АКСИОЛОГИЯ СОВРЕМЕННОГО МАССМЕДИЙНОГО ДИСКУРСА: КРИТИЧЕСКИЙ ДИСКУРС-АНАЛИЗ

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DISCOURSE OF CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL SPECTACLE IN SERBIA

The political discourse is all about engaging of the political leaders with the rest of the community. The fact that community also has some power over constructing what political discourse will look like does not mean that the majority of what is said contributes to a healthy political environment nor that it is based on what the interest of the public good is. However, the political discourse always shows the charts of the whole society because the language is a structural system based on what is prevalent in the cultural background of the given speaking community. Reality shows, news storytelling and other hybrid genres in Serbian media make a specific context for political inputs. The politicians become actors, and their public speaking becomes structurally specific performance. The way they speak and perform in public changes the expected matrix of communication and genre. Therefore, political spectacle is the most imperative element of contemporary political discourse in Serbia.

Key words: *political discourse, media, spectacle, rhetoric, genre*

1. Introduction

In contemporary Serbian reality, it is no longer unusual for hybridization of media genres to happen, which conditioned further complex changes in the whole society. Political factors adapt to media genres in which they have the interest to appear. Even without this adjustment, it is clear that Serbian society experiences profound discursive changes that are not dependent only on internal factors. Due to the change of the political system in 2000 and the innovations provided by the non-governmental sector, the neoliberal model was not applied only in political institutions, but also in the media and, consequently, in daily communication. The individual person in the media as well as in politics is shown as a general example of the people, and the politicians present themselves as regular individuals, just the same as the others – with one small difference – power.

In this paper, the concept of political spectacle in the public discourse of Serbia will be theorized. In addition to the views of some authors of the Anglo-Saxon school who wrote about the spectacle, the stances of Serbia's authors who notice a change of discourse towards the spectacle of politics in the public domain will also be listed. Only a few examples will be given, because the totality of the spectacle is overwhelming and could be analyzed in a more extensive publication.

The basic types of spectacle in Serbia are based on a heroic character, story of an average citizen, endangerment of the community by an outside factor or a threat by the institutions to the people. Examples will be presented further in the text, after theoretical explanations.

2. Theoretical approach

Guy Debord wrote about the spectacle as of a solidified, petrified image of the whole society, which is always positive: what is good – will appear and what appears – must be good [Debor 2003]. According to Debord, societies of modern production are presented with immense spectacles. Everything that once existed became only a representation; but the spectacle is not just a set of images, but a social relationship mediated by images, a view of the world transformed into an objective force [Debord 2012: 4].

Having considered that Debord is the theorist of Marxist critical theory, he thinks of the uneven distribution of goods in society as the main cause of all trouble – the spectacle is both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production. It is not just a decorative element of the world, but the center of real social *unreality*. By its form and content, the spectacle serves to fully justify the conditions and goals of the existing political system. So, it might be said that the spectacle is not opposed to reality, it is its product. The spectacle is immune to individual human activity or corrections, and it might be opposite to the dialogue, which goes well with the intentions of political rulers to stay in power.

However, the presentation does not depend on the ones who are presented, so the spectacle becomes independent, self-sufficient and able to restore its power. Spectacle is a technological version of the expulsion of human power into "one-sided" element – communication is a one-way road; the category of the sacred and mythological in the political spectacle has always existed, and in modernism it is not only allowed and possible [Debord 2012: 25], but utterly desirable. The protagonist takes on the role of the hero, who is the only one to save the community, so the rest of the people can take smaller parts in the play or supporting role to the starring one. There can be no freedom without activity, and in the spectacle, all activity is forbidden – activity is reserved for those in power, for those who are in the limelight of the stage.

The screen turns out to be a new place of trading of words, where rhetorical ceremonies are established in a specific scenario. Being guests in the news, or participants of reality shows, the political speakers portray their views of the desirable image of society and have the impact on the voters based on their public authority. Every spoken word has a rhetorical background of special relations and hidden meaning. Thus, in the media, a politician will often show himself in a kind of inauthentic ceremonial, in a kitsch rim. In such a presentation, no unpredictable rhetorical case is allowed. The rhetorical possibilities are bound by stereotypes and the conversation is reduced to verbal rituals. “There is very little true dialogue there. Dialogue ceased to be the circular flow of words” [Stanojević 2009: 72].

