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POST-YUGOSLAV SCREENPLAYS**

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Abstract

Commenting on Hegel's remark that all great world-historic facts and personages appear twice, Marx famously appended that they do so the first time as tragedy, and the second time as farce. This paper intends to show how the film scripts by popular Serbian playwright Dušan Kovačević (b. 1948) can be read as a specific post-Yugoslav and post-communist artistic commentary on Marx's claim. Kovačević's scripts for three well-known post-Yugoslav films are discussed: Emir Kusturica's controversial *Underground* (1995), Goran Marković's *The Tragic Burlesque* (1995), and Kovačević's own *The Professional* (2003). Within the larger frame of post-Yugoslav cinema, these three films constitute an important segment of the ideological current of self-Balkanization, which seemed to be all over the place especially in the Serbian cinema of the 1990s. What these self-Balkanizing films have in common, according to Pavičić, is a perception of the Balkans as a zone of permanent and inveterate chaos, a zone to which occasional wars are actually rather endemic. The three Kovačević's scripts in question are very much in the same vein, yet they are substantially more farcical in nature when compared to self-Balkanizing films that were not written by Kovačević. It is in this specific Balkan mixture of tragedy and farce, exclusive to Kovačević's poetics, that one can detect an aesthetical reply to Marx's aforementioned view of history: tragedy and farce not as consecutive events, rather as two complementary artistic insights of the same event. And, while over the years there have been numerous exegeses on the political message provided in *Underground* by Kusturica, a lot less has been said about the effect of Kovačević's publicly known political stance as a royalist (i.e., a supporter of the 1945-deposed Karađorđević royal family) on his scripts. The three scripts in question prove to be completely consistent with such viewpoints.

Key words

tragedy, farce, post-Yugoslav cinema, royalism, self-Balkanization, Dušan Kovačević, Emir Kusturica

1. Introduction

Commenting on Hegel's remark that all great historic facts and personages recur twice, Marx famously appended that they do so „once as tragedy, and again as farce.“¹ While Hegel's point had been that a pivotal event needs to be repeated in order to gain people's acceptance and general legitimacy in the course of history,² Marx focused on the „theatrical“ aspect of such repetitions: those who repeat history are unable to take note that their time has passed, and are therefore comical in their miserable attempts. The radical left-leaning Jacobin phase of the French Revolution in 1793 and 1794 was thus, for Marx, a tragedy, whereas the French Second Republic between 1848 and 1851 represents a farce. During the 1790s, the French bourgeoisie had pushed for a thorough revolution (yet succeeded only partially – it did remove the Ancien Régime, but in the end, capitalism prevailed), whilst in the mid-19th century, it became farcically reduced to a reactionary movement.

This paper intends to show how film scripts by popular Serbian playwright Dušan Kovačević (b. 1948) can be read as a specific post-Yugoslav artistic commentary on Marx's claim.

In particular, a spotlight is shined on Kovačević's scripts for three well-known post-Yugoslav films: Emir Kusturica's controversial and much-discussed *Underground* (1995), Goran Marković's *The Tragic Burlesque* (1995), and Kovačević's self-directed *The Professional* (2003). Within the larger frame of post-Yugoslav cinema, these three films represent an important segment of the ideological current of self-Balkanization (a term developed by Croatian writer and film critic Jurica Pavičić), which seemed to be ubiquitous especially in the Serbian cinema of the 1990s, or at least, the most internationally renowned Serbian films of that period belonged to that trend. What those self-Balkanizing films had in common, according to Pavičić, was a perception of the Balkans as a zone of permanent and inveterate chaos, a zone to which occasional wars are actually rather endemic. The three Kovačević's scripts in question are composed very much in the same vein, yet they are substantially more farcical in nature when compared to self-Balkanizing films that were not written by Kovačević. In these three films, the tragic and the farcical aspects intertwine almost indistinguishably. Two inquiries into this intriguing microspace of popular culture will occupy me throughout this paper. Firstly, I will try to find out whether this specific Balkan mixture of tragedy and farce, exclusive to Kovačević's poetics, constitutes some sort of an aesthetic reply to Marx's aforementioned view of history. And, while over the years there have been numerous exegeses on the political message purveyed in *Underground* by Kusturica, a lot less has been said about the effect of Kovačević's publicly known political stance as a royalist (i.e., a supporter of the 1945-deposed Karađorđević Royal Family)³ on his scripts. The paper will try to fill that gap by inquiring how this position plays into his post-1990 screenwriting oeuvre.

