

DIGITAL HERITAGE: CO-HISTORICITY AND THE MULTICULTURAL HERITAGE OF FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

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COBISS 1.01

ABSTRACT

Digital Heritage: Co-Historicity and the Multicultural Heritage of Former Yugoslavia

The author discusses digital practices of preserving and representing multicultural heritage, first against the backdrop of dominant, official and often (nationally) exclusivist practices of “doing heritage”. The former are understood as tools for preserving, developing and embedding cultural heritage in wider experiential spaces, while the latter often serve as the tool for homogenisation and sanitisation of national cultural and social spaces. To do this, the author focuses on presences and absences of WWII, socialist Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav migrant heritages in contemporary Slovenian digital spaces, i.e. how digital media are used to present and preserve these variegated heritages. In order to interrogate the practices and strategies of defining and managing heritage in the digital media environment, the author discusses several vernacular interventions as re-presences of the Yugoslav past. With respect to the specificities of the techno-cultural environment in which the topic “lives”, the author introduces the concept of “co-historicity” to denote the ways affective media practices facilitate contemporaneous “being” in different, individualised, mediated and mediatised re-presences of the past.

KEYWORDS: digital heritage, co-historicity, digital storytelling, migration

IZVLEČEK

Digitalna dediščina: Sozgodovinskost in multikulturna dediščina nekdanje Jugoslavije

Avtor razpravlja o digitalnih praksah ohranjanja in reprezentacije multikulturne dediščine, v prvem delu o razkoraku med dominantnimi, uradnimi in pogosto (nacionalno) izključujočimi praksami na eni ter digitalnimi praksami »dediščinjenja« na drugi. Pri tem se osredotoči na digitalne prakse, ki so razumljene kot vznikajoče strategije in orodja za ohranjanje, razvoj in vpisovanje vernakularne kulturne dediščine v širše izkustvene prostore. Avtor se osredotoči na prisotnosti in odsotnosti dediščine druge svetovne vojne, socialistične Jugoslavije in postjugoslovanske migrantske dediščine v Sloveniji oz. slovenskih digitalnih prostorih. V ta namen avtor razpravlja o več vernakularnih intervencijah kot primerih prisedanjanja jugoslovanske preteklosti. Glede na specifično tehno-kulturnih okolij, kjer ta tematika »biva«, avtor predstavi koncept »sozgodovinskosti«, s katerim označuje fenomen intervencije afektivnih medijskih praks v sočasnost »bivanja« individualiziranih, posredovanih in mediatiziranih prisedanjanj preteklosti. KLJUČNE BESEDE: digitalna dediščina, sozgodovinskost, digitalno pripovedništvo, migracije

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INTRODUCTION

For ages, humans have been interested in preserving the present moment for posterity, as a reminder of their past grandness and, more recently and increasingly, as a reminder of their folly (if to little practical avail). This can be traced back to the cave paintings and architecture later on, to science and art, but perhaps most closely to monuments, museums, archives, collections... The fascination with things present – yet utterly sentenced to pass into the unreachable past – seems unending and its roots obscured. However, it is reasonably safe to claim that communication down the generations would not have been possible otherwise. Likewise, synchronous communication would have been hampered not least because wider meaning-making and world-understanding and culture-sustaining frameworks – intricately intertwined in the processes of understanding the present and, in dreaming up the future, re-presenting the past (cf. Sobchack 2011) – could hardly be functioning. In communicating with their future, humans in fact use their past to delimit the coordinates of being in the present. John Urry argues “there is no past out there, or rather back there. There is only the present, in the context of which the past is being continually recreated” (Urry 1995: 6). This re-creation is invariably a “victim” of memory politics and any subsequent dealing with the past easily falls prey to (un)intentional politicisation.

Likewise, it is a “victim” of the attempts to define and preserve the (mis)achievements of the past within the canon and, significantly, within the framework of cultural heritage discourse (CHD). Classically, CHD presupposes a fairly rigid classification and eligibility criteria and regulations concerning the definition, renovation and maintenance of tangible and intangible heritage, which somewhat resembles the discourse of the archive. The classical archive, “a formal structure governing transformation of present records into storehouses of the past” (Ernst 2004: 96), establishes a referential framework within which the “truth” about the past can be determined. This approach, however, seems to be shaken and challenged by the rise of digital media communications technologies and related practices of presenting, re-presenting and preserving content. This article thus aims to examine the fractures between approaches to defining and preserving heritage in classical and digital terms.

Cultural heritage as a broader and more specific (hegemonic) framework is globally classified and regulated by the UNESCO charter, which defines heritage as: “our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations [... it includes] sites, objects and intangible things that have cultural, historical, aesthetic, archaeological, scientific, ethnological or anthropological value to groups and individuals” (Concept of Digital Heritage).

National approaches vary. In the Netherlands, for instance, the Culture Heritage Agency says:

Cultural Heritage is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values. Cultural Heritage is often expressed as either Intangible or Tangible Cultural Heritage [...]. As part of human activity Cultural Heritage produces tangible representations of the value systems, beliefs, traditions and lifestyles. As an essential part of culture as a whole, Cultural Heritage, contains these visible and tangible traces from antiquity to the recent past (What is cultural heritage).