The theoretical origin of the term *spectacle* comes from the fact that the postmodern world has lost its unity; it is common language which bridges those divisions by having a one-way relationship with the center that keeps them both isolated, but so united. The merchandise is now the only thing that can be seen; it is impossible to distinguish values from goods, satisfaction from survival [Debord 2012: 42-44]. Power and leisure – the power to decide and the time to consume – are parallel parts of the process that are not questioned. The dictatorship of bureaucracy must not leave a trace of freedom as this could cause its end; that dictatorship is maintained by constant violence – all must be identified with the

magic of an absolute spectacle or disappear [Debord 2012: 64]. "The narration is fantasy – fantasy establishes reality. This phantasm itself is not something that distorts the reality, as it is for the classical definition of ideology, but through the concealment of the real constitutes reality" [Balažic 2006: 139].

The spectacle, even though essentially dogmatic, does not create a factual dogma. What creates an abstract power in society also creates disillusionment, so "looking back on history means to look back on power" [Debord 2012: 134]. The spectacle, as the main social organization of paralyzed history, paralyzed memory, the abandonment of any history founded in historical times, is actually a false awareness of the epoch. The culture is the general sphere of knowledge and the presentation of all experiences in a historical society, so it has the power to generalize, existing "both as an intellectual division of labor and as an intellectual labor for division" [Debord 2012: 180].

Ideology is the basis of class thought, it's not just fiction but a distorted awareness of reality: Debord makes a parallel between ideology and schizophrenia – individuals do not recognize each other, they live in an illusion, society is really divided even though it seems it is not; the spectacle annuls the boundaries between itself and the world [Debord 2012: 212-219]. The solution Debord sees is a typical Marxist view: self-emancipation and dialogue, but a dialogue that needs to take up arms to impose itself [Debord 2012: 221].

Jakobson also spoke of schizophrenia in the public language. On the case of poetry of Helderlin, the poet who was proclaimed to be schizophrenic, Jakobson proved that the dialogist nature of the poet has changed, which provoked structural changes and a "terrible style" that the public was not used to, which is the main reason why he was declared to be schizophrenic by the society. The main objection to his poems was that "it lost its sense of style and the difference between the language of poetry and everyday speech" (Jakobson, 2012: 59), but in fact it was about structural innovations and ingenious creativity. Jakobson did not write about the spectacle, but only about attributing schizophrenia to someone who deviates from the established language, while Debor saw schizophrenia in the spectacle.

Helderlin might belong to insufficiently or too spectacular prominent individuals whose work breaks the monotony and finesse of the spectacle, so he is a threat. "A loner is always a threat to both history and utopia because his individual vision endangers the official version of the historical events and the projection of the future, because it slowly and effectively, nonviolently creates ornaments with grandiose narratives: especially with the power that comes unknown where it changes the circumstances, but it remains unchanged itself" [Gordić Petković 2015: 192]. In the same period as Foucault, Jacobson (independently) wrote that discourse serves to monitor and punish throughout institutions, including (psychiatric) hospitals.

Some other French authors also spoke about the spectacle in the media and politics. No theorist concludes that the spectacle can have a positive dimension, so Fransis Bal observes: "The spectacle is continuous, complete, and impeccable" [Bal 1997: 103].

Another theoretician in the tradition of Marxist theory dealing with similar topics is Frederick Jameson, an American literary theorist who writes about the social unconscious because ideological consciousness is actually distorted

consciousness. “The political unconscious deals with the dynamics of the act of interpretation and assumes, as its organizational fiction, that in fact we never have the text directly in front of ourselves, in all of its freshness, as a matter of itself. On the contrary, the texts almost always come before us as something already read; we receive them through the deposited layers of earlier interpretations or – if the text is completely new – through the accumulated reading habits and categories that we developed from these inherited interactive traditions” [Jameson 1984: 8]. Therefore, it is not about the research of the text, but about the interpretative frameworks in which the social unconscious is created and shaped. History is a necessity for necessity, not as content, but as a form of event – which makes it a narrative category of a political unconscious, which never provides any new knowledge, but a re-contextualization. Jameson considers the process of storytelling the central function or instinct of the human mind in which the presentation and representation are mutually managed. Referring to Marx's understanding of language as the fixed reality of thought and word as a kind of reality abbreviations, Jameson argues that the world as a content does not only experience a change of form, but the action of the symbols in the world actively changes its content. Genres are “literary institutions or social agreements between a writer and a certain audience, who should determine the proper use of a particular artwork” [Jameson 1984: 126]. So, when a political narrative happens in the media, it becomes the structure of the political spectacle.