2. The artist

Popular Serbian playwright Dušan Kovačević (b. 1948) has left an indelible mark on the history of Serbian cinema. In the early 1980s, he signed the scripts for two comedies directed by Slobodan Šijan and set in the interwar Kingdom of Yugoslavia, namely *Who's Singing Over There?* (1980) and *The Marathon Family* (1982), both of which acquired cult status in the region, with the former also screening in the Un Certain Regard section at the Cannes Film Festival in 1981 and much later winning some polls for the best Serbian and even Yugoslav film of all time. Later on, after the breakup of Yugoslavia, one of Kovačević's pre-existing plays (to be precise, most of Kovačević's screenplays are updates of his pre-existing plays) was expanded by himself and the celebrated director Emir Kusturica into an exhilarating, controversial, three-hour allegory of the Balkans' permanent state of war, *Underground* (1995). This Cannes Palme d'Or winner was a textbook example of a trend in post-Yugoslav cinema that Jurica Pavičić, a Croatian writer and film critic, has labelled "the film of self-Balkanization".⁴ Two further well-known examples of

this trend, both of which have nothing to do with Kovačević, are Srđan Dragojević's *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* (1996) and Goran Paskaljević's *Cabaret Balkan* (1998). The common denominator of these films, the perception of the Balkans as a zone of permanent chaos, a territory on which occasional tragic conflicts are somewhat natural, is something the West wanted to hear in the 1990s in order to exculpate itself of guilt for inaction during the Yugoslav Wars, and some post-Yugoslav filmmakers were eager to satisfy that need. In short, self-Balkanizing films interiorize and often also hyperbolize Western cultural stereotypes about the Balkans. Pavičić's concept, as applied to the field of film studies, has its predecessor in Bulgarian historian Maria Todorova, who in 1997 referred to such naturalization of the region's cultural phenomena as Balkanism.⁵ In doing so, she herself followed suit of Edward Said's well-known notion of Orientalism (1978).

The coexistence of tragic and farcical story elements is also true of both Kovačević's screenplays written for Šijan in the 1980s; a specific Balkan mixture of tragedy and farce has always been Kovačević's brand. But whereas, considering Kovačević's political stance as a royalist, the two Šijan's comedies can be read in retrospect as some kind of nostalgia for the pre-socialist Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Kovačević's post-Yugoslav screenwriting work is deeply concerned with Yugoslavia's socialist era and with its remnants in the post-1991 Serbian society. Let us now see how.

3. The new world

Underground continues the story where and when Kovačević's script for *Who's Singing Over There?* left off: in Belgrade on 6th April 1941, when the Luftwaffe began bombing the city. There and then catches fire Kovačević's and Kusturica's feral satirical stampede covering a turbulent half century of Yugoslav history, all the way until the 1990s. Which is to say Kovačević's 1977 play was updated (by both Kovačević and Kusturica) in order to include Tito's death in 1980 and the 1990s breakup war.

