

## HOMO LUDENS

*Tekst za monografiju "In Trance We Trust" Srđana Veljovića o Džoniju Rackoviću  
(scroll downfor English)*

Biti ambivalentan - zvuči prilično jednostavno, prazno opšte mesto koje tek treba oblikovati. Tabula rasa, nedovoljno ispisana mentalno-emotivna mapa u kojoj ni jedna misao ili emocija nisu ništa intenzivnije od one druge. Stav koji *a priori* tvrdi da nemamo stav ili da ih pak imamo nekoliko, i koji ne traži nikakva dalja objašnjenja i dopune. Ona mu, istina, možda ni ne trebaju jer kako neki kritičari tvrde čak ni kritika od koje se neki stav ipak očekuje "ne mora da bude premisa dedukcije koja se zaključuje konkluzijom "ovo ili ono treba da se radi"<sup>1</sup>.

Ipak, osećati se ambivalentno je daleko komplikovanije, ako ne i granično frustrirajuće, budući da pretpostavlja da o nekoj osobi, pojavi ili situaciji istovremeno imamo drugačija a neretko i sasvim oprečna mišljenja. Manje izražena i slabijeg intenziteta, ambivalencija može lako da se transformiše u nešto veće, u pravi antagonizam, ali i jedno i drugo svedoče o postojanju unutrašnje šizme u pojedincu, koju je nekada teško i verbalizovati. O prisustvu rasepa sa čije se obe strane stoji istovremeno. O čvorištu u kom se oprečnosti susreću i osećaju intenzivno, gde je sukob internalizovan i gde ne postoji samo jedan ispravan odgovor.

Pozicionirana negde tačno u tom rasepu, ili čak iznad njega na tački najvišeg pada, i ravnomerno udaljena od obe strane nalazi se neuhvatljiva, liminalna i pomalo zazorna ličnost performans-umetnika Nenada Džonija Rackovića, koji je za sve godine delovanja na sceni uspeo da otelotvori i održi živim taj ikonični amalgam suprotnosti dok konstantno šeta na tankoj niti iznad tog procepa. Od abjektivnosti do gotovo kulta-ličnosti, od odbijanja i zaziranja do mitologizacije, i nazad.

### **"Goli čovek-barbarogenij"<sup>2</sup>**

Kad god se govori o Rackoviću, uvek se nekako čini suvišnim praviti posebno raspricane prologe i dodatno objašnjavati o kome je reč i zašto on nesumnjivo jeste pionir *novog vremena* i *novog senzibiliteta* na beogradskoj sceni. Ako bi to pak bilo potrebno, to bi svakako bio i veoma nezahvalan zadatak jer dovodi u pitanje šta i koliko sagovornik zna o Beogradu i njegovoj umetničkoj sceni poslednjih decenija ukoliko mu je Džoni zaista promakao.

Racković, kao para-umetnička ličnost i semi-mitološko biće utkan je u toj meri u narativ ove sredine (kao što je i ona utkana u njega) da posle toliko godina suživota nije baš sasvim lako odrediti ko je tu na koga više uticao. Poput medijuma kroz koji prošlost i sadašnjost neprestano struje i komuniciraju, tragovi i putokazi ka nekom istovremeno starom i sivevremenom Beogradu prolaze kroz njega i otkrivaju se i u pričama i u senzibilitetu. Dekadencija osamdesetih, razočaranja i nasilje tvrdih devedesetih, liminalne dvehiljadite. I nema dileme da on jeste pravi predstavnik nekadašnjih "odmetnika" od pravila, koji se ne ugledaju na uzore i idole, ako ih uopšte i imaju. Onih odstupnika od odmerenog ponašanja i ispunjavanja društvenih normi čisto zarad njihovog ispunjenja.

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, "Questions of Method", u: James Faubion (prir.) *Power: Essential works of Foucault 1954-1984*, tom 3, London, Penguin, 236.