It might seem that the narratives provide the opportunity for an individual to enter the public scene as himself/herself, but the curvature of the content is conditioned by the structural changes of the genres which portray that content: what is represented gets covered and hidden by the simulation of it, because it is a spectacle, and not real representation. The order of the simulacrum, according to Baudrillard, makes superficial impressions and makes greater distance between the sign and signed, between the image and originals [Bodrijar 1991: 27]. The simulation logic has no contact points with the logic of facts, Baudrillard writes, since “facts are born at the intersection of the model” [Bodrijar 1991: 21], which is why there is a pervading of meaning. The events are ambiguous and deliberate, not because of their own insignificance, but because there is their symbolic replica that takes on this significance [Bodrijar 1991: 56].

According to Baudrillard, the content is presented as a message, but the actual message – the structural change of society is conditioned by the media. Power, which is not sure of the dominance in that game of characters, can cause false crises and spread panic, after which the scenario of authority instead of its ideology is set [Bodrijar 1971: 31]. Society liberated from any sense, according to Baudrillard, becomes a deception because the truthfulness of the published information is proved by the communication system [Bodrijar 1971: 92]. He gives an example of reporting on terrorism, where the media both criticize and communicate the “raw fascination” with this act as a spectacle [Bodrijar 1971: 88]. “The depersonalisation is essentially organized, at first, as something miraculous" [Stanojević 2011: 158].

However, there are views that Baudrillard has grasped the ways in which society changes, but that this is not necessarily a negative outcome of the development. “The Baudrillard's thesis about turning machines and beings into the screen does not have to be a chilling picture of our world, but perhaps only with

new words, a call for an interactive journey to the media and media content – in the hope that the passion for adventure is not a sign of naivety, but an impenetrable thirst for knowledge" [Gordić Petković 2009: 13]. Besides curiosity, there is also a race for viewers and advertisers within media and voters and sponsors within political parties, so it is not unusual to liberate the standards of structures and forms of speaking in public, which turns into a competition in making a more memorable and politically influential spectacle.

Human interest story involves texts that tell us about an individual human experience that is related to a significant political topic. Narrative journalistic genres used to be just reportage and comments, sometimes the interviews too, but today there are many hybrid genres in which storytelling can happen, including news. When comes to narrative in public speaking, "the reality is broken through the prism of the writer's vision" [Životić 1993: 136]. Feature is a relatively new concept in the theory of journalistic genres and includes some facts with elements of TV reportage, where the emotional involvement of journalists and the description of the circumstances by the image of the individual hero of the story are evident. If the source or the main character is a political person, it becomes a political spectacle. The author is not accused for using soft mechanisms of expressing, because the genre supports it; the opportunities for using vivid style is seemingly not authoritarian and the richness of the language allows comments which would not be allowed in the traditional media genres. Personal reactions don't need a factual background because the most important is actually who said it: if it is a remarkable politician, he/she becomes a main character in the scenario.

However, enriching the informative genre with meaningful narration made a new genre (feature), but that did not suppress the real news genres. The media do not help politicians to get the spotlight intentionally: "Feature is a TV genre to be earned by honest reporting, because it relies on the author's interpretation" [Tu 2015: 17]. "Even though many authors often equate the story with a reportage, it is a typical interpretive genre that sublimates elements and facts and fiction in itself, and its main function is to humanize, both to educate, and to entertain" [Kljajić 2009: 45]. So, when it comes to weighing down the role of the media in making of the political spectacle in Serbia, they are an influential part of making it, but not by choice or belief, but mostly because of the coherent structural changes that are both politics and media going through.

3. Examples of political spectacle in public discourse of Serbia

As it was said in the beginning of the paper, the basic types of spectacle in Serbia are based on: a heroic character, story of an average citizen, endangerment of the community by an outside factor or a threat by the institutions to the people. They are successfully portrayed throughout the media, so it is a part of the general discourse, and not only political; the spectacle is in the intersection between media genre innovations and political desire for empowerment of the mythological thinking about the people in power.