In Slovenia, on the other hand, guidelines and regulations as stipulated by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia are somewhat more detailed:

Cultural heritage comprises the sources and evidence of human history and culture regardless of origin, development and level of preservation (tangible/material heritage), and the cultural assets associated with this (intangible/non-material heritage). Because of their cultural, scientific and general human values, it is in the state’s interest to protect and preserve cultural heritage (What is Cultural Heritage?).

The Slovenian definition of cultural heritage seems inclusive enough in its dedication to preserve *stuff*

that matters. Yet, by focusing on sites, materials, and “knowledge, skills, customs, beliefs and values as recognised and realised by people and connected with creation, use, understanding and transmission to current and future generations” (What is Cultural Heritage?), it seems to implicitly exclude the recognition of the fact that “heritage is not a thing, it is not a site [...] heritage is what goes on at these sites [...] it] is a cultural process that engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present, and the sites themselves are cultural tools that can facilitate, but are not necessarily vital for, this process” (Smith 2006: 44). In other words, the definition insufficiently emphasises the dynamics of “turning stuff into heritage” and relies too heavily on “fixing” the meaning and content in space and time. It furthermore fails to acknowledge another important aspect: migration flows in the post-Cold War world have been remarkably rapid and sizeable, meaning that in the era of not only globalising movement of people but also related massive “migration” of consumer products and lifestyles, little attention is paid to the “burgeoning transience” of rapidly changing socio-cultural constellations (or, if not changing, then being radically redefined). This also demonstrates little understanding of the “shrinking of time” (Virilio 1999), the term alluding to the increasing pace of technological innovation and change that leaves no socio-cultural practice unscathed. The corollary of this process is an ambivalent/paradoxical phenomenon: the faster passing of *stuff* into the past (oblivion) and – substantially due to digital communications technologies – excessive re-presencing of the past.

The amount of digital content produced that is relevant for a not insignificant number of people and communities constitutes a vast pool of resources and cultural references – with increasing relevance (or at least presence) of personal accounts – that fit into the concept “digital heritage”. The repositories of stuff created and preserved in digital media environments are essentially the result not only of migration/circulation of content across space but also of the co-creation of space’n’time-travel-like immersive environments (websites, videos, music). In such “volatile” environments the past is continually re-presenced, redistributed, recontextualised and redefined in ways and means previously inconceivable (and I do not want to sound too technotopian).

The past, in digital media representations and renarrativisations and according to the principles of Anderson’s Long Tail effect (Anderson 2004), seems to be finding numerous distributed “consumers” in a distinctly globalised environment. Which means that even within a very specific national setting (such as the Slovenian), it is insufficient to talk about a homogenous cultural heritage corpus resistant to broader processes unravelling in the era of what Anna Reading calls “gloabal time” (Reading 2012).

Throughout the latter part of the second millennium it was print (for its technical capacity enabling a return to a previous place/page) and throughout the latter part of the 20th century radio and TV (for their unique rhythmatization of the (national) everyday) that put and kept, so to speak, the national in place (see Anderson 1991; Briggs, Burke 2005). However, with digital communications technologies and in mediated environments, the urges to forget and to remember become increasingly supported by media technology/ies, inasmuch as they enable/facilitate an environment much more susceptible to decidedly individual moulding. An individual can pretty much (re)urbish her environment according to her preferences, meaning that the media objects surrounding us are there (or not) largely by our own choice.¹

In the vast environment that the internet is, it is not at all that difficult to filter stuff and “design” one’s own understanding of events, the world and also one’s own image of the past that corresponds to one’s attitudes and beliefs, identity formation drives and desires. This effectively means that an individual or a group can readily devise their own likeable/agreeable pasts and “tell a story about it”. The phenomenon of co-habitation of different individualised “histories” I propose to call “co-historicity”; it is discussed in more detail below. And this is intriguing enough.

¹ This is not the place to go into the debate about the surveillance and technologisation of the everyday as a means of establishing a society of control, and I do not mean to imply that the user is entirely “free” to do as she pleases; in line with the general argument I want to emphasise individual agency in co-creating and navigating digital media environments.

Below I first address the implications of the effects of digital media on digital cultural heritage discourse in relation to “classical” cultural heritage discourse, making reference to several projects underway. Then I move on to discuss the implications of using the concepts of media archaeology and digital archive in conceptualising vernacular (multi)cultural digital heritage and co-historicity. Finally, by way of multimodal discourse analysis (O’Halloran 2011) of selected digital media objects, I interrogate two cases of (vernacular) digital cultural heritage that each in its own right illuminate and support the discussion of co-historicity and ex-Yugoslav digital cultural heritage.