<sup>2</sup> Ljubomir Micić, Ivan Goll, Boško Tokin, *Manifest Zenitizma*, Zagreb, 1921, 3

Neprijatno, žestoko, ogoljeno, često destruktivno ali gotovo uvek spontano i iskreno delovanje i suočavanje sa ličnim i društvenim agonijama je za njega jedini prihvatljiv modus operandi. Kao lice društvene agonije, svih animoziteta i frustracija koje se tu talože, nasilja, nekada čak i sasvim bukvalno, Racković je u svom delovanju gotovo traubovski uspostavio svoju performativnost kao “životinjski teatar koji nastaje iz duboke želje, ulrika životinje u svakom od nas (animus). Performer transformiše tu želju u akciju (animer) i ako je njegov performans uspešan, životinja u čoveku je uzbuđena. Pozorište mora da probudi ljude iz zimskog sna”.<sup>3</sup>

Upravo takvo delovanje je i dovelo do toga da se pred likom i delom Rackovića stari kriterijumi ugibaju ako ne i u potpunosti slamaju, i da se, delujući sa prostora izvan sistema i kanona, on uspostavi kao jedan od aktera scene čije je samo-izvođenje sopstva apsolutno netaknuto i nekontaminirano ikakvom strategijom. Osim konstantnog pomeranja granica, osluškivanja i opipavanja samog sebe i “emanacije zdravog, babarskog dinamizma” koji je na tragu zenitističke potrage za onim najljudskijim u čoveku, drugih predumišljaja čini se gotovo da nema. To ga je i učinilo neponovljivom umetničkom pojavom na lokalnoj sceni ali i urbanom legendom, u susretu sa kojom se aktiviraju različite nepredvidive mogućnosti od oduševljenja do zaziranja, pri čemu njegovo delo konstantno podseća da “da bi bilo slobodno, delovanje čoveka treba da bude umetničko i zasnovano na igri”<sup>4</sup> čineći Rackovića *par excellence* primerom Homo Ludensa.

***Warning! This is a very heavy play- it's real long- it will leave you feeling sad and empty***<sup>5</sup>

„Ostvarena između bića i privida, igra nije potreba neslobodnog, već slobodnog čoveka. Ko se plaši njenog reskog bleska i njene neposrednosti, ko je prestravljen njenom magičnom neočekivanošću, ko je izgubljen u dodiru s njom, taj se odveć plaši i života i smrti. U svojoj pustolovini i stalnoj neizvesnosti, igra nikad nije nađena, jer se ona stalno nalazi i neprekidno otkriva”.<sup>6</sup> Promišljajući igru na taj način, moglo bi se zaključiti da je potreba za njom unutrašnji perpetuum mobile koji se nalazi u samoj suštini slobodnog bića i pokreće ga. Slobodan je onaj koji se igra i igra se samo onaj koji je slobodan a o igrivosti Rackovića Homo Ludensa bi se moglo pisati naširoko budući da je tu veštinu doveo do savršenstva i postao njen korifej. Ipak, ono što je u međuvremenu postalo manje jasno i što je danas nemoguće ne zapitati se je da li Homo Ludens jednako uživa u svojoj igri kao nekada? Da li nakon decenija provedenih igrajući se na isti način igru još uvek jednako dobro razume? Ume li da joj odredi granice, domete, ciljeve, pa čak i posledice? Zna li da predvidi njeno trajanje ili je postala pomalo nalik na crvene cipele pa nagoni na dalje i još iako je onaj koji ih nosi već sasvim iscrpljen?

Jer to jeste sasvim realna opasnost i najklizaviji element igre. Ona ima blistave mogućnosti i nosi u sebi čestice neverovatnog potencijala. Istovremeno, jednako opasna kao i blistava, igra je neverovatno moćan, i nestvarno zavodljiv agens koji svojim moćima može da nadigra i prevaziđe sopstvenog tvorca, kao i da razori i samu sebe. “Igra koja ne zna za svoje granice, a realizuje se van uma i pravila, uvek rizikuje da se pretvori u nasilje.”<sup>7</sup> i ono što se neumitno nameće kao pitanje je u

<sup>3</sup> Wayne Traub, “The Animal Theatre Manifesto” <https://www.der-theaterverlag.de/tanz/aktuelles-heft/artikel/jenseits-12/>, pristupljeno 17. maja 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Miško Šuvaković, “Teorijski performans”, Maska br. 1-2 (90-91), Ljubljana, 2005

<sup>5</sup> Naziv rada Ivana Ilića, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Ratko Božović, *Lavirinti kulture*, Čigoja štampa, Beograd, 1998, str. 181.