In the opening scenes of the film, the German "punishment" of the Serbian capital for the *coup d'état* against the accession of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to the Tripartite Pact is harshly contrasted with archival footage of inhabitants of two other Yugoslav cities, Slovenia's Maribor and Croatia's Zagreb, emphatically saluting the German occupying forces in April 1941. The film, however, neglects to mention that there were thousands of ethnic Germans living in those two cities and that it was mostly them who saluted the invaders. Likewise, some highly unreliable Yugoslav characters in the first part of the story are referred to by unmistakable Croatian, Muslim, and Slovenian names. With such pieces of information and lacks thereof, *Underground*, although in a very naive sense a pro-Yugoslavist film (the sole moral character in the

film is a firm believer in Yugoslavia), conveys a nationalist message that Serbs were always the victims and never the perpetrators, and that *other* Yugoslav nations bear all the blame for the evils that have befallen the Western Balkans. Such understanding of the meaning of the film has been prevalent in film studies, as well as being quite convincing.⁶ Another possible reading was suggested by philosopher Slavoj Žižek, who contended in a 1997 essay that *Underground* was exactly what the Western gaze wanted to see in the Balkans: that this was a place of an incomprehensible, mythical cycle of passions, of Dionysian forces of nature that were inexplicable in rational terms.⁷ Or, as Kusturica himself would say: "In this region, war is a natural phenomenon. It is like a natural catastrophe, like an earthquake that explodes from time to time. In my film, I tried to clarify the state of things in this chaotic part of the world. It seems that nobody is able to locate the roots of this terrible conflict."⁸

It was precisely this mystifying simplification that played a major part in the West's reluctance to speed up the resolution of the Yugoslav conflicts in the 1990s,⁹ although, of course, the simplification had already circulated in the West way before Kusturica triumphed with the film in Cannes. *Underground* was therefore, among other things, a translation of such statements into the language of cinema. By resorting to exuberant images and sounds of the Balkans as a place of inherent chaos (the constant loud music, hard partying, reckless machoism, obsessive fornicating), it failed to address the real reasons behind the Yugoslav Wars, such as nationalist ideology and cheap populism, or, indeed, even *encouraged* a chauvinist frame of mind (with the aforementioned labelling of unreliable partners in crime as a Slovene, a Muslim, and a Croat, and of Serbs as perennial victims). But what interests me most is the specific mixture of tragedy and farce which is very much at work in *Underground* yet considerably less potent in all the other films directed by Kusturica. One should take note that *Underground* is Kusturica's single film with Kovačević as screenwriter.¹⁰ Being that Kusturica's other films do not intertwine tragedy and farce to such extent,¹¹ and since many other Kovačević's film scripts (including the Yugoslav ones) do so to a large degree, one can deduce that in *Underground*, too, this is a feature to be credited predominantly to Kovačević.

The core of *Underground* is a large cellar somewhere in Belgrade in which, during the Second World War, Serbian resistance fighter Marko hides his friends and family. Yet even after the war has ended, Marko keeps them down there, misleading them into belief that the war still goes on. The inhabitants of the cellar continue to manufacture weapons thinking they are meant for Tito's partisans fighting the Germans, but in reality, the weapons produced only serve Marko's private profit on the black market. All the while Marko enjoys life above ground as a

national hero and a celebrated poet in the Communist Yugoslavia. His deception is later exposed and he absconds, though the day of reckoning comes during the 1990s collapse of SFRY.

Throughout the first two parts of the film (covering the Second World War and the Cold War), the tragic and farcical aspects are intertwined rather than consecutive. If anything, tragedy follows farce instead of the other way around, seeing as the last part of the film, dealing with the characters during the 1990s Yugoslav Wars, is noticeably more mournful and solemn in comparison to the preceding events. Farcical aspects become scarcer. Kusturica and Kovačević do not spare us the tragedies of the civil war; as Marko finds out, “there is no war until a brother kills his brother.”