MEDIATING AND MIGRATING (DIGITAL) CULTURAL HERITAGE

The transient digital objects and spaces of encounters (websites, blogs, social networking sites, videos, etc.) are increasingly acknowledged as relevant markers and traces of humans’ past lives. Given their “resonance” in cross-platform online (ad hoc) collectivities, such spaces and objects need to be treated as representative “products” of certain historical moments and socio-cultural processes; as such they should be seen as potential harbingers of future heritage discourse. Particularly because rarely are they “mere” objects. Instead users tend to “stitch” the objects together, “infesting” them with a narrative, a story: a digital story. Digital storytelling primarily relies on montage activity and in some cases substantially corresponds with archiving: “Montage”, Wolfgang Ernst says, “is also a way of reading. Perusing the past as information entails modular decoding of the archive and thereby a genuine archival aesthetic, which does not confuse memory with history and /.../ *mentally manipulates* what is there rather than narrating it” (Ernst 2004: 94).

Digital content and online activities – due to their transience, impermanence, incessant mobility and dubious prospects of longer-term preservation – thus deserve the necessary attention.² But the field of digital cultural heritage is still largely unregulated as it is in fact systematically unchartable. As difficult as it is to classify the “classical” tangible and intangible heritage, also due to shifting meanings of relevance and representability, it is far more difficult to provide a working and at least remotely all-encompassing guideline as to what, how and for how long and in what form(at) to preserve (see Cameron, Kenderdine 2010). The criteria of representability that might have worked in pre-digital national settings/states heritage discourses are largely inapplicable in the digital era as they dismiss massive amounts of social/cultural activities. An international approach, yet one which is radically intertwined into bureaucratic procedures (hence inadequate to respond to and chart the changes underway), is UNESCO’s attempt to define digital heritage: “*Digital heritage* is made up of computer-based materials of enduring value that should be kept for future generations” that includes “resources of human knowledge or expression, whether cultural, educational, scientific and administrative [... that] are increasingly created digitally, or converted into digital form from existing analogue resources [such as] texts, databases, still and moving images, audio, graphics, software, and web pages” (Concept of Digital Heritage). In addition, it also stresses that “heritage value may also be based on what is important at a group or community level [...] and] [a]nything that is considered important enough to be passed to the future can be considered to have heritage value of some kind (Concept of Digital Heritage).

2 There are several attempts at digitising digital media environments and related content, likewise the wider category of digital cultural heritage, yet with a notable exception of the Internet Archive’s The Wayback Machine, very little attention is paid to preserving the vernacular. Even the institutional and state-supported attempts at preserving heritage digitally are facing enormous logistical and financial problems. Digital giants, e.g. Google Books, invest significant funds into digitising books, yet it remains far from clear how this digitisation will affect the future availability and hence wider cultural value of such digital artefacts.

Contrary to the bureaucratic eye, the nascent field of digital cultural heritage studies sees the problem unravelling through the questions of DCH as a discourse where the indefiniteness of “enduring value” and “value of some kind” is a tad more complex. It is characterised as a:

political concept and practice; the representation and interpretation of cultural heritage such as digital objects (including questions of aura and debates of “virtual” versus “real”); issues of mobility and interactivity both for objects and for consumers of digital heritage; the reshaping of social, cultural, and political power in relation to cultural organizations made possible through communication technologies (Cameron, Kenderdine 2010).

And this is crucial for understanding and conceiving a wider and more inclusive framework of cultural heritage which might take into account movable content, migratory individuals and evolving technological tools of expression, preservation, and distribution.

In the meantime in Slovenia, a Google search for “digitalna kulturna dediščina” [digital cultural heritage] yields no results that would suggest any kind of state-level strategy, let alone a long-term vision that would lay out guidelines and suggestions on what to do with digital heritage in Slovenia, i.e. how and why at all to bother with the preservation and maintenance of digital heritage. This may not be entirely unrelated to the fact that “heritage discourse in Slovenia remains seemingly homogeneous, unproblematic and consonant with other discourses of the national state ideology” (see Petrović 2014). The user is directed to sites engaged with the digitisation of cultural heritage, predominantly printed and photographic, occasionally audiovisual material. For instance the Ljubljana City Library sees digital cultural heritage as “digitised sources and evidence of human history and culture, regardless of origin, development and level of preservation” (Digitalna kulturna dediščina). Sadly, born-digital cultural heritage is left entirely off the radar.

Still, the Library lists four DCH projects: *dLib.si*, *Slovenian Digital Library* (enabling searching through articles, photographs, maps, posters, sound recordings); *KAMRA* (regional portal combining information and access to digitised content, full texts, information, programs and projects); *Europeana* (European digital library enabling access to more than 15 million audiovisual and textual objects in addition to content provided by museums, archives and multimedia archives) and *DEDI* (the first Slovenian digital encyclopaedia of natural and cultural heritage).

Interesting and timely as these projects are, they do not seem to be fully aware of their potential. *DEDI*, the digital encyclopaedia, for instance, contains 457 objects, but this is only half way to fully acknowledging another dimension of “heritage in the making”.³ Much like *Kamra* or *Europeana* (an international project), this endeavour shows very little awareness of the “production underway” of new content that classifies as digital heritage. In effect, this is a passive repository, much akin to a classical archive. Admittedly, *DEDI* features an “Add heritage” button, but the feature is extremely user unfriendly and not very attractive.