<sup>7</sup> Divna Vuksanović, “Homo Ludens ili strast ka slobodi”, str 133

kakvom je odnosu Homo Ludens sa sopstvenom igrom danas? Koliko je svestan podele uloga, pravila, vremena u kom je nastala i ovog u kom je, naizgled neumorno, nastavlja a za koje je možda pomalo i prevaziđena?

U svom tekstu "Poslednja decenija: Umetnost, društvo, trauma i normalnost" Anđelković i Dimitrijević i više nego dobro primećuju da je "Rackovićeve aktivnosti neuhvatljiva u nekom institucionalnom smislu jer su njegove akcije često neklasifikovane kao performansi i dešavaju se *ad hoc* u odnosu na konkretna zbivanja. Za Rackovića je karakteristično brisanje distance između njega samog i onoga što se pojavljuje kao recidiv njegovih svakodnevnih aktivnosti"<sup>8</sup>. Međutim, došao je trenutak kada umesto da je dajemo ekscesivnim glavnim junacima pažnju radije pomeramo i zastajemo na konceptima kao što su "granica" ili "distanca". Na pomenutom recidivizmu, i pitanju na koga i kako utiče jer važno je znati da Homo Ludens u svojoj igri ipak nikada nije sam.

Za nastavljanje igre i konstantno utemeljivanje legende o sebi njemu su neophodni saučesnici, pomoćnici, publika. Hteli oni to da budu ili ne. Uostalom, i pomenuto "brisanje distance" podrazumeva postojanje dve strane i neke granice između njih. Nekog međuprostora predviđenog za razmenu, komunikaciju i pristanak, za koji se već po automatizmu pretpostavlja da Homo Ludens ima apsolutno pravo da ga ugrozi ako ne i naruši jer tako nalažu pravila njegove igre. Ostali mogu da se prave da im to ne smeta, može stvarno da im ne smeta, ili da im smeta i to i iznesu uprkos velikoj mogućnosti da će zbog toga biti etiketirani kao "nedovoljno slobodni", "nedovoljno urbani", "nedovoljno šta god".

### ***Koktel, šljokice i žad...<sup>9</sup>***

U tom kontekstu postavlja se pitanje: ukoliko druga strana ne želi da bude deo Homo Ludensovog neprekidnog performansa, da li joj je ostavljena mogućnost da bira da ne bude, kao i zašto se čini da je sve manje onih koji žele?

Tu leži verovatno i najveći problem savremene percepcije Rackovićevo delovanje i suština promene koja se desila. Ne radi se o negiranju njegovog dela, niti o diskreditovanju, da ne kažem *cancelovanju*, Rackovića kao umetnika, ni o neznanju ili nerazumevanju toka performansa, niti se dovodi u pitanje sloboda izražavanja, već se poziva na promišljanje i odgovornost. Radi se o tome da je *a priori* proglašavanje svakog Homo Ludensovog čina umetničkim performansom i normalizacija bilo koje vrste uznemiravanja pod krinkom urbanosti i umetnosti, ne samo besmisleno nego i opasno, i nema baš nikakve veze sa atmosferom današnjice. Vreme opsednuto idejom o ingenioznom, po pravilu, *umetniku*, kojem pod tom titulom sve prolazi, koga treba negovati ohrabivanjem, i podržavati sve njegove prekomernosti jer su "uobičajene" pripada prošlosti.