Besides the obvious metaphor of the cellar standing for citizens of the Communist Yugoslavia being kept underground by a corrupt bon vivant, there are further clues in the last part of the film that offer an indictment of Yugoslav communism. The South Slavic paramilitary unit that in 1992 captures both “Ustashe” (Croats) and “Chetniks” (Serbs) is led by Marko’s Partisan comrade Crni, who after all these years still walks and talks like a communist. Such an element of the plot confirms Dina Iordanova’s reading of the meaning of the film that the communists (who have dominated the Yugoslav Partisan movement, ruled Yugoslavia until 1991, and are shown in the film in 1941 and 1961 as being morally corrupt and nihilistic) are to blame for the Yugoslav Wars.¹² In addition to that, both Pavle Levi and Jurica Pavičić take note of the film’s repeated use of the song *Lili Marleen* which had been especially popular with the Germans during the Second World War. On two separate occasions, the song accompanies significant archival footage. Firstly, it complements the reception of the Germans in Zagreb and Maribor, while the second time, it underscores famous images from president Tito’s funeral, the point of this musical analogy so manifestly being that the Titoist personality cult equals blind servility to Nazism.¹³ Rejection of communism, evident in many of Dušan Kovačević’s works, thereupon remains markedly alive and kicking in *Underground*, and is of course fully consistent with the playwright’s royalist beliefs.

And yet, for all the somber tragedy of the 1992 chapter, *Underground* does end on a farcical note, with a fantasy coda of all the characters who had died throughout the story now alive again, in their best years, feasting and dancing, announcing a new life for the territory. The overall aesthetics of *Underground* therefore convey a feeling that tragedy and farce are two ways of life in the Balkans. It is not difficult to see why this film attracted charges of Balkanism, of exoticizing the Balkans and complying with the Western gaze, by film scholars and philosophers alike. I am sharing their opinion that the ideological force that ripped Yugoslavia apart was nationalism, oftentimes fuelled by religious zealotry, and not communism in itself. Which is not to

say that the Yugoslav communists were immaculate heroes, and nor would I want to belittle *Underground*, which is a very watchable and expertly made film full of bursts of unsurpassable creative energy. It is just that its controversies appear to be rather well-earned. The film's simplification of the complex causes of the Yugoslav Wars, the determined turning of a blind eye to nationalisms as important factors, going so far as to even *condone* Serbian nationalism – all of this leaves a bitter aftertaste to viewers who are more intimately familiar with the history of the region and are not content with tendentious answers.

4. The madhouse metropolis

Kovačević first wrote the play *The Tragic Burlesque* in 1990. The film version, directed by Goran Marković, is set in 1990s Belgrade but was filmed in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 1994. The story of the film is set in motion when a psychiatric hospital on the outskirts of Belgrade, due to the disintegration of the state and the sanctions imposed, runs out of medications and other necessary means to function properly. A doctor decides to leave the hospital with his twenty-some patients, escort them to the city by tram, and try to accommodate them with their relatives or even anyone at all who would be willing to accept them. Unsurprisingly, this turns out to be a mission impossible, yet the underlying message of the film is that Serbian society of the 1990s is already so psychotic in itself – through a chain of effects of wars in the region – that institutionalized psychiatric patients can meld with “normal” citizens almost seamlessly. Thus, the commotion the patients cause while cruising the Belgrade streets conforms to the Western stereotype of the Balkans as an inherently crazy, “mental” place, yet it goes even deeper than that. As Dina Iordanova wrote about the film in 2001: “The director’s preoccupation is to show how, in today’s Belgrade, traditional concepts of normality and insanity have become interchangeable – the ‘normal’ ones are depressed and incapacitated, while the deviant ones thrive on chaos, war and the trafficking of arms, drugs and fuel.”¹⁴

The effect of this approach is deeply bittersweet: that which is funny is at the same time forcibly tragic. The film contains perspicuous accusations of the Communists’ wrongdoings (mainly through dialogues), but, in the end, does not amount to much. The jokes are not hilarious, the characters are not interesting enough, the situations are weakly relatable and the story is thin in comparison to Kovačević’s best works. There is no hook to keep us hooked. *The Tragic Burlesque* could be marked as a minor addition to Kovačević’s screenwriting filmography.