Europeana, on the other hand, takes a different approach in that the portal works as an open platform that is also cross-platform networked, with a mission to “create new ways for people to engage with their cultural history, whether it’s for work, learning or pleasure” (About us). It aims to make “cultural heritage openly accessible in a digital way, to promote the exchange of ideas and information. This helps us all to understand our cultural diversity better and contributes to a thriving knowledge economy”. *Europeana* thus gives room for expressing individual, unsolicited, unrefined personal accounts of the 20th century periods, particularly the Great War and the collapse of socialism in Europe.

Here I must note that these sites are to a great extent organised as archives and primarily focused on historical sources, and as the internet is primarily an audiovisual medium before it is an elaborate-text one, the appeal lies in visualisations, i.e. content that can communicate more information in a single

3 I am borrowing this phrase from the “Heritage in the making; A site on heritage dynamics in the former Yugoslavia” blog, <http://heritageinthemaking.wordpress.com/>.

unit: scans of original photographs, images, or of photographs of buildings and structures. Which is perfectly legitimate and not an object of criticism; I just want to emphasise the apparent lack of awareness of the complexity, elusiveness and general inability of state-level (or privately but insufficiently funded) organisations/initiatives to engage with digital heritage as a phenomenon that is particularly vulnerable to time, funding and particular interests. To put it differently, relevant cultural, historical and increasingly scientific production does not end with official datasets, collections, and archives... it requires and deserves a life after that.

There is no need to emphasise that there is more to digital heritage than one might assume from state- or international-body sponsored, homogenous, to some extent nationally exclusivist attempts that through the “add heritage” option do in fact encourage individual participation (mostly through sharing photos or stories).

What is persistently left outside the (inter)national canon are privately/low-scale/collectivity initiated digital interventions, websites, collections, videos, music, not least the repositories of social networking sites,⁴ i.e. user activities... and interventions dealing with topics that represent a (sometimes indistinguishably mundane) complementary and additional part to the institutionalised interventions.

Of course, it would be a tantalisingly difficult project to just “list” or classify all interventions, while the result would be overwhelmingly impossible to navigate and make sense of. If we, for instance, correlated mundane online activity to pub-talk, it would be easy to dismiss as ephemeral and relatively limited in terms of effect. However, given the scale of the presence and the sheer mass of stuff online and our everyday exposure to digitally mediated content it would be imprudent (and this is a euphemism) to dismiss online activities and dynamics as un(trust)worthy and limited in terms of wider socio-cultural relevance and resonance... even a bizarre idea can find a sizeable audience (Anderson 2004).

The potentialities of digital communications technologies for bottom-up interventions advise us to look for cultural heritage elsewhere than just in the official canons. One way to address (digital) cultural heritage and/or its techno-cultural complexity, particularly the essential emphasis on the vernacular, transient, migratory, is to approach it through the concepts and practices of vernacular digital archives and media archaeology.

MULTICULTURAL HERITAGE, DIGITAL ARCHIVE AND MEDIA ARCHAEOLOGY

The theoretical and practical implications of using media archaeology (Huhtamo, Parikka 2011; Ernst 2013) and vernacular digital archives as concepts in dealing with digital memory practices and in charting individual, bottom-up interventions into re-presenting the past are promising. For our purposes, the two are also seen as crucial practices and tools used in navigating and understanding digital media (but applicable to the wider debate of engaging with (media, art) records of the past). Below I propose to apply the conceptual framework of media archaeology and digital archiving in order to validate the proposition of vernacular digital cultural heritage.

The concept of a vernacular digital archive is substantially related to issues of preservation, canonisation and curation of digital content. Unlike classical archiving and musealisation, which “[i]n choosing what to preserve as traces of the past [...] have traditionally valued objects and texts, selected for their enduring cultural value, over ephemeral manifestations of cultural heritage” (Haskins 2007: 402), digital archiving practices, at least ideally, open up spaces for a more individual-based, inclusive, (arguably) democratic practice that engages with the mundane: this, for instance, is most clearly visible in digital

⁴ This is not to say that prior to the internet private collections did not exist nor that they were any less left off the radar.

memorial videos (found for instance on YouTube, but also on blogs and websites) where the authors and visitors (as co-creators) engage in the practice of digital storytelling (Lambert 2013). As they do so, they in fact create an archive. And as such archives are non-sponsored, individually motivated and driven by affective engagement with content and other users, such vernacular archiving seems to enable a more personal, de-institutionalised engagement. I nevertheless remain cautious enough not to underrate the issues related to data overabundance and the critical problems with legitimacy, authenticity, interpretive authority, reliability and attention that such vernacular archiving practices may facilitate.

Unlike the classical archive, the vernacular digital archive evades the alphabetised order of a database and alters the mission of preservation of the past, which is no longer the domain of high interpretive authority but effectively a situation where interpretive authority is deauthorised, i.e. relegated to the individual user or collectivity. Here I do not want to equate archiving and cultural heritage, but they are substantially related and to a certain extent overlapping in that cultural heritage items/content work as a sort of archive or are presented as such, particularly in case of digital storytelling. This is all the more applicable, as I discuss below, in numerous bottom-up interventions in digital media environments.

