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Paper abstract – Balkanising Taxonomy

“In the past decade memory and the manipulation of memory have been posited as one of the central aspects of Balkan conflicts.”

Maria Todorova,
2004

This paper will explore the project *Balkanising Taxonomy* developed from the work with memory I commenced in 2008. The discourse of memory dispersed around the fields of research on the Balkans I started years ago. I knew that I will be dealing with culture and politics in exploration of Belgrade's protest in '96/'97, but the sites of memory I begun to tackle called upon more investigation and reached beyond my expectations.

The main role in this research was played by Constance Howard Resource and Research Centre in Textiles that offered me to curate an exhibition of Balkan garments and photographs. I dived into their archive of clothes and images from the beginning of the 20th century donated by Jane Page in 2007 and got lost in the wealth of history held by the objects in front of me and the surge of memories I carry as an individual and a part of Balkan people's collective.

Aren't my memories of the East influenced by their projection in the West, so mediated anyway or the act of memory is a radical departure of the perceptions Balkans has in the West and must stay alive so they do not get uniformed in universal history? My paper battles with these sociological questions caught up in my artistic practice that serves as a prism and a method of my research.

www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/balkanising-taxonomy

Discussion

Discussion book: Sarah Pink *Doing Visual Ethnography*, London: Sage (2007)

(especially the introduction as well as chapters 1 & 5)

For a review see: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/7/2/pink.html>

Discussion introduction:

Art is more important than sociology

At the annual International Visual Sociology Association conference in the University of Cumbria this year, there was a disappointing confirmation of the view held about the visual sociology programme at our university.

We have been struggling with the idea of visual sociology since the programme begun, promising practice led degree that paradoxically did not seem welcoming to practice. That practical part, a project that was to form almost a half of our

theses was meant to be arts research endeavour and even though we were to conduct visual sociology, the project could be an audio presentation for example. So, visual sociology programme held a very broad view of itself and did not stop at the boundaries of the form, whilst in action, embracing and understanding of what is clearly (visibly) visual was difficult to achieve.

However, the whole discipline has a problem with embracing of the visual by accrediting, assessing and understanding it in a more useful, wholesome and even respectful manner. As Pablo Hermansen from Pontifical Catholic University of Chile mentioned at the closing panel of the event, we are only dealing with the sociology of the visual; arriving to the idea of visual sociology will take time for the social scientists.

Among the delegates there were a few Americans whose junior researchers in particular mentioned they came to the conference to enquire about the perception of visual sociology in Europe. They found that in the US, however supportive their departments are, they seem to be unable to understand their projects. Hence, it is difficult to receive any appropriate support – theoretical, financial, practical that would steer a project forward, let alone in a desired direction. Unfortunately, we have the same problem at Goldsmiths University that runs the only visual sociology programme in the world.

Our projects are not inviting the interests of our supervisors and the theoretical work deriving predominantly from classical sociology is under scrutiny without the notion of its relationship and often emergence from our practice our researchers are mostly directed by sociologists only. My research in the department is guided by two sociologists, one openly declaring that has no appropriate knowledge of visual sociology and is allocated to me according to the geographical area of investigation (which is a problem in itself), but our themes of interest are not meeting...

How then to feel that we are developing as visual sociologists or that sociologists are embracing the visual? Again, Hermansen addressed the tension between the two disciplines and as an example mentioned his own presentation. By the time he described the project, its methodology and related statistics, none was left to show the artwork. He felt he undermined himself as an artist and that is precisely how my colleagues at the university feel, so to hear the quiet remarks from the artists in the audience in Cumbria: "we also have degrees, you know..." was a relief for me who felt the same throughout my PhD and at the conference, but it was also a warning sign that we might haven't escaped the old belief that science is more important than art.

The presentation of Sarah Pink whose book *Doing Visual Ethnography*, Sage (2007) is on our reading list was especially worrying. She discussed a methodology she called "walking with video" that is a simple filming technique consisting of a hand held camera aimed at the interviewee as both the video/film maker/interviewer walked and talked.

Pink, as many social scientists also failed to adequately apply a minimal knowledge of filmmaking, nowadays obtainable on the short course if the degree is too much of an endeavour where the part of this arts discipline – its technical skill – can be learned, so when she walks the wind doesn't blow over the desired sound and we

actually hear and so, respect the interviewee. It is always easier to blame technology than actually learn how to operate it or prepare the visuals for a variety of formats, including textual as many social scientists at the conference failed to respect a 20 min slot.

Finally, at the last panel of the event, a sociologist proclaimed that art is there to further sociology and here is where I finally blew up. "There is no point to be crossed," exclaimed Sarah Pink. What is the point? Not to react and allow depreciation and undermining of art and its practitioners? A photographer joins in her defence: "Art belongs to everyone...". Surely, but sociology seems not and this is my point. And until we, the artists say and see that sociology is embracing art it is not being done. What is the point in sociologists saying we are doing so when they can't do the same? Only at this meeting point of mutual respect of both disciplines, we can honestly discuss visual sociology.