5. Nothing ever changes

The Professional, too, was a play Kovačević first wrote in 1990. For the film version, shot in 2002, he updated the story so as to cover the most recent period of Serbian history between 1991

and 2001. The film, whose popularity has only grown over the years and now enjoys a cult following, is a high-concept story if there ever was one: what if one day a stranger walked into your office who knew everything about you? Well, that would be because of his job, which he would have been performing with the highest degree of professionalism. In the autumn of 2001, one year after the fall of Slobodan Milošević, an old man with a large suitcase walks into a publishing house in Belgrade where a strike is taking place on the ground floor, ignores the security guard, ascends a few floors and asks the secretary for a brief appointment with the new manager. The manager, Teodor Teja Kraj, a former literature professor and a dissident from the Milošević years, has no recollection whatsoever of the old man, who keeps calling him by his first name and asking him, “You *really* don’t know who I am?” As it turns out, the old man, Luka Laban, is a retired officer of a national security agency, a dedicated professional whose duties in the previous decade included spying and eavesdropping on dissidents like Teja, and periodically taking action in order to ensure that Teja would not have compromised the regime. Luka seems to be ill, perhaps terminally, and appears to have visited Teja to “confess his sins”. In the next “five minutes” of the appointment, which last for a few hours, Luka tells Teja how he twice came dangerously close to killing him because of his anti-Milošević and anti-communist rhetoric, and how he personally took care that Teja lost his job at a faculty. On the other hand, we get to see how Luka twice saved Teja’s life, the reason being that Luka’s daughter, a college student, was infatuated with her literature professor, Teja. Through these reminiscences, major episodes of Serbian 1990s history are revisited: the March 1991 anti-government protests, the 1995 fall of Knin, the 1996 post-electoral demonstrations and the 1999 NATO attacks. In Luka’s large suitcase, there are countless items from Teja’s life – things he lost or left behind.

The film is incredibly rib-tickling – one of the best jokes concerns the inflation crisis in Serbia’s economy which meant that a copy of a newspaper cost 80 million dinars¹⁵ – and *at the same time* unbearably sad: lives are shattered and loves destroyed. This is full-time tragedy and full-time farce on a large scale. Comedic attitude is shown to be one of the techniques to keep sanity, possibly in more ways than one: a rather corpulent lady remarks in 2000 that once Milošević is removed, she will be even fatter; now she at least keeps a tight rein on her weight because of all the worrying. In the farcical aspect, the film depicts the national security officer infiltrating a series of situations in Teja’s public and private life, each time assuming a different disguise, even one of a Santa Claus (who then gets so involved in the action that he forgets he was supposed to be a Santa Claus, which leads to a hilarious exchange with those who expect gifts from him), without Teja ever recognizing his face. Again, as in *Underground*, tragedy and farce are shown to be inherent to the Balkans’ way of life, and the film is moderately self-

Balkanizing in that it shows the recent history of Serbs as a neverending sequence of protests and wars, though this time, Kovačević does probe the role of Slobodan Milošević in the historical goings-on of the 1990s, the tragically negative role of the Serbian *vožd* which had been merely implicitly decipherable in *Underground*. So, on this occasion, Kovačević's heady mix of Balkanism and politics serves a more elaborate, a more down-to-Earth purpose.

