

Sandcastles in Sound: Memory and Popular Music on the Shores of Oblivion

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1. Introduction

I remember when my parents played The Beatles to me, asking if I could distinguish the voices of John and Paul. It was an impossible feat for me at that time as I heard music and song as a uniform and dynamic sonic entity. It was not until my early teens that I was able to distinguish properly the different instruments and voices that made up a song. At that time, I was entering audiovisual culture with attention and admiration, listening to more music, watching documentaries, collecting posters, recording music off radio to audio cassettes, buying CDs, flipping through booklets, photographs, album artwork, and so on. Later still, I came to prefer the time-afflicted second-hand LPs with the hisses, cracks and sellotaped dusty covers that left my fingers dry. The 'sonicity' of music is deeply affected by visual elements, and it is a door to imagine the past. For example, 1960s music documentaries are still one of the pervasive visual referents of the flower-power subculture, just as black-and-white WWII footage is decisive for imagining what that past 'looked like' and how it 'sounded'. For a long time, I thought that before WWII people walked at a slightly faster pace, clearly a mediated effect of Chaplin's gags. Another occasion that reveals the understanding of the role of sound, music, and the visual in imagining the

past came when I first heard Amalia Rodrigues' "Que deus me perdoe". I understood none of the lyrics and knew nothing about the singer or *fado*. Still, the song invoked in my consciousness an image of a place in the past: it was in black and white, a wooden boat gently rocking at a stone pier below an old stone house overlooking a Mediterranean bay. The experience was unreal, but it was truly felt. It was here, yet long ago. It was not my past but, in this song's universe, it was. Or it could have been.

Years later, living among excessively mediated sounds and images that affect the form and content of interpersonal and social communication, these memories made me question how we can imagine (the past) with mediated, recorded music. In the following I discuss this issue through an analysis of a selection of songs by Yugoslav singer-songwriter Arsen Dedić (1938–2015) that are, melodically and lyrically, evocative in terms of mnemonic imagination so much so that they indeed act as cinematic music of the everyday.¹ I probe Dedić's songs as a mnemonic networking device, the interplay of temporal objects, mnemonic imagination, and theory of the imaginal, and discuss the lyrics and melody, coupled with analysis of YouTube comments, and elements of auto-mnemography.

2. Soundbathing

Before humans enter the world, or rather before the world enters them visually, infants encounter sound: noise, voice, music. In the foreword to French cinema scholar Michel Chion's *Audio-vision*, Walter Murch notes:

We begin to hear before we are born, four and a half months after conception. From then on, we develop in a continuous and luxurious bath of sounds: the song of our mother's voice, the swash of her breathing, the trumpeting of her intestines, the timpani of her heart. Throughout the second four-and-a-half months, Sound rules as solitary Queen of our senses: the close and liquid world of uterine darkness makes Sight and Smell impossible, Taste monochromatic, and Touch a dim and generalized hint of what is to come.²

During the early stages of immersion in the audiovisual, humans "rarely encounter their mothers or other people as disembodied voices; rather, infants experience dynamic encounters where mothers' visual characteristics, voice, and movements are perceived as a whole".³ Only later can sound and image be perceived and thought of as separate entities. The effects of the disembodied voice, the "sounds one hears without seeing their originating source," are nothing radically new and have been known since Pythagoras and the acousmatic.⁴ But it was only via

technical media – radio and phonograph (sound with no visual), and photography (visual with no sound) and cinema (audiovisual) – that sound and vision could be recorded and separated to attain a life of its own.

Technically reproducible sound becomes a relatively stable external perceptive referent that constitutes the condition of tertiary retention and imagination.⁵ As Bernard Stiegler says “the intervention of the imagination at the heart of perception, is only made obvious by tertiary retention – by a phonogram, in that for the first time it makes possible the identical repetition of the same temporal object, within the context of a multiplicity of phenomena seen as so many diverse occurrences of one and the same object.”⁶ Yet, such an object is also one that, in repetition, never affects a single consciousness in the same way. Stiegler notes: we always hear from the position of previous experience or “from the position of an expectation formed from everything that has already musically happened to me.”⁷ The listener is never the same (again). This invokes a different kind of imagination as compared to the pre-recordable time of partaking in live performances: one which can unfold decoupled from the visual referent.