Exaggerated, sparked and hyperbolical story of the leader saving a child from a sudden and severe winter storm in 2014 is the example for spectacle based on a heroic character. There was no need for the deputy prime-minister to go into the helicopter and go to the endangered village to save that one child, but it was an easy opportunity to make it a political spectacle. Mentioning children is always

emotional and captivating, especially when the leader shows up suddenly and saves the day. Reactions to this event were both positive and negative: the parody on the internet showed the leader running with a child in his arms, just like he really did, but with a Superman cape added. That parody, too, was used both for promoting and diminishing of the leader in the political community. The main idea was to portray a leader as a hero, which the other politicians also used in the years coming. It is interesting to notice that none of them used it solely, but they were all in pairs: because it was not desirable to appear as an equal hero as the leader is, so it is better to be one of the two small heroes than to endanger the role of the main hero.

Story of an average citizen might be explained via example of an old lady during the big flooding later in 2014. The lady was specific because she climbed a tree to save herself and spent the night there before the rescuers came to help. Even though she is not a political figure, nor she openly mentioned any names, she speaks simply and with strong dialect, so she is seen as a woman from the people; besides her interesting storytelling about the night on a tree and flooding, she mentions the institution of rescuers and also the town municipality as saviors. She herself is the dominant sign in the political discourse that people should be proactive to save themselves if the institutions are late, but also to be thankful to the institutions that it all ended well eventually.

Endangerment of the community by an outside factor is usually used to legitimize some risky decisions in international politics. Not stating, but asking "Do you want us to be bombarded again?" or "Do you want to go bankrupt?" makes no narrative, but a spectacle. The citizens both with journalists become the *enemies* that are opposed to the government, even though usually nobody said anything similar. Besides the using of contrast as a strong message (*you are either with us or against us*), rhetorical question makes responsibility for the implication lower and the old fears of bombing or high inflation that happened in Serbia in recent history becomes the emotional trigger for the people to agree with everything that might prevent the repetition of the circumstances. It makes a *status quo* at its best.

Threat by the institutions to the people usually comes from bureaucracy, and not from the heroic politicians, stars. New laws that are not about big capital investing in Serbian projects are explained by office officials that appear in public, it seems, once in a lifetime for that specific purpose. Usually, they use the language as if they are the politicians – with lots of phrases, speaking in contrast, talking extensively without answering the question, but almost always finishing with a morally inadequate conclusion that citizens must obey to the new rules, even after the academic and professional community react against the decision. The typical phrase is "this is going to happen, whether you approve it or not, or else", giving an open threat in detail to those who oppose. In 2018, the government issued slogans for increasing of procreation. The slogans were simplified and rhyming like in children books, but the message was "stop talking, make babies cry", as if parenthood is only about making a baby physically and not raising it afterwards. The threat in this slogan is within the "stop talking" part, where instead of addressing the problems of unemployment and small incomes, the state decides to tell the citizens to stay quiet and obey. Also, the threatening context was because

officials speculated that another possibility for the procreation goal is to ban abortion, so the state "granted" the citizens a decision they will like more. The statements usually give an estimation that those who have arguments against the decision are of different ideological background and are against the ruling party, and not against the nature of the decision itself. One of the most debated statements was of the mayor who didn't express condolences for tragic loss of two lives in the flooding in 2014, but instead he stated that citizens have a lot to learn from the example because "that is what happens when you don't listen to the authorities".

4. Conclusion

In contemporary context, Serbian political discourse is well established, compared to all the other systematic structures of society. Media genres are changing towards feature and other emotional genres, so does the media language. The politicians are also adjusting to the desireable language in the media, but also have a prospect of their own. Mutual changing of the media and political system are making enough space for the political spectacle to happen unhindered.

The idea of spectacle exists for centuries and was proclaimed by the politicians always, because the narrative thinking is innate to any human, in any period of history (and will be in the future). The political discourse is helping the political leaders to engage with the rest of the community, and the political spectacle is the most intriguing, easy and fun way for all. The language is a structural system based on what is prevalent in the cultural background of the given speaking community, so any change is a sign of deeper societal changes. Reality shows, news storytelling and other hybrid genres in Serbian media make a specific context for political inputs. The politicians have become stars, actors, and their public speaking becomes structurally specific performance. The way they speak and perform in public changes the expected matrix of communication and genre. Therefore, the political spectacle is the most imperative element of contemporary political discourse in Serbia.

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