The ending of *The Professional*, where it is revealed that Teja is still being monitored by the secret service even after the fall of Milošević and the retirement of Luka Laban, is all the more hurtful, the point being that on the level of politics, nothing ever *really* changes, power takeovers are revealed to be nominal rather than real. The new power continues to spy, and it unscrupulously spies upon "its own" people. *The Professional* shows what power with no outside (the concept, *pouvoir sans dehors*, stems from Michel Foucault and describes the plethora of micro-powers) means when transposed to a macro-stage in a totalitarian society such as Milošević's Serbia: in a society such as that, justice is unreachable because the perpetrators and the investigators of crimes are often one and the same; if one has access to enough power, one can arrange every political murder to come out as a suicide or an accident. Foucault acknowledged that resistance to such power must – and does – come from within the power itself,¹⁶ and according to *The Professional*, this very resistance transpires from the personal ties that bind us. Each one of us has the capability to put personal above the political. It is precisely at this point that *The Professional*, sad and tragic as it is, offers at least *some* faith in humanity: when all has been said and done, and before leaving to check himself into a hospital, from where he may not emerge alive, Luka asks Teja to make a phone call to Luka's daughter in Canada and tell her that they (Luka and Teja) have met up – and, in the end, *parted amicably*. Obviously, preferring personal over political is an individualist and conservative outlook that perfectly complements Kovačević's dislike of communism, and it is the only recipe for fighting totalitarianism that Kovačević provides here. But it is a legitimate answer.

6. Conclusion

The three films discussed above have shown that tragedy and farce are not consecutive events as in the Marx statement; rather, they are two complementary artistic insights of the same event. History does repeat itself, in the Balkans perhaps even more so than elsewhere, but life can be, and often is, profoundly tragic and hysterically funny *at the same time*. From a more cynical viewpoint, if we were to take it, comedy could be understood as humanity's self-deceit to make the tragedy of life more bearable. The Western Balkans, famous both for their lengthy history of tragedies and for their excellent sense of humor, seem to be confirming this perspective.

In Dušan Kovačević's post-Yugoslav screenplays, farce is abundantly added to the tragedies usually attributed to (and shown in the films about) the disintegration of SFR Yugoslavia and to the 1990s transition period. However, in Kovačević's scripts, both Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav farce does not follow tragedy, rather the two are shown to be two sides of the same coin, two complementary ways of addressing the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav reality. If anything, in *Underground* it is solemn tragedy that follows a careful balance of farce and tragedy, but not without a final wink. As it happens, with his inclinations towards farce, Kovačević significantly enriched the otherwise more serious streak of self-Balkanizing post-Yugoslav films.

Whereas *Underground* was a major indictment of the moral nihilism and corruption of the Yugoslav Communists, implicitly blaming them for the Yugoslav Wars, *The Professional*, whilst similarly critical of the Communist era and its later remnants, allows for a more nuanced perception of power: the power is now oppressive and Orwellian regardless of who is in charge. In such circumstances, hope arises from resistance to the power, which has shown time and again to be the real guiding spirit, the real creator of the world's history, and a rectifier of at least some historical mistakes and injustices.

Regarding the other task I have taken on in the introduction of this paper, my conclusion would be that although the three Kovačević's scripts in question do not deal explicitly with the Karađorđević royal family, they do exhibit a clear dislike for the Communist regime and its continuation into Milošević's Serbia, which, combined with Kovačević's soft spot for pre-socialist Serbia as shown in some of his other works, can be interpreted as fully consistent with his political stance as a royalist.

¹ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (Gloucester: Dodo Press, 2009), 1.

² Georg W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1924), 162. The first Roman emperor Augustus thus repeated and legitimized the intentions of the assassinated late Republic dictator Julius Caesar, Napoleon had to be defeated twice in order for his defeat to be historically confirmed, and the Bourbons in France had to be removed from power twice. Through a repetition, according to Hegel, something which was thought of initially as contingent, becomes actual and corroborated.

³ He is still, as of January 2020, mentioned as a member of the Crown Council of the Royal Family of Serbia on the official website of the Karađorđević Royal Family. As a matter of fact, so is Emir Kusturica, but Kusturica's contradictory political statements over the years would require a thorough analysis on their own. Kovačević's standpoints are much more »manageable« and consistent. The support of the Karađorđević Royal Family, which was deposed by the Communist takeover in 1945 but remains active in its aims to regain the Crown, is a constant of Kovačević's public life. For both his and Kusturica's membership in the Crown Council, see: »Crown Council«, The Royal Family of Serbia, accessed January 19th, 2020, »<https://royalfamily.org/crown-council/>«.