This happens at many conferences, but in Cumbria, after such an attitude towards art and leaving specialised arts panel for the last day, we must wonder if the organisers too had the same view of the importance of visual in sociology.

Bibliography

Sarah Pink *Doing Visual Ethnography*, London: Sage (2007)



Paper:

Archive as methodology – Research(er) as an archive

My archive is essentially a storytelling machine. It MEdiates the process of emersion into it as both a researcher and a subject in research.

Images expose defencelessness, vulnerability, illustrate the condition objects/subjects put themselves in for this intervention in "the real" at the time. The market crowd of Balkanising Taxonomy project is photographed as in a frozen image without sound. "The silence of the absolute image" provides a possibility of testimony, in the words of Vikki Bell (2009). The portraits say "I was there" – the images call to be counted to provide justice of the experience.



History is linked with ideology and connected to fiction - documentary image is less of a proof, but rather supports (im)possible (hi)stories. Still, postcolonial and subaltern voices speak through the image and their power then is immediate (Spivak, G.C.. 1988).

Production, use, destruction and withdrawal of images happen in the processes of shaping history and memory. Heterogeneous, non-linear sources and cinematic structures like montage are vehicle for histories since they emerged. We need to question them since then when considering documentary imagery is "evidence" or we can accept those methodologies, like my archive, an interpretation of history.

The mass media's portrays complicated relationships in a superficial and simplified way while the impression of authenticity and historical accuracy is acquired. Moreover, the mass availability of materials on the Internet increases the selectiveness and provides users with personal truths they can develop. An image contains a complex thought-process ready to offer new information to the 'spectator' who acts upon it. This interaction creates a 'spectator' who communicates with the image via evolving information and not through the lure of illusion. It is the interaction achieved through the 'memory' of the image, and not the image itself. (Santorineos, 2009)

The origins of the exhibition/archive catalogue lie, literally, in a listing of objects included in a display or a collection. My theses will expand on this idea and besides gathering the images (objects), include the analysis of their interaction and in particular social developments between them. Along those lines are Brecht's hybrids, photo-epigrams that were published as a book called *War Primer* in East Berlin, (1955) and designed as practical, portable "monuments" - to aid future generations in "critical remembering". (Korner, 2006)



My Archives

In 1989, after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, the archives – the depots in which the memory of a society, of a nation is stored – were opened. "A historical activity got underway that previously could only have been carried on abroad, in the West". (Schlogel, 2008) Interestingly, it is still the case in Serbia, the information is inaccessible and some collections are better to be compiled in the Western Europe. Not only because former Serbia's leaders attempted to cover up the stories of resistance by forbidding their records, but current Serbia's leaders are more concerned with the party politics and European Union membership prospects than the issues and preservations of the past. Here, in the Western Europe, emerged a space in which the normalisation of Serbia's historical memory could take place and restoration could begin, however basic and partial.

My theses is an act of building a digital collection that is also an act of building a community around the collection. I have already achieved this in part, with *Balkanising Taxonomy* where I gathered researchers around the Balkan archive donated by Jane Page in 2007 to Constance Howard Research and Resource Centre for Textiles at Goldsmiths University. This project served as pilot for methodology and pointed to the direction I am now taking with my theses project: building and analysing of Belgrade's protest archive. The catalogue of theses, a combination of practical and theoretical part of analysis laid out together in a form of collection/exhibition led by the archive findings illustrates the methodology and the outline of my theses. I am hoping that this work could begin the possibility of an alternative model of cultural memory altogether and devise research protocols that will sustain the discipline of Balkan studies.

Archive here is understood to cover a range of objects, from a personal badge collection about the protest to a photographic album, from a repository of a writer's papers in a library to an artist's installation of objects. Regardless of its content, the archive will work to contain, organize, represent, render intelligible and produce narrative of the protest. I am trying to put foundations to an alternative platform of this repository. The archive has been revered from afar and aestheticized for so long, but not understood as a potential object of critical practice which is how I am trying to introduce it in my research.

Technology of archives

In the public discourse on past events and the construction of identities, the stance and use of the mass media, television and internet, are of major significance (Reljić,

2001). The media serve to witness and to save particular news and narratives in collective memories. The news industry tends to report on catchy events instead of long-term progresses. On the other hand, films are produced that reconstruct and remember historical events and so contribute to breaking up silence about a loaded past. (Howard / Rolt / van de Veen / Verhoeven 2003) This is the reason why we mostly know about the war than other stories Serbia has and why we know them in the format disseminated through the Hollywood where Serbs are usually criminals and terrorists.

