand it all!” And about his birth place: “I’m in the army and there are some Pirot, Vranje, and other hills. When I’ve heard a song about Srem (‘oh, it would be grate, if heart and soul could go back to my home, Srem alone’) I jumped over the fence and ran away home.”

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Grand Show is RTV Pink music show.

³⁷ Саша Јовановић, op. cit.

³⁸ After all, how many public performances does Dragoslav Mišković have?

I think that this analysis of Miki's performance at least to a certain extent confirmed the starting assumption: phenomena, performances and social roles do not hide and do not express some hidden reality; they are our social and cultural reality. Mass-media are not some other reality isolated from everyday life. They constitute everyday life. Reality is more real than real because it represents the assembly of dynamic images that constitute roles, effects and poses that should be followed. Mass-media stars are reflection that is never transcendent, simulacrum that persuades as that it is not real.³⁹ With this analysis of Miki's performances, I conclude that it is not the content of these performances that is dangerous, it is not about "what they say", but "how they say", i.e. it is the construct of the performance that is dangerous. Media become "as if" "transparent" and "as if" understandingly true. The naturalness and literalness of media figure such as Miki are supported with powerful symbolic and media machinery, with the Law of the society that gravitates to show itself as healthy, normal and tolerant. Materiality of the media is not perceived any more as a framework that offers its content and which does not create society through the media. That is why the system strengthens the uniting practice of the performance that contracts the intentionally produced activity and the one that is allegedly "revealing".

Such praxis integrates any occasional, and even confronted social and cultural meaning. That is how Miki may at the same time spread ethnic stereotypes *and* allegedly represent new face of the independent Serbia. In the independent Serbia, created, among other things, as a result of strong nationalistic tendencies and as a consequence of wars, the dream about "ethnically clear nation" is still very important, as well as an exclusiveness toward any kind of difference and prejudices towards the "Others".⁴⁰ Symbolic place of Miki – (dis)position of the difference⁴¹ and models for treating the difference – provokes different reactions among the representatives of different social groups in Serbia. On one hand, socially marginalized groups, but also the part of so called pro-European Serbia, appropriate Miki as their own, as desirable political body, as the symbolic place of *difference* that promises them social visibility. On the other hand, these social groups that identify themselves with nationalistic, "traditional" and conservative values appropriate him also, at the same time suppressing his "possible" difference that is a threat for clear, uniform identity.

³⁹ Ana Vujanović, op. cit., 62.

⁴⁰ Unfortunately, examples for such a claim are numerous: increasing homophobia (beating of the participants of the first and by now the last *Pride* parade in Belgrade in 2001 and attacks of some football fans with the blessing of some representatives of the Serbian Orthodox church), religious intolerance towards representatives of Muslim religion (setting on fire Bajrakli mosque in Belgrade in 2004 and invitation to boycott shops and objects possessed by Muslims in Sombor in 2008), xenophobia (setting on fire embassies, after proclamation of Kosovos independence in March 2008).

⁴¹ This does not necessarily means that Miki Đuričić identifies with any position of difference; moreover, he claims that "there are many Mikis in Serbia".

Miki Đuričić is essentially an ambivalent phenomenon that represents the result of the cultural media industry that was, and still is, determined by the national and political ideology that is marked by the fights for meanings of different ideologies, but also by a global spectacle. At the same time, his identity's fragmentariness and refraction in the web of different discursive practices and (un)stable positions that mutually cross – being constantly in the process of metamorphosis – produce the “zone of possibility” that is always related to the feeling of potentials that might not yet completely articulate. Possible symbolic capital of the social change is grounded on multiple cross-identity formations that produce identity as it is. Impress of the space that he occupies, his dominant political context is written in Miki's identity and he is imprisoned by the determination of “wherefrom I come”, without the process of self-determination that is independent from approved social norms.

Miki Đuričić, a media star is at the same time a symbol of Serbia's attitude towards Europe, of Serbia in the process of coming closer and playing with its own multitude. The content of these processes and knowledge is constantly being fractionated in reality and finally Miki, the same as Serbia, lives parallel in two realities, in endless inner transition. For him, just the same as for Serbia, it is absolutely possible and acceptable to accept *both* the rhetoric of ethnic stereotypes *and* anti-nationalist attitude as well as European values through this position *and* affinities towards subcultures usually with connotation of urbanity, and all this through the participation in the global spectacle. In the end, he transforms his *unarticulated potential* into the market capital, which actually would have been his only output in the end – had he managed not to lose his money.

Маријана Митровић

Србија од Микија и Купиново(м) до Европе: јавни наступи и друштвена улога медијске звезде

Кључне речи:

Мики из Купинова, медијска звезда, јавни наступ, друштвена улога, постсоцијализам, друга транзиција, Србија, Европа

У овом раду се покреће анализа јавног наступа и друштвене улоге медијске звезде у постсоцијалистичкој Србији кроз пример Микија Ђурчића, учесника првог серијала reality show-а *Велики брат* на овим просторима. Ови проблеми се посматрају кроз призму позоришне антропологије Ервинга Гофмана кориговане и допуњене Бодријаровим концептима симулакрума и симулације. Уз ослонац на Гофманову методологију анализе друштвених наступа кроз међуигру свесно и ненамерно продукованих знакова, као и Бодријарово одређивање такве хипертранспарентности као симулације, расправљају се дискурзивни, симболички, друштвени, културни и политички учинци његових наступа и покушаји њиховог представљања у светлу „новог лица Србије“. Ово „ново лице“ Србије која пролази кроз другу фазу транзиције се у дневно-политичком и медијском дискурсу представља као симболички очишћено од искључивости које су доминирале првом фазом.

Пракса Микијевих наступа, посматрана у различитим фазама, интегрише контрадикторна значења и симболичка инвестирања различитих друштвених група у транзицијској Србији. Он постаје једна од медијских симулацијских фигура које треба да приближе претпостављене половине србијанског друштва, у исто време репродукујући стереотипе и афирмишући неке од локалних етно-експликација тзв. „европских вредности“.

Мики Ђурчић је амбивалентна појава јер представља резултат културне медијске индустрије, која је маркирана борбама за значење различитих идеологија, али и глобалним спектаклом, док истовремено, његова идентитетска фрагментарност и разломљеност у мрежи различитих дискурзивних пракси и (не)стабилних позиција производи извесни симболички капитал могућности друштвене промене, која још увек не може у потпуности да се искристалише, као, уосталом, ни „ново лице Србије“.