⁴ Jurica Pavičić, *Postjugoslavenski film: Stil i ideologija* (Zagreb: Hrvatski filmski savez, 2011), 137-141, 154-160.

⁵ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁶ See, for instance, Pavle Levi, *Razpad Jugoslavije na filmu* (Ljubljana: Slovenska kinoteka, 2011), 81-89, and Dino Murtić, *Post-Yugoslav Cinema: Towards a Cosmopolitan Imagining* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 46-60. This is also the viewpoint of Dina Iordanova in her monographs *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 111-135, and *Emir Kusturica* (London: British Film Institute, 2002), 151-181.

⁷ Slavoj Žižek, »Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism«, in Žižek, *The Universal Exception*, ed. Rex Butler and Scott Stephens (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 182-191. (Žižek's essay was first published in the *New Left Review* in 1997.)

⁸ »Propos de Emir Kusturica«, *Cahiers du cinéma* 492 (1995): 69.

⁹ Of the West's reluctance to intervene in the Yugoslav wars, an overview is provided in Noel Malcolm, *Bosna: Kratka povijest* (Sarajevo: Buybook, 2011), 399-451 (the chapters on the Bosnian war). On the West's continuous exoticization of the Balkans as the »wild child« of Europe, numerous studies can be consulted, among others Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), and Božidar Jezernik, *Wild Europe: The Balkans in the Gaze of Western Travellers* (London: Saqui in the Association with the Bosnian Institute, 2004).

¹⁰ In the late 1990s, Kusturica and Kovačević had two other common projects in the works, but both fell through: an adaptation of D. M. Thomas's 1981 novel *The White Hotel* for which Kovačević rewrote a pre-existing script, and *The Nose*, based on motifs from a Kovačević play.

¹¹ Before *Underground*, there had been no exaggerated humor in Kusturica's films. After *Underground*, Kusturica made two all-out farces with no tragedy whatsoever, *Black Cat*, *White Cat* (1998) and *Promise Me This* (2007), and two sad stories about Yugoslav Wars in which tragedy overshadows the occasional humor, *Life is a Miracle* (2004) and *On the Milky Road* (2016). In other words, neither before nor after *Underground* did Kusturica come close to an interlacement of tragedy and farce such as the one in his 1995 opus magnum.

¹² Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames*, 118.

¹³ Pavičić, *Postjugoslavenski film*, 160. See a similar point in Levi, *Razpad Jugoslavije*, 81-89.

¹⁴ Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames*, 268.

¹⁵ The perfectly performed scene in *The Professional* where Teja pays one billion dinars for 10 copies of *Politika* (800 million dinars would be the price for 10 copies, the rest is tipping the newspaper salesman) is one of the two best artistic jokes on Yugoslav-related inflation crisis (that time in the late 1980s and early 1990s when prices and banknotes reached billions of dinars and which I am old enough to personally remember) I have ever encountered, the other being the line in Slovenian singer-songwriter Iztok Mlakar's song *Republika Palma de Cocco* (from his first album, released in 1992) where the narrator mentions that he received a lousy million for holiday allowance. What on Earth could he do with a lousy million dinars? All that remains is for him to put it in a sock, and once it is full, he will go on holiday... to a non-existing Republic of Coconut Palms.

¹⁶ Mladen Dolar, *Kralju odsekati glavo: Foucaultova dediščina* (Ljubljana: Krtina, 2009), 98-99.

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The Tragic Burlesque (Urnebesna tragedija), directed by Goran Marković, written by Dušan Kovačević, 1995.

Underground (Podzemlje), directed by Emir Kusturica, written by Dušan Kovačević and Emir Kusturica, 1995.

Who's Singing Over There? (Ko to tamo peva), directed by Slobodan Šijan, written by Dušan Kovačević, 1980.