The internet is a useful memory platform which allows for discussion and virtual sites of remembrance. I will be using it as a platform for representation in my research and an active methodological tool in creating a digital archive. I am committing myself to working with the notion of responsibility for creation of memory, taking memory work as if I am producing art.

In my fieldwork, I plan to conduct oral history (the interviews faze) with protestors and digital storytelling as they are a form of resistance to strategic narratives, both national and international in the case of Serbia.



I am doing this research as memory fades - memory fed by personal experience - direct memory, both mine and protestors'. I attempt to capture it before it vanishes with me and other individual men and women or is replaced by new, more pressing memory. The ones who were born later can never have the experiences that others have had, can never catch up with them. To think oneself into the horizon of experience of another generation is a question of education, tact, sensitivity. (Schlogel, 2008) I am trying to use all of these traits and create something for the living by embracing the responsibility for the dead, but do it in a manner that will not develop a remembrance so concerned with the past that it forgets the present. "Devotion to the dead that is not borne by respect for the living is somehow unconvincing." (Schlogel, 2008) Sometimes it is easier to exist in the past, which is transparent and self-contained, than in the obscure present and ambivalence is in Serbia now, practically a lifestyle. An obsession with history could be so that one can avoid the present and for Serbs, it became habitual.

Does the medium make the memory? Within the cross-disciplinary field of memory studies the role played by different media (texts, images, monuments etc...) must be unveiled in the evolution and maintenance of 'memory sites.' It examines the interaction of different mnemonic practices over time, the influence of innovations

within the media landscape on such practices, and their role in the shaping of social memory. I am asking what happens to a historical topic as it passes from one medium to another (from fictional and non-fictional stories, to photographs, to monuments, to commemorative ceremonies, to souvenirs).



Instead of focussing on the archive as the repository of truth (e.g. about national identity), in my research, I intend to 'perform' archive as a result of a way of acquiring knowledge and making art that is specific to Serbia.

The most obvious selection process in the monument of the archive is that of classifying the images to follow the path of selection, it is an attempt to apply and devise a method of representation. Archive saves and protects memory and is a record of desire for preservation. However, the rhizomatic structure of the archive defies any linearity in terms of the selection, gathering, chronology and systematisation of the images and their authors. "The archive does not employ the simple method of adding and including neglected or excluded images," it preserves = pre/serves them. (Milevska, 2006)

The protests' physical, digital and on-line collection will contain the necessity for dual presence of text and image as expected in visual sociology PhD programme that intends to host such projects.

There is no temporal or spatial threshold to this research, even though I am trying to construct one in order to capture a breath of uprising in Belgrade. There is no single introduction to the archive (arche – true beginning), there are multiple and erratic beginnings. When I hit the first entry/point/record, I only found there are more accesses to it, but the sole encounter between the researchers and the sought document/image is what makes research matter. "The archive is a labyrinth with many dead ends and no short cuts". (Milevska, 2006) That search, my research itself is an unstable archive and it is rarely the new factual information that excites me so, as the evident tension in interpretations of the records when placed next to each other.



Here, the difficult question crops up: how do we begin to theorize the archive as a political apparatus? The archive attempted here is political, not only as it is created around a political activity, but the choices that are made for collection as well as its format and methodology of gathering data are political decisions. I will seize this archive and its attendant collective consciousness as a tool for resistance in countering dominant history with resistant narratives. This will be done because the archive is not simply a place to amass memory, but represents a site to make visible a history of the present, which can in turn be used to uproot the authority of the past to question the present - a site of perpetuated renewal and tension within which the past and present can come together.

The archive both includes and excludes - it works to preserve while simultaneously doing violence in doing it. The acts of selection, collection, ordering and cataloguing are inherently violent as deliberated in *Balkanising Taxonomy* essay on the website. Questions of collective memory, nostalgia and the role of reflexivity with respect to the manner in which the archive is constructed/produced/curated will guide my thoughts throughout this theses.

When people actively construct and co-construct their own social reality, fluid and multiple perspectives of the world emerge: there is no single truth. This compels us to assess and re-assess, to interpret and to re-interpret our sociological enterprise. "It is through a continuous oscillation between hypothesis formulation and revision that we move towards understanding." (Coetzee & Rau, 2009) This understanding is precisely what archives can give us.

It is necessary to counter the region's invisibility by making the region's culturally creative past more knowable in accordance with current principles in both historical and art-historical research in order for clichés of Balkan-ness to be alleviated. So, archive of the Belgrade protest is "a must" and it is me who has to compile it.

"Researchers' identities and practices make a big difference. They can't hover above the nitty-gritty power relations of everyday life. Research can only emerge out of them. Tainted by them. Reproducing them."

Cook,I.

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