Moreover, the digital/digitised past is much more easily stripped of chronological “factuality” and is much freely edited and manipulated (not that it was not before, but the scale and invasiveness of “unauthorised” interpretations is unprecedented). Memory, remembering and vernacular archiving and cultural heritage discourses empower individuals to co-create micro-narratives and micro-archives based on excavated content. Smith’s argument applies:

The real sense of heritage, the real moment of heritage when our emotions and sense of self are truly engaged, is [...] in the act of *passing on and receiving memories and knowledge*. It also occurs in the way that we then *use, reshape and recreate* those memories and knowledge to help us make sense of and understand *not only who we ‘are,’ but also who we want to be* (Smith 2006: 2; italics added).

Digital media technology significantly empowers and enables individuals, minorities and migrants to co-create stories, databases and archives of their memories and the everyday in order to assert their identity claims and positions within wider socio-cultural coordinates. Crucially, the engagement with technology enables their pasts and histories and cultural backgrounds, often excluded from the homogenised national (in this case Slovenian) setting, to be externalised and embedded into the socio-technical tissue. The intertwining of their “lived presences” in digital objects informs the discussion about multicultural heritage (derived from vernacular DCH) and co-historicity.

MIGRANTS IN SPACE-TIME: DETERRITORIALISING HERITAGE

To grasp the increasing presence of variegated and fragmented individual renditions of the past that in many respects deserve to be treated as vernacular digital heritage, the prism offered by co-historicity and multicultural heritage can prove useful. Not only because it enables us to grasp the complexity of online actions, interventions and externalisations, but primarily because these interventions speak of the encounters of individuals and collectivities with media objects, mediations and mediatisations (Lundby 2008) of their own pasts and presents through mundane communication activities. By co-historicity I refer to the condition of the present everyday life immersed in digital communications (environments) that presupposes being in an age of ubiquity and abundance of mediatised and mediated pasts, histories and memories. The latter are seen as facilitators of an emergent co-present, simultaneous histories or historical contemporaneity. Co-historicity presupposes an individual engaging with content and media environments, who can “edit” her own story and understanding of the past, or if you like she can

“subscribe” to creating a certain digital re-presence. Effectively, in digital media environments, numerous micro-histories co-exist and challenge the “grand” history. Digital re-presence presupposes navigation among different media objects which are, in the case of social networking sites, readily publishable as layers of statements that give us a set of information about user preferences, beliefs, allegiances, ideological inclinations, etc. In an increasingly deterritorialised world where grand hi/stories are no longer the domain of the state but rather of personal preferences and consumer habits, this means that the very idea of the national is at best seriously questioned. Moreover, the fragmentation of national media spaces coincides with the emergence of individualised media environments, which contributes to the perception that individualised stories and histories are as important or relevant as are the collectively agreed upon ones (see Parikka 2010).

Given the publishing and accessibility opportunities of digital communications technologies, co-historicity promises to explain not only the technological condition but to shifting meanings of understanding being in deterritorialised spaces as well. The very idea of deterritorialisation fits nicely with the characteristics of contemporary communications practices and devices and is also applicable to the condition of increased human migration both in space and time.⁵ As painful as this may be, technology enables the carving out of spaces for co-creating vernacular heritage discourses that would otherwise not have been possible or at least not as publicly present.

Re-presencing seems to define much online activity explicitly or not explicitly related to the past. Below I look at several cases of digital storytelling that qualify as cases of co-historicity, digital archiving and digital (multicultural) heritage.

First let us discuss cases of digital storytelling as a practice that combine media archaeology and results in vernacular digital archives: a practice of making short audiovisual narratives that use music, video, photos and text to tell a story about an aspect of the Yugoslav past. Apart from being digital stories, such videos also qualify as vernacular digital heritage in that they re-presence media bits – and through this practice also important aspects of Yugoslav-era everyday life, politics, ideology and mythology. Typically, videos like this feature images depicting topics related to the anti-fascist struggle during WWII, i.e. resistance fighters, Marshal Tito and other visible personae, etc. or more “popular” stuff such as actors/actresses, musicians, TV ads, posters, trademarks. The edited selection of images (sometimes also moving) and occasionally titles and captions are overdubbed with a song (pop, rock, revolutionary, etc.).

One case of a vernacular digital memorial, which due to copyright infringement is no longer available on YouTube, was made by a user whose grandfather, a partisan during WWII, passed away in 2009. The digital memorial featured images of the user’s grandfather, generic images depicting combatants, scenes of liberation and a video excerpt of a man breaking his shackles. The whole video was overdubbed with Branimir Štulić’s (former frontman of 1980s Yugoslav rock band Azra) cover of “The Partisan” (made famous by Leonard Cohen). This was primarily a memorial, an intimate one at that, but it became a site of remembrance for many other users who visited it. An ad hoc community formed around this video and participated in the practice of co-creating and re-presencing a joint (if dissonant) vision of the past. This vision was based on the intertwining of the very personal/intimate *raison d’être* for the memorial with wider implications that arise from “migrating” such stuff into digital public-ness. In a very intriguing manner this digital memorial brought together a very private externalisation of grief within a participating community that externalised a shared common interest/respect for the WWII heritage which lies not only in derelict bunkers and cenotaphs but also in eyewitness accounts (WWII Heritage), memories and stories. What makes the story about WWII heritage particularly interesting in the post-

5 By “increased migration in time” I refer to the fact that due to rapid technological innovation and changing cultural values the “displacement” from the chronological becomes much more visible and problematised (cf. Huyssen 1995), which supports the claim that we are more than ever living in an elusive present and thus perceive the passing of time not just as aging but as leaving/migrating. However, the past, that “foreign country”, relentlessly keeps returning to colonise the present.

socialist (Slovenian and Yugoslav) context and in the discussion about digital heritage is its status as a resource of historical and cultural capital and conflict.