When we create sonic vessels (sounds, words, songs) – embodied, disembodied, reembodied infrastructures co-shaped by posture, looks, gestures – we exteriorise our inner worlds. Our intentions, thoughts, aspirations, expectations, feelings can unfold extra-somatically (as they do in written texts and other technical media). In the process, we recursively pack and unpack what we think and hear, see, but also scent, or touch. Thus we cocreate and recreate virtual spaces of commonality, experience, an affective interrelation of the desire to be; together. These desires are impossible without referencing or invoking images. Chiara Bottici argues: “even in small communities, based on face-to-face relationships, the subject in question needs (re)presentation through an image in order to make it exist out of a simple collection of individuals. Communities cannot exist except as imaginal beings”.⁸ This suggests that any thinking or mnemonic activity is necessarily informed by the audiovisual, which, in a media-tech-dominated world, is situated at the cross-roads of technically mediated sound and vision: photography, music, cinema, and text.

I will sit right down
Waiting for the gift of sound and vision
And I will sing
Waiting for the gift of sound and vision
Drifting into my solitude
Over my head

Don't you wonder sometimes
About sound and vision?⁹

Discussing the relationship between photography and music, Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley note that “they appeal to distinct senses of human perception, signify in quite different ways and operate through codes and conventions, idioms and styles that are specific either to image- or sound-production”.¹⁰ Importantly, a photograph fixes fleeting images in time and constructs and imposes a Barthesian *// y a été*,¹¹ it suspends movement in time. But music holds a different relationship with time: “recorded music transcribes time in its sequential flow. These distinguishing features extend into their different modes of reception, even if they sometimes coincide in acts of remembering”.¹² As a photograph arrests time and thus effaces context, music always flows.

A melody, Bernard Stiegler claims, begins, unfolds, and ends in its flow and is as such a temporal object. For Stiegler, an object is temporal “to the extent that it is constituted by the flow of its passing, as opposed to an object like a piece of chalk, which is constituted through its stability, by the fact that it does not flow”.¹³ The emphasis on the revealing in passing, or as Elodie Roy notes, on ceaselessly vanishing as it is played,¹⁴ is crucial here. It emphasises an object's temporal properties: the song *lives* while it lasts, it lives off the memory of what had just passed. And yet, it also alludes to the future which exists at the interstices of experience and expectation.¹⁵ Recorded music is endowed with a nearly prophetic function: in its replayability it makes us expect a certain combination of tones or a certain note sounding out of tune.¹⁶

A song, a temporal object, unfolds outside us, all the while being synchronised with, or rather synchronising our consciousness. It rhythmises our experientiality and imagination. As an artefact of tertiary retention, following Stiegler, a temporal object connects the immediacy of primary retention always recursively mediated by, and mediating, the secondary retention. A YouTube user commented below Amalia Rodrigues' “Que deus me perdoe” video: “Sounds of my childhood whilst my mother prepared the 'Sunday family lunch'.....its like going home !”.¹⁷ The comment alludes to the evocative power of the song to not only trigger memories, but also their power to engage the senses. What is more, simultaneously listening to the song and reading comments also acts on the online listener: it evoked in me images of a long-ago meal unrelated to the song or that user's intimate memories. It coincided “with the stream of consciousness of which it is the object: that of spectator's.”¹⁸

This induces a complex mnemonic situation where the viewer:listener and another listener:commentator meet in a public:corporate mnemonic theatre in social

media.¹⁹ Both bring in their own 'standing reserve' of memories, triggered, empowered, enhanced by the song's lyrics and melody but also their geo- and politically-specific histories and pop-cultural references. This points to the media-synchronised temporal coincidence in acts of remembering that may in fact be happening at different individual times or geolocations, yet still be synchronised *within* the temporal object. In this context it is particularly interesting to see how a song – indeed much more than the sonic sum of its instrumental parts and voices – drives or affects the emergence of imagined places and times that arise out of a fusion of the 'silent image' and 'sightless music' in time.

In a culture so profoundly framed by and reproduced through mediated temporal objects, the investigation into how we think when we imagine must acknowledge that "visual and auditory cultures are [or rather can be] experienced on their own as bearers of personal and social memory." However, Keightley and Pickering continue, "they are experienced also in *conjunction with each other or considered as parallel forms of perceptual engagement*, as are our own eyes and ears."²⁰ Thus they conclude that considering technologically-mediated images and musical sounds alongside each other may help to counter the visualist bias in media studies and approximate more closely to the lived realities of these two media in their promiscuous intermingling.²¹ What is more, it may also assist in discussing the issue of mnemonic imagination in music.