Sadašnjost je, na sreću, *novije vreme* od onog *novog vremena* čiji je Racković predstavnik. U njemu stasava nova generacija koja drugačije izražava svoja nezadovoljstva. Koja je senzibilnija u odnosima i prema okruženju, koja ozbiljno promatra seksualnost i vrlo dobro zna granice i da uznemiravanje počinje u trenutku kada osetimo neprijatnost jer ih je neko prešao. Generacija koju više brine istraživanje sopstvenog identiteta nego građenje mita o nečijem, koja nije puno

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<sup>8</sup> Branislav Dimitrijević i Branislava Anđelković, "Poslednja decenija: Umetnost, društvo, trauma i normalnost" u *O normalnosti: Umetnost u Srbiji 1989-2001*, Beograd, 2005, str 104

<sup>9</sup> Pesma "Žad" Tamare Popović (Tam), beogradske muzičarke generacije Z

zainteresovana za idolatriju generalno jer pre igraju za tim “jednakost i kolektivitet”, kojima surovi pankerski fazon baš i nije đir, i koje legende urbane kulturne elite ne zanimaju previše.

A Homo Ludens? On svakako može da nastavi sa svojom igrom. Sve dok razmišlja i o njenim posledicama. Njegova performativnost je posebno snažna i potentna zato što podseća na konstantan ponovni prolazak kroz traumu. Kompulzivno ponavljanje istog obrasca ponašanja verovatno sa idejom da će se jednom dogoditi apsolutna katarza i oslobođenje. Ipak, ukoliko ona uporno izostaje, ili ukoliko se već nekad desila a sve nakon nje je ostalo samo puko ponavljanje poznatog paternog ponašanja, nije li možda vreme za prelazak na sledeći nivo? Za malo više introspektivnog sagledavanja ili čak možda i neku sasvim novu igru.

## ***HOMO LUDENS*** ***(English)***

To be ambivalent – seems quite simple: a blank commonplace that has yet to be shaped. A *tabula rasa*, an insufficiently inscribed mental/emotional map in which no thought or emotion is more intense than the other. An attitude *a priori* stating that we either do not have an attitude or that we have a few, with no further explanations or amendments required. Actually, they are perhaps not even needed because, as some critics claim, even criticism (from which certain attitude is expected) “need not necessarily be the premise of deduction that ends in conclusion ’this or that should be undertaken”<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, feeling ambivalent is far more complex, even borderline frustrating, since it presumes that we simultaneously have different and very often contradictory opinions about a person, phenomenon or situation. Less obvious or slight ambivalence can easily be transformed into something bigger, into real antagonism, but they both demonstrate the presence of an internal schism in an individual, which can at times hardly be verbalized; the presence of a split whereby the individual stands on both edges at the same time; the hub at which the contradictions meet and are felt intensely, where the conflict is internalised and there is more than one true answer.

Positioned somewhere precisely in that split, or maybe even above it, at the point of the most extreme drop, and evenly distanced from both edges, there is this elusive, liminal and somewhat obnoxious personality of the performance-artist Nenad Johnny Rackovic, who has, during many years of his presence on the scene, managed to embody and maintain that iconic amalgam of opposites, constantly balancing on the thin thread above that split. From abjectness to just about the personality cult, from rejection and shying away to mythologising, and back.

***“The naked man - barbarogenius”<sup>11</sup>***

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<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, “Questions of Method”, in: James Faubion (prir.) *Power: Essential works of Foucault 1954-1984*, vol.X

<sup>11</sup> Ljubomir Micić, Ivan Goll, Boško Tokin, *Manifest Zenitizma*, Zagreb, 1921, 3

Whenever the subject of Rackovic is discussed, it always seems superfluous to make elaborate prologues and further explanations as to who he is because he is without a doubt a pioneer of a new era and new sensibility of Belgrade scene. Should it however be necessary, it would certainly present a treacherous task; namely, if anyone actually failed to notice Johnny, that in itself would certainly cast a shadow of doubt over that person's familiarity with Belgrade and its art scene in the recent decades.