The tangible and intangible “offline” WWII heritage has been identifiably and quite successfully contested by the processes of the dissolution of the country, including topographical changes and the “left-to-ruinism” of Yugoslav iconographic monuments and architecture. However, the unregulated and “unbordered” (to some extent, particularly when compared to the actual territorial borders) digital media environments have provided a space for the externalisation and circulation of content that still openly cherishes the “acquisitions of the revolution”.

What in post-1991 political and media discourses (which decidedly influenced heritage discourses) became unwanted heritage (partisan resistance) was previously defended as a pillar of independence (Slovenia) and sovereignty. This purge effectively stripped the new nations of their heroic past. At the same time digital media provided a space to challenge the homogenising historical discourses through voicing the chapters and aspects of the Yugoslav past (WWII and post-war). This includes the anti-fascist legacy, the social revolution and the implementation of a system that at least declaratively provided an emancipatory project that facilitated modernisation, industrialisation, and women’s rights. Additionally, the heritage of WWII and Yugoslav anti-fascism also includes values such as resistance, solidarity, and honesty, which are the prevailing themes in the comments spurred by the video: interestingly, the video itself proves to be a galvaniser of discussions that diagnose the present condition through detecting the qualities of the past. As of late 2012, this digital site has been deleted from YouTube and the entire collectivity with it, which opens up questions of preserving vernacular digital content: individual engagement and collective participation in sharing memories.

The other case is less intimate, if no less affective and perhaps a bit more easily determined DCH, as it seems to have a more elaborate agenda behind it: the SecanjaCom YouTube channel, dedicated to: “Lepa secanja na stara dobra vremena: domaci i strani filmovi, TV, poezija, proza, sport, emisije za decu, crtani filmovi i jos mnogo toga” [Pleasant memories of the good old times: domestic and foreign films, TV, poetry, prose, sports, children’s shows, animated films and more] (in Serbo-Croatian) (SecanjaCom). The people that run the channel are practitioners of media archaeology who search for forgotten stuff that defined and was Yugoslav popular culture and everyday life, but in the process of the dissolution of the country became unseemly, offensive or just fell out of the canon (Assmann 2009). Significantly, it is primarily driven by the nostalgia for stuff Yugoslav (apart from the YouTube channel there is also a “Dobra stara vremena” [The Good Old Times] Facebook page and a secanja.com website). The way the secanja.com cross-platform activities are organised suggests seeing their engagement also as archiving and in fact curating objects of vernacular cultural heritage. At present the channel contains two interesting videos about childhood and youth in the former Yugoslavia: “Detinjstvo” [Childhood] (Detinjstvo) and “Mladost” [Youth] (Mladost). The first one starts with a caption: “Do you remember when we were young?” and clearly addresses the generations that grew up since the 1960s and had the chance to experience Yugoslav socialism and now live in one of the post-socialist countries or as emigrants. It contains images of items and products that marked the lives of children of socialism, from beverages to hula-hoops, marbles, cartoons, games, etc. The video is overdubbed with Ivo Robić and Zdenka Vučković’s 1958 “Tata, kupi mi avto” [Daddy, Buy Me a Car]. The second video uses Mary Hopkin’s “Those Were the Days”, but it changes the focus from children’s to young adult activities: going to the movies, “loving” foreign and “domestic” actors/actresses and films, listening to music on cassettes and vinyl and Radio Luxemburg, TV series, going to the seaside in a Zastava 750, travel, etc. The thing is that these videos are not just the artefacts depicted but the transfer of their socio-cultural meanings (or at least the attempt to do so). Their relevance lies at the crossroads of Ernst’s montage and Urry’s recreation of the past, not least visible in the juxtaposition of domestic and foreign actors/actresses and films which positions the reference to the Yugoslav past within a broader referential framework. Thus, for a 21st century user that comes across the video, it may serve as a condensed renarrativisation and in fact an archive of items that marked the youth of several generations of Yugoslavs.

Now the question is what qualifies such interventions as heritage? Where is the supposed heritage value? In the digital object as such or in the content or in the emotions the object might stir?