3. Images in the Radio

To remember is to imagine and to imagine is to network the self and others: across space and between places, events, people, the past, the now, and the future. It is also, and always, a question of the 'here of the past' and the 'now of the future'. Claire Colebrook argues that the experience of the here and now is already haunted by a received sense of the past and an anticipation of the future.²² For Reinhart Koselleck, before and after constitute the significant unity that makes an event out of incidents and gives semantic dimensions to narrative.²³

But a critical element inscribed in the before:after composition is that of forgetting: "If 'to memorize' did not mean already 'to have forgotten,' nothing could be retained, since nothing would have passed, nothing would have happened".²⁴ Any present, then, is always unfolded at the interstices of the space of experience and the horizon of expectation.²⁵ Moreover, any idea, feeling or imagining of the past is always only possible at this intersection, which is embedded into broader historical structures (among which Koselleck lists productive forces and relations, space and geography, institutions). These act as pre-givens: they change slowly and barely perceptibly and thus condition and shape social life, and make possible the course

of events.²⁶ Such structures make life and the world feel, as Alexei Yurchak observed in Soviet late socialism, as “everything is forever”. When this forever, however, “is no more”,²⁷ the innards and mechanisms of structures are laid bare to reveal not only the constructedness of each ‘present’ but also its effect on forgetting. For example, in exchange for our immersion in its eternal, yet finite now,²⁸ a song allows us to suspend and forget not only the exterior but also historical details of past events: in immersing into its narrative we forget, yet this forgetting provides a space for new combinations of memories and feelings that give rise to new meanings; and recursively affect our understanding of the present.

Humans in western geopolitical reaches know of various ways to navigate between the past, present and future. Oral tradition and spoken word are the primary constitutive elements of secondary retention,²⁹ where “my experience of the now is inflected with memories of the past”.³⁰ Writing, the first technology of exteriorisation of memory (and the infamous beginning of the corruption of memory in Plato’s Phaedrus), and other technologies – chemical (photography, film), mechanic (phonograph), electrical (radio, television), and digital (the internet, broadly speaking) – constitute technologies of mediation of reality (its archive and its end) which become the condition and manifestation of tertiary retention or technical exteriorisation of memory, or epiphylogenetic memory.³¹ The technical conditioning of feeling and memory is en-melodied, as much as it is visualised in its absence, in Arsen Dedić’s “Nježnost u mraku” [Tenderness in the dusk]:³²

Već je noć, gle, sad smo sami, [It's night, already, look, we're alone now]
 tiho radio svira, [The radio plays quietly]
 i nad pjesmom među nama [And above the song between us,]
 od srca do srca, [From heart to heart,]
 brodi naša bolest laka [Our lightful illness wades]
 kojoj sreća je ime, [Happiness it's called]
 koja zaljubljene sjeća [That reminds the lovers]
 onog što si žele. [Of what they desire.]³³

The first verse of this love song refers to the radio and its socio-intimate role which posits media technology as an inducer of eventful atmosphere, emphasised by the *forte* opening and the gentle sound of piano to carry the words. The text offers an illustrative depiction of the force of technology to structure the intimate setting between two lovers. Yet, as they are finally alone, they are also immersed in their intimacy. This is potentiated by a song that is in fact posited as a sonic infrastructure networking two hearts, bodies, minds; radio waves are the infrastructure of love.

