Gala Day with FK Zvezdara, Belgrade + Dinamo Pančevo, Vojvodina / Photos: Dejan Balasa / Text by Eleanor Ivory Webber / Translation Sandro Stojanovic

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There are at least two sides to every equation, the physical and the mediated. The realm of the physical includes materials, the body and their cultures; it thus implies history. The realm of mediation produces history, through its distribution of narratives, ideologies and politics based on those same bodies and cultures. For better or worse, mediation is about change, and while physical history can be mediated, so too does mediation produce new histories of its own.

And yet, physical history must be met by present capacity. Having built up a certain repertoire, played at a certain level and in a certain league, one’s worth can be translated into a system of equivalences based on validating previous experience.

"Presenting the player as a public project both opens a social space and is self-incriminating."¹

After the standard military service, he was conscripted to the Yugoslav People’s Army. To be discharged, he allegedly plead insanity, by way of self-inflicted injuries. It is not known what these injuries were, but it is clear the desire to play football and escape war was stronger than that of fighting for the Serbnationalist cause or remaining in Yugoslavia, and was worth contending with the presumable shame the label of "insanity" brought. To do oneself harm, as a way of moving forward, is a way of negatively constituting life.

¹ Lachlan Petras in conversation with Eleanor Ivory Weber, 19th August 2017
He would never again return to Yugoslavia.

He described playing there as the time-based, interactive, and the performative basis of Gala Day. He played in the former’s teams. This was the only way to obtain the memorabilia he required, and a season was the minimum for this exchange. Football performance thus becomes the facilitating gesture, taking full circle the original self-incriminating gesture.

A process of reversal. One mirrors the other’s “return” to a place he has never known. For the former: the escape from war and poverty and the continuation of his professional football career. For the latter: a return to football having not played for some years and the continuation of his professional art career. A testament to a physical ability they share. On both sides, before and after, Gala Day is the ongoing mediation and literal embodiment of physical “performance”.

A boy dribbles during a coaching session in Zvezdara

Coaching juniors with Cika Vlada in Zvezdara, Belgrade / December 2014 / Photos: Dejan Balan
Gala Day mediates moments of identification forming where it “shouldn’t”. The “return” is a technique (performance) for defining this identification. And thus, Gala Day redefines a moment in Australian soccer when the former’s ethnically motivated gesture provided the pretext for mainstream Australian media, notably Channel 7, to eventually squash the National Soccer League—a league shaped by ethnic affiliations, offering a socio-political space for non-Anglo-Saxon Australians—and replace it with the resolutely non-ethnically aligned A-League. This was an ideological move to neutralise spaces outside the Anglo-Saxon frame of reference, in the name of depoliticising sport.

The latter has gone so far as to create an icon for this conundrum. Referencing the “T” in the middle of both his and the former’s names, and appropriating 7’s logo, the symbol is also reminiscent of the Orthodox cross.

The season-long performance, which none but the latter were fully conscious of nor privy to, embodies what is latent here, and exemplifies a process of subtraction that negatively defines the performance. To complete such a feat and not make one’s own effort the centre of attention is to describe one’s constitutive lack in the eyes of dominant media and history. It speaks of self-inflicted, self-incriminating gestures, and makes sense of writer and independence politician Vuk Drašković’s line in the novel The Dagger (1982):

‘Each act of revenge is a suicide.’
Negating the tactic of revenge through a process of repetition (rehearsal), his gesture is made legible, not through valorising victimhood, or neutralising politics, but through recognising the multifaceted reality of such gestures, some of which cannot be mediated. Negative vitality, not revenge.

Beamed through the media without context, without a body of experience, symbols become facile to apply, and meaningless to interpret. However, what is most important to this story, and what mainstream media consistently disavows by repressing, is that conflict (being "struck together") is constitutive not only of history, but also of identity itself.

To take another line from Drašković: "You are certainly not what you are, nevertheless, you are what you are not."

Eleanor Ivory Weber

October 2017
Postoje dve stvarnosti entiteta; fizička i posredna. Fizička podrazumeva materijalnost, telesnost i kulturu, te sadrži istoriju. Posredna stvarnost proizvodi istoriju širenjem narativa, ideologija i politika sa kojima deli telo i kulturu. Bez obzira na sve, posredna stvarnost je utemeljena na promeni, dok se fizička istorija može posredovati pritom proizvodeći nove, sopstvene istorije.

Međutim, fizička istorija mora odgovarati kapacitetu sadašnjosti. Nakon što ostvari određeni repertoar, koji se odvija na izvesnom nivou, vrednost se može prevesti u sistem jednakosti uslovljenim prethodnim iskustvom.

„Igrati se na tom nivou i predstaviti projekat kao javni otvara društveni prostor, ali i prostor za samoinkriminaciju”.¹

Nakon služenja standardnog vojnog roka, dodeljena mu je služba u Jugoslovenskoj narodnoj armiji. U namerni da dobije otpust otpuste, navodno je sebi naneo povrede i pozvao se na ugroženo mentalno zdravlje. Nije poznata priroda ovih povreda, ali jasno je da je njegova želja za fudbalom i begom od borbe za srpski nacionalizam u okviru razdvojenije Jugoslavije prevazilastrila strah i sram od društvene stigme kakvu nosi etika duševnog oboljenja.

¹ Lachlan Petras u razgovoru sa Eleanor Ivory Weber / avgust 19 2017
Nikada se više nije vratio da živi u Jugoslaviji.

Svoj život u to doba opisuje kao proizvod vremena, relativan i kao performativnu osnovu za Gala dan. Igrao je za reprezentacije bivšeg. Ovo je bio način da ostvari priznanja koja su mu bila potrebna, a sezonska pobeda je bila minimum kako bi udovoljio drugima. Njegov uspeh u fudbalu postao je postupak facilitacije, time praveći pun krug do prvobitnog samoinkriminujućeg postupka.

Šta znači „stati na stranu neprijatelja”.


Ovaj događaj se razvio do te mere da je dobio i sopstvenu ikonu. Referišući na slovo T u njegovom i imenu bivšeg i apro prirajući Channel 7 logotip, dobijeni simbol podseća na pravoslavni krst.

Pregovaranjem taktike osvete kroz proces ponavljanja (probanja), postupak postaje legitiman; ne kroz potvrđivanje pozicije žrtve ili neutralizovanjim politike, već kroz prepoznavanje višeslojne stvarnosti takvih postupaka, od kojih neki ni ne mogu biti posredovani. Negativno življenje, a ne osveta. Projekovano kroz medije bez konteksta, bez iskustva, simbole teško možemo upotrebiti, a besmisleno ih je interpretirati. Međutim, ono što je najvažnije za narativ i što mainstream mediji dosledno potiskuju, predstavlja konflikt (biti prisljben na zajednicu) koji je kostitutivan ne samo za istoriju, već i sam pojam identiteta.

Da citiram još jednu Draškovićevu misao: „Svakako nisi ono što jes, međutim jesi ono što nisi.”

Eleanor Ivory Weber
Prevod: Sandra Stojanovic
oktobar 2017