IKONA – TIMEBOX (Essay by Sebastjan Leban)

What is going on today in the field of the economy of the visual? What symbols, strategies and concepts are we faced with in the era of digitalization and, above all, what are the consequences of the passage from the cinematic to the digital mode of production. This last has changed the capitalist machine into a fluid, grid-like matrix introducing new codes into its mode of operation. Codes that have, following the new territorialization and the process of digitalization, upgraded their analogic function. As a result, we are not only being colonized at the material level, but are as well being forced into epistemological thinking imposed on us by the system. This is occurring through new media, TV ads, reality shows, in short, through our everyday reality, where we are being passivized up to the point that allows us to still be socially productive, yet politically sterile.

If until the first half of the 20th Century capital was regarded as a multilayered structure, the second half, marked by globalization as a strategy for a new domination of the world, can be defined as the major shift that changed the multilayered system of capital into a grid-like coded capitalist matrix. Through centuries, capital has absorbed all alternative systems by subjugating them, at first only to supersede them later, and finally, to permanently delete them. This is especially true, in Europe in particular, also for socialism, which saw its symbolic collapse in the fall of the Berlin Wall. In Slovenia, for example, the idea of a socially just society upon which, through self-imposed contributions, the dream of a different world was built, lasted for 50 years or so before the socialist ideology was supplanted by the ideology of capitalism. What is worthy to analyse is the change that has been produced in the transitional period when Slovenia (and later on the rest of the Eastern Europe as well) shifted from the socialist mode of production into the capitalist mode of production. This change occurred not only on the economical level, but flooded the whole social structure as well.

In order to be able to see this new ideology at work, I propose to analyze the notorious case in Slovenia of the company Steklarska nova, where we were able see the true nature of the transitional modified interpretation of the capitalist mode of production. The laws of the capitalist mode of production and its ideology, where the capitalist invests the means of production and by this appropriates the surplus value, were intentionally changed by the converted ex-socialists in power. In the case of Steklarska nova, the means of production were invested by the State, due to the fact that the company is owned by the State. By following the patterns of capitalist appropriation and its mode of production we can claim that in the case of Steklarska nova, the surplus value should be returned back to the State and not distributed among the members of the company’s Board of Directors whose investments of the means of production were null. The reason why they were able to appropriate the surplus value lies in the fact that they were appointed to their positions by one of the political parties, by nepotistic operating system or simply by the fact that they were in that position when the transition occurred. Steklarska nova is not an isolated case, but quite the opposite; it is a symptom of the transition from socialism to capitalism.

The first major problem of socialism was that it took for granted that, by creating a parallel structure to capital, this last could be abolished. However, this is erroneous; for capital is thus only abolished temporarily and within a strictly limited territory, outside of which it freely expands and further upgrades. The second problem was that a socially just society in socialism existed more or less in the idea only, since class classification was a reality in practice, same as in capitalism. Despite the slogan “we are all equal and enjoy equal rights,” the differences among classes in socialism were more than present. This is also one of the reasons why, with the advent of neoliberalism, the former socialist society accepted the capitalist model without hesitation, taking on its ideology and beginning to systematically destroy all connections with the previous ideology and the State. And so, after twenty years of transition, instead of a social form of capitalism, we are now faced with a degenerated version of neoliberalism. The former socialist society and ideology, enhanced by the capitalist logic and ideology, has developed deviations of capitalistic appropriation. This last occurred in Slovenia through reduction of social transfers and appropriation of public ownership that formed in socialism through the system of self-imposed contributions. As a consequence, it has sharpened class differences and, what is worse, it has taken necropolitics as its mode of functioning, to which testify the innumerable examples, including the Steklarska nova case, that we have witnessed recently in the building sector and in other sectors.

In the transition period, that is, in the passage from the socialist into the capitalist regime, one can also observe a change in the iconography through which the previous regime could exercise its ideology. Radovič deliberately confronts us with the icon of the star and the attributes it assumes in communism and in capitalism, along with the specific message and specific ideology it bears. The belief that the advent of democracy and the consequent demonization of communism has brought an end to ideological apparatuses is mistaken, and it comes as a result of the mediation of capitalist values. In reality, ideological tools have upgraded to such a degree that it makes it possible today to speak about the simultaneous agency of the ideological and repressive apparatuses of the State and capital. The project *Icon – Timebox* places the icon of the star at the forefront of ideological (re)production. The icon thus serves as an analysis of the ideological apparatus of the State and capital. By placing two periods, two ideologies and two dictatorships in the same space, Radovič opens the way to new interpretations of both the system of visual codes used by these regimes as a means of their representation, as well as Althusser's differentiation of the field in which ideology operates. *Icon – Timebox* functions so as to temporarily abolish the symbolic and real difference between communism and capitalism, exposing their common denominator that finds its most evident expression in the economy of the visual. The icon becomes at once a means of admiration, liberation and oppression.

The latest financial crisis has clearly shown the degree of autonomy and the power of capital. We have witnessed this to such a degree so as to pose a legitimate question: Is it capital that serves the State or vice versa? We are thus confronted with the crucial shift of the paradigm of power where capital not only appropriates the surplus value, but has become the point of execution of power. Involved in this case is, of course, the complicity between the State and capital that has not only changed the point of execution of power, but has upgraded the existing – in Althusser’s words – ideological and repressive apparatuses of the State. These are now upgraded by ideological and repressive apparatuses of capital that, in contrast to ideological and repressive apparatuses of the State – where, as stated by Althusser, we have to do with two separated corpuses, each of which lead here and there its own politics – form a uniform politics of the domination of capital. This difference is crucial for understanding the formation of the new field of ideology. Properly speaking, this is the basis on which Radovič not only places the icon of socialist ideology against the capitalist one as a warning, a challenge or to make us think, but also to analyse the internal relations of the formation of the new ideological upgrading.

References:

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