Most of these videos that can be found on YouTube feature scanned images. Where the story diverts from the presupposed “sterility” of cultural heritage is in the individual intervention, which leaves a vestige of messiness, disorderliness, punkishness. For the most part, the videos are not professionally made and have little “artistic value” as such, but they possess a certain quality that positions them in the realm of re-presenters, re-users and re-shapers of the Yugoslav past (cf. Smith 2006: 44). Cases such as these in fact come close to Smith’s argument in that they facilitate, mobilise and “engage with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present” (ibid.). What is more, digital storytelling based on media archaeology not only creates an affective vehicle with which to either confront or succumb to the nostalgia for youth/Yugoslavia. In fact, such videos effectively re-frame cultural codes, practices and consumer products into a radically different present. And it is such radical reframing or counterpoising – spanning different levels of the processes of growing up, but also different value systems and political regimes (which is mostly implicit in such videos) – that effectively deterritorialises heritage and “deuniversalises” History.

If the above cases are based on media archaeology, editing and dubbing to create a memorial or a “digital storytelling exhibition”, I would now turn to another phenomenon that opens up different aspects of digital archiving and (multi)cultural heritage. Since early 2008, the group GojkoAjnkula/MZP Video Produkcija (GA), based in Jesenice, Slovenia,⁶ has been making and uploading DIY videos on YouTube which present short sketches featuring amateur acting, scripting and shooting (GojkoAjnkula). The group consists of second-generation migrants from the former Yugoslav republics who have the privilege of sharing both the “domestic” and “foreign” cultures, and have managed to do so with a decent amount of humour and irony. So far they have made some 60 sketches in which the stories and characters refer to contemporary commonplaces in post-socialist Slovenian society. Given their “national background”, their sketches portray characters “de abajo”, former compatriots that are often stereotyped to fit in with and reinforce the image of the “čefur”.⁷ To emphasise this aspect the authors use language and attire corresponding with the generally recognisable image: specific types of track suits, posture, jewellery, distinct pronunciation and characteristic idiom. While not all sketches address the issue of migration explicitly, the topic is implicitly present throughout GojkoAjnkula’s production. Apart from several sketches that deal explicitly with the topic, a disclaimer at the beginning of a number of sketches: “MČZ opozarja ljudem s slabim želodcem in kakršnokoli nestrpnostjo kot tako priporočamo, da se pred ogledom videa posvetujejo z očijem in mamico. [Warning! People with sensitive stomachs or any kind of intolerance are advised to consult mummy and daddy before watching the video.] (Carice). This ironic statement indicates a full acknowledgement of the position of GA as creators of content and content as such, as well as an understanding of the anticipated audiences and the socio-cultural environment within which the sketches “live”.

Here I do not attempt to do an in-depth analysis of the ways they deal with and present the issue of migration and minorities, but rather aim to discuss the phenomenon in the light of multicultural or vernacular digital heritage. The GA sketches can hardly be seen as having an agenda to archive and present heritage. However, on a certain level this is what they do: the idiom, the attire and the topics chosen make reference to the Yugoslav past and the Slovenian present, to migrant backgrounds and “integrated” presents. Presenting among others the topics of “cool chicks”, “swear words”, and “migrant parenting”, GA effectively reframe the stereotypes of our “former brethren” into a socio-cultural situation that has seen several such attempts in the past (perhaps most famously the TV series Teater Paradižnik

6 Jesenice is a town in north-western Slovenia that at its heyday was one of the most important steel and iron-working centres in the former Yugoslavia and hence also an attractive destination for intra-state migration which resulted in a sizeable Croat, Bosnian and Serbian community.

7 Čefur (pronounced “che’foor”) is a derogatory Slovenian term applied to people from former Yugoslav republics.

[Tomato Theatre], Naša mala klinika [Our Little Clinic] etc.). Moreover, this reframing is particularly interesting from the perspective of how cultural content, practices and elements associated with certain “foreignness” in Slovenia manage to draw a remarkable amount of attention. For instance, “Kletvice” [Swearwords] plays out the stereotype about the alleged fertile culture of swearwords in the Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian languages (Kletvice), as opposed to the repressed Slovenian tradition of swearing, which draws on the fairly rich Slovenian tradition of perceiving other Yugoslav languages as a potential linguistic threat to the Slovene that became particularly palpable due to the sizeable migration of workers from the mid-1960s onwards (cf. Mlekuž 2008).

Thus the GA sketches can easily be dismissed as jokes. They do funny stuff and they obviously have fun making the sketches. But is there anything more “serious” to them? Can they be seen as cases of vernacular DH? For one thing, the migrant aspect to GA sketches clearly endows their endeavours with a spice of multiculturalism. Not just because the team includes members of different nationalities, but predominantly because of the way they play out the stereotypes associated with the socio-cultural construction of the *čefur*. This is not least apparent in the “Čakija Noris” [i.e. “Chuck Norris”] sketch where a Slovenian reporter comes to a remote Bosnian(?) village in search of Čakija Noris’s son only to find his own father, who at one point served in the army in the reporter’s home town and apparently slept with his mother (Čakija Noris). The reference to serving the army in the former Yugoslavia is still a strong cultural and memorial topos in Slovenia, but in this instance it explicates the fluctuation of people who became “problematic” only after the disintegration of Yugoslavia, while prior to that enabled mundane and multifarious exchanges which have had important corporeal and symbolic consequences. However, and not to diminish the wider historical background of this particular migrant (and mixed marriage) situation in post-socialist Slovenia, it may be said that what GA are doing in terms of heritage has more to do with the present than with the past. GA’s activity effectively results in an archive of the present: much more than they “do” the Yugoslav past, they do the Slovenian present. They deal with topics that challenge the presupposition that the Slovenian cultural make-up and hence heritage is hegemonic and mono-national. The popularity of their videos and the resonance of the topics demonstrate that the multicultural component (particularly in relation to the former Yugoslavia) of the Slovenian present is an existing phenomenon “on the ground”. As such, the GA phenomenon can be seen as a distinctly born-digital one that manages to turn the present socio-cultural atmosphere, “lingo”, specific “migrant dress code” and certain topics, through jokey audiovisual storytelling, into a vernacular digital archive of multicultural heritage.