Nenad Rackovic, as a para-artistic personality and a semi-mythological being, has been inwrought in the narrative of this society (as has the society in him) to such an extent that, after so many years of coexistence, it is not easy to tell whose influence was greater. Like a medium that the past and the present constantly flow and communicate through, he channels the footprints and directions to a certain, at the same time old and contemporary Belgrade through him, and they surface in the stories and sensibility. Decadence of the eighties, disappointments and violence of the tough nineties, the liminal two thousands. There is no doubt that he is the true representative of the former "renegades" against the rules, those that do not look up to role models or idols, if any; renegades against the moderate behaviour and compliance with the social norms just for the sake of compliance.

Unpleasant, intense, stripped naked, often destructive, but almost always spontaneous and sincere action and confrontation with personal and social agonies is the only acceptable *modus operandi* for him. As a representation of social agony, of all the animosities and frustrations deposited there, violence, sometimes even quite literally, Rackovic has in his action established, in an almost Traubian manner, his performativity as an "animal theater that is born of deep desire, the cry of the animal in each of us (animus). The creator transforms this desire into action (animer) and if his performance is successful, the animal in man is aroused. Theatre must rouse people from their winter sleep".<sup>12</sup>

It was exactly this kind of action that led to the point at which the old criteria bend, if not break altogether, when applied to the persona and work of Nenad Rackovic, and at which he, acting from the domain outside of the system and canon, establishes himself as one of the actors of the scene whereby performance of self remains ultimately untouched and uncontaminated by any form of strategy. Apart from the constant shifting of boundaries, sounding and feeling himself out, and "emanation of healthy, barbarian dynamism" that follows the steps of zenitistic search for that most human in a human being, there seems to be no further premeditation. That is what singled him out on a local scene as a unique artistic phenomenon, but also made him an urban legend, that ignites a variety of unpredictable reactions when faced with it – from delight to shying away from it – whereby his artwork constantly reminds that "in order to be free, man's actions need to be artistic and based on play"<sup>13</sup>, making Rackovic an example *par excellence* of *Homo Ludens*.

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<sup>12</sup> Wayn Traub, "The Animal Theatre Manifesto" <https://www.der-theaterverlag.de/tanz/aktuelles-heft/artikel/jenseits-12/>, accessed 17<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Miško Šuvaković, "Teorijski performans", *Maska* br. 1-2 (90-91), Ljubljana, 2005

***Warning! This is a very heavy play- it's real long- it will leave you feeling sad and empty***<sup>14</sup>

“Carried out between a being and an illusion, playing is a need that belongs to a free man. Those afraid of its sharp flash and its immediateness, frightened by its magical unexpectedness, lost in contact with it, are scared of both life and death. In its adventure and constant suspense, play is never found, as it is continually being detected and uncovered.”<sup>15</sup> When considered in this way, it could be concluded that the need for play is an internal *perpetuum mobile* that is situated in the very essence of human being and that propels it. He who plays is free and only the free can play, and one could write extensively about the playfulness of Rackovic *Homo Ludens* since he has polished this skill to perfection and became its coryphaeus. Still, what has in the meantime become less obvious, and today one cannot help but wonder, is whether *Homo Ludens* enjoy to play the way he used to. Does he still, after having spent decades playing in the same manner, understand the play equally well? Can he set the boundaries, the range, goals, or even consequences? Can he tell how long it is going to last or has it in a way become like the red shoes that force the one who wears them to continue even though he is exhausted?

Because this presents quite a real danger and the most slippery element of the play. Play does possess brilliant possibilities and carries within the particles of incredible potential. But at the same time, being equally dangerous as it is brilliant, play is extremely powerful and inconceivably seductive medium capable of outperforming and outgrowing its maker, and destroying itself as well. “The play that does not know its boundaries, and if it is performed in the absence of mind or rules, it inevitably carries the risk of turning into violence”,<sup>16</sup> and the question that inevitably follows is what kind of relationship *Homo Ludens* has with his own play today. To what extent is he aware of the casting, rules, the era in which it was created and the contemporary one in which he, seemingly tirelessly, continues the play, even though it is perhaps a bit outdated?