While various media technologies have distinct and specific narrative limits and functionalities, they generally refuse to act separately either temporally or technically. In fact, they became co-constitutive of the human self and part of cognitive assemblage. In the context of the song, the radio acts as an infrastructure of cognitive assemblage that emphasises, to adapt Katherine H. Hayles, “the flow of information through a system and the choices and decisions that create, modify and interpret the flow.” The flow of sound synchronises consciousness and gives narrative structure to the cognitive assemblage that includes material agents and forces enabling the “cognizers within the assemblage [to] enlist these affordances and direct their powers to act in complex situations.”³⁴ Such an assemblage, in this case the song:radio:in-song-actors:listener, is reliant on the constant process of technical networking of media technology, content, and the human, that defies chronological succession or any hierarchical superseding of any technology upon another. Technical mediation in a system and a network of tertiary retention apparatuses thus conditions and shapes human experiential planes. It defines and structures not only the space of experience but also the horizon of expectation. The latter can only be thought and imagined in the context of historical structures and as the encoding of power, an “effect produced by mediators (human and nonhuman) that transform temporary and shifting configurations into durable, robust, and reproducible structures capable of creating, solidifying, and wielding power”.³⁵ Music, in this context, reproduces and reconfigures the interaction between increasingly industrialised networks of tertiary retention apparatuses and historical structures. The latter “transcend the chronologically ascertainable space of experience available to the specific subjects involved in an event. While events are caused or suffered by specific subjects, structures as such are supra-individual and intersubjective. They cannot be reduced to individual persons and seldom to exactly determinable groups.” In this context, radio (waves) becomes the technical structure of narrative memory, as well as the condition to extrapolate the song's interiority to its spatial exterior and the future. “Structures do not in this way become entities outside of time, but rather gain a processual character, which can then enter into everyday experience.”³⁶

However, media (as infra)structures disclosed recently that the present we can take for one's own (and its historical, techno-political structure) is being de-structured rapidly. It seems that we have become maladjusted to the flow of time which, becoming industrialised through technical objects, we can only ever almost catch by its fluttering tail of divergent meanings. In such a context memory and mnemonic imagination become particularly relevant. Mnemonic imagination, Kheightley and Pickering argue, is “an active synthesis of remembering and

imagining which is essential to our understandings of the relationship between past, present and future.”³⁷ Moreover, it is in mnemonic imagination that our engagements with the past move through a series of interactive dualities: the constitution of selfhood and the commission of social action; the interplay between experience and expectation, memory and possibility; the relations between lived first-hand experience and mediated or inherited second-hand experience.³⁸

This is depicted in the function of the radio as expressed in the song “Nježnost u mraku”, where an imagined:mediated-song-within-a-song, made present by reference to the radio waves, constitutes a place where first-hand and mediated experience converge in interaction with the song as a mediated infrastructure of time. Here, the diegetic lovers and their imagined feelings of endless love at the brink of finitude seep into the listener's listening context, thus becoming a future condition of subsequent listening. This provides a moment of fusion as well as the co-creation of intimate memories in an arbitrary listening situation, induced by the melancholy melody and the narrative imposition of finitude:

Kao i sad nek sve do zore [Just like now and until dawn]
 tiho radio se čuje, [Let the radio quietly play]
 prerano će ionako [Too soon, anyway,]
 proći sve što tu je. [What is here will pass].³⁹

As such it alludes to “an active synthesis of the past, present and future, which results in the creative production of new ways of understanding the past [...] as it is lived, retrospectively considered, and retroactively assessed.”⁴⁰ It conditions mnemonic imagination and moves us between past, present and future as well as between personal experience and social meaning.⁴¹ Here music connects and networks listening consciousnesses and bodies across space and time.⁴² And Dedić's verses capture its mnemonic power whose structure and rhythm emanate from a dynamic morphology of the sea:

Znaj da ljubav je ko more, [Love is like the sea, you know]
 što se vječno hvata skala, [Always seizing for the rocks,]
 val što sam iskopa raku, [A wave that burrows its bier]
 opet dignu se iz vala. [To rise again out of another wave.]⁴³

The love song is structured by the random radio-induced sounds carried on waves, alluding to space that emerges when listening to technically mediated music: the lyrics show that it is radio sounds that delimit and define the emergent quality of the

lovers' intimate place, at once both endless and finite. As such Dedić's song implicitly evokes the mnemonic, opening up a diegetic universe that is, in each new listening, recursively and technically (re)constructed through the extra-diegetic presence of the radio. During this process, the listener is situated in "what has been taken over from [the listener's] past [and] is continually being revised in order to accommodate an open and continually unfolding future."⁴⁴

It is thus interesting to see viewer:listener comments posted after, or while watching one of the video-takes on the song.⁴⁵ The video consists of an artist's photo and a selection of black-and-white images of the night sky and the seaside, the coast and the sea and the moon. It elicited the response: "Everything is beautiful, the photos, text music I'm enjoying. But I'm getting somehow sad and the song is so melancholic", that emphasises the melancholy of the song, in lyrics (finitudal love and existence) and melody. The commentator engages with the photos – whose mnemo-evocative power stems from the black-and-whiteness techno-culturally often constructed to convey pastness and remoteness and the romantic hue of the bygone – as well as the song's dramatic melody. The engagement is enhanced by the lyrics that, although not explicitly sad, nevertheless express the feelings of loss, cursively articulated in a comment: "Oh, when I remember.....tenderness in the dusk...youth, the radio plays quietly", referring to a young age, inevitably remaining ever farther in the past, whereas the present is infested by its re-presented remains. The future looms, inaudibly, out of sight.

This aligns with Keightley and Pickering's statement that imagination animates the material on which it draws and "through the productive tension between them, the mnemonic imagination facilitates the transformation of experience as process into experience as product".⁴⁶ Moreover, a listening mode imbued with melancholia, particularly when accompanied by mediated images, "moves us beyond a unitary positioning of ourselves as oriented to the past or the future at any given moment".⁴⁷ Instead, a song *within* which fragments of our intimate, biographical, mnemonic remains reside induces a state where various temporal planes co-exist and "inform the process of making sense of our experience. It is in this multidimensional action that memory and imagination are locked together as a distinctively mnemonic imagination".⁴⁸ The melody, the images, and the words bind with the fragments of the listener's mnemonic residues and aspirations, much like in Dedić's "Vraćam se" [I'm Coming Back]:

Vraćam se tu, [I'm coming back here,]
 da ti kažem – ovo sunce nek mi sja. [To tell you – let the sun shine.]
 Vraćam se tu, [I'm coming back here,]

to su luke iz mog sna. [Here are the ports from my dreams.]
 Vraćam se tu, [I'm coming back here,]
 na toj zemlji gradim dom. [On this land, I'm building a home.]
 Vraćam se tu, [I'm coming back here,]
 sve ću dijeliti sa njom. [I will share everything with her.]⁴⁹

4. Sandcastles in the Mind

The verses above invoke again the 'mythical of the sea' where returning is framed in the context of dream ports constituting a safe haven of the past; yet they are also places of rest or places of new beginnings. In its acousmatic quality music is decidedly dependent on the visual, and builds imaginal through its absence. In this context, the mythical power of the sea is furthered by the construction of the sea as the origin of life. Here, the Mediterranean plays an additional role as the cradle of Western civilisation and philosophical thought, as well as a tourist destination. Tame, compared to the Atlantic monster, as Fernand Braudel writes, the sea is full of tales, secrets, and voyages. The Mediterranean and the Adriatic become a lake, a sunny resort, always close to an inland home,⁵⁰ endlessly reproduced on postcards and in cinema and TV, never bereft of half-forgotten summer romances and mythicity. The latter is also embedded in old maps, as Predrag Matvejević writes, that "bring back the old issues of sea and land: the forms they take, their interaction, and ways to represent them; they bring together knowledge and experience: space and the conception of space, world and world view."⁵¹ The sea is central in much of Dedić's music, as a topography of memory, love and desire.

If maps provide the first and rudimentary, albeit at best skewed archives of past geomorphology, we can say that music as a sonic infrastructure of the imagination of the world, similarly provides an intimate mnemonic topography. In Dedić's "Kuća pored mora" [A House by the Sea], the sea and the shore constitute a dynamic canvas that alludes to the history of the Adriatic, mythicised in Yugoslav cinema and music, and also a place of contact for many domestic and international holidaymakers. The Adriatic is itself a mnemonic complex still today posited as a place of inscription of memories for generations of Yugoslavs and post-Yugoslavs. As it is in the song:

Raznesene valima i vjetrom [Blown about by waves and wind]
 tu su tople ruševine ljeta, [Warm ruins of summer]
 na rubu napuštenog mora, [At the edge of deserted sea]
 i jednog izgubljenog svijeta. [And a lost world.]

The song *Kuća pored mora* as a temporal object is explicitly cinematic in recounting a story not only of an ended romance, but of an ended summer, an ended life. Words depicting a deserted seashore and the ruins of the summer crumbling away in autumn winds evoke images of desolation. They are a rem(a)inder of a lost world that lives within the singer's imagination, and a future memory invoked in the listener at each new listening occasion. The newspaper fluttering in the wind is a mnemonic witness to a life lived in what was not much more but a sandcastle, chipped at