In light of the digital aspects, GA’s video interventions and the team’s YouTube channel can furthermore be seen as a meeting place of people who watch their videos and thus participate in an ad hoc collectivity. As can be deduced from the comments, this collectivity is largely based in Slovenia, but GA has also reached other former Yugoslav countries. Crucially, through their digital media appearance, the “disclaimer” quoted above and the approach they take to the topics they deal with, GA are positioned at the margin of official identity discourses. However, they effectively create a digital space within which their message circulates and multiplies. What is more, their sketches significantly establish the different facets of Sloveneness as a socio-cultural fact. In the broader picture, these sketches reframe and re-present the Slovenian present as significantly co-created by ethnic minorities and also co-shaped by cultural heritage emanating from living in socialist Yugoslavia. The sketches and user comments, in addition to presenting an archive of the socio-cultural climate of the 2010s, also operate as an archive of user reactions, which brings an important emphasis to the entire story: the user/participant is delegated an important role in the co-creation of the practice of vernacular heritage.

CONCLUSION

The experience of a common/shared Yugoslav past and the neglected relevance of the post-WWII period seem to be the decisive element in much Slovenian post-socialist era material dealing with memory

and remembering, but also in co-shaping the vernacular digital cultural heritage. Likewise, this experience is to a great extent also the motivating agent of the co-historicity present in contemporary daily political abuses, as it is in many post-Yugoslav vernacular digital interventions that prove an attractive means to stimulate the debate about the past. At the same time the past, the memories but also mediated visualisations and audibles are re-presented and relaunched into the digital environment that to a significant extent defies the limits of cotemporaneous presence at any one "heritage site". Through the principles of co-historicity the (national) past is fragmented and the so-desired grand narrative to keep the national-collective in place contested. On the other hand, the collectivity that forms (ad hoc) in and around a "digital heritage site" is provided (and each member is significantly a co-creator) with a space and "material" to re/produce the collectivity and the individual's relationship to others and the commonly shared past. Here one may object that neither of the cases is Slovenian per se. But this is where co-historicity and the fragmentation of the national come into play: the "original" or physical location of the heritage (cyber)site is irrelevant in that the digital media environments enable migration between different ideological, trans/inter-national or any other settings. What matters, then, is that through vernacular digital heritage territorially and temporally dispersed collectivities can engage with heritage as part of their daily digital communications routines.

This is the case in both the phenomena discussed above. In the case of vernacular digital memorials, the divisive line of co-historicity largely runs through the interpretation of WWII and the post-war period and is most radically visible in user comments. Digital media thus enable the proliferation of promulgations of factually questionable interpretations of the past and by doing so also create a digital heritage discourse which cannot be dismissed on the grounds of factual errors, but has to be considered as a *topos* that matters to a significant number of people who might well see the material re-presented as heritage.

In the second case, co-historicity may not be as explicit, yet the reference to the same historical period remains strong (if with a different emphasis). What the GA sketches exemplify is the multicultural aspect of present-day Slovenia. They open up a space for users to enjoy the jokes, but as they do so they also contribute to a collectivity that at least acknowledges a non-exclusivist approach to certain idioms and fashions: thus they are readily admitted into the vernacular multicultural heritage discourse. In other words, such digital interventions contribute to multiculturalising heritage, in the sense that heritage becomes understood as multicultural and the other way around, that what is accepted as multicultural heritage contributes to understanding the socio-cultural reality as intrinsically non-homogenous, fragmented and open.

Another aspect common to both approaches is the vernacularisation or the process of giving voice to individuals and groups that in the era of mass media had little access to the power-dominated public space. Vernacularisation in this respect refers to the modes and tools for re-presenting the past through accessible media technologies. Thus in the era of "micromedia", airtime is much more easily conquered, although the question of attention is crucial in valuing any activity. The opportunity to emanate a voice thus radically questions the ways something is canonised and presented as heritage, i.e. in such a (media) environment of burgeoning vernacular archives and sites of multicultural heritage it is particularly difficult maintain a solid generally applicable narrative.

Finally, given that the production of knowledge is increasingly decentralised and relegated to the individual, the definition of what is a relevant and adequate heritage becomes increasingly stripped of top-down interpretive authority. In exchange we are left with a number of interpretations that each in its own right find legitimacy in a fragmented, territorially and sometimes temporally dispersed collectivity.

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