In their article “The Last Decade: Art, Society, Trauma and Normality”, Andjelkovic and Dimitrijevic notice very precisely that “Rackovic’s activity is elusive in an institutional sense as his actions are often not classified as performances and happen *ad hoc* depending on the actual circumstances. It is characteristic for Rackovic to wipe out the distance between himself and that which remains as a relapse of his everyday activities”<sup>17</sup> However, we have reached the point when, instead of giving the spotlight to excess protagonists, we are inclined to move the attention and halt by the concepts of “barrier” or “distance”; at the previously mentioned relapses, and the question of who and how do they affect, because it is important to know that in his play *Homo Ludens* is never alone.

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<sup>14</sup> The title of Ivan Ilić’s work, 1997.

<sup>15</sup> Ratko Božović, *Lavirinti kulture*, Čigoja štampa, Beograd, 1998, page 181.

<sup>16</sup> Divna Vuksanović, “Homo Ludens ili strast ka slobodi”, page 133

<sup>17</sup> Branislav Dimitrijević i Branislava Anđelković, “Poslednja decenija: Umetnost, društvo, trauma i normalnost” u *O normalnosti: Umetnost u Srbiji 1989-2001*, Beograd, 2005, page 104

To be able to keep playing and reaffirming his legend, he needs accomplices, assistants, audience. Whether they like it or not. Besides, even the mentioned “wiping out the distance” entails two sides and some kind of barrier between them; some interspace meant for exchange, communication and consent, but it is automatically assumed that *Homo Ludens* has the exclusive right to compromise or even violate it – because that is what the rules of his play dictate. Others can pretend that they are not bothered by it, they can really be bothered, or be bothered and state so in spite of the high probability that they will be labeled as “not being free enough”, “not being urban enough”, “not being enough whatever”.

### ***Cocktail, sequence and jade ...<sup>18</sup>***

In this context, the question arises: in the event that the other party does not want to participate in *Homo Ludens*'s ongoing performance, do they have the option to refuse, and also, why does it appear that there are fewer and fewer of those who do want to?

This is where possibly the biggest problem lies when it comes to contemporary perception of Rackovic's actions and the essence of the change that took place. It is not about the negation of his work, nor it is about discrediting, or rather *cancelling*, Rackovic as an artist; it is not about ignorance or lack of understanding of the course of the performance, nor is the freedom of expression being questioned – it is an invitation to thoughtfulness and responsibility. It is about the fact that *a priori* declaring every act of *Homo Ludens*'s an artistic performance and normalization of any kind of harassment by hiding behind urban or artistic mask, is not only absurd but is also dangerous, and has nothing in common with today's atmosphere. The era obsessed with the idea of an ingenious (invariably) artist, who can get away with anything holding that title, who is supposed to be nurtured by encouragement, and whose all “usual” excesses are applauded to, belongs to the past.

Present time is, fortunately, “newer” than the new era that Rackovic is a representative of. A new generation matures in it and it expresses its discontent in a different way. Generation which is more sensitive in its relationship with the environment, which views sexuality with seriousness and knows very well where the boundaries are and that harassment starts the moment one feels uncomfortable because someone has overstepped them. Generation more concerned with exploring its own identity than with building a myth around someone else's, that is not very much interested in idolatry in general because they would rather play in a team of “equality and collectiveness”, who do not dig harsh punk style and are not too interested in the legends of urban culture.

And what about *Homo Ludens*? He can certainly continue with his play. As long as he considers its consequences. His performativity is particularly powerful and potent because it reminds of the continual, repeated experience of trauma. Compulsive repetition of the same pattern of behavior, probably with the idea that the absolute catharsis and liberation will eventually happen. However, if this fails time after time, or if it had already happened once and all that was left after that is mere

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<sup>18</sup> Song “Jade” by Tamara Popović (Tam), Belgrade musician of generation Z

repetition of the familiar pattern of behavior, isn't it time for shifting to the next level? Time for little more introspection, or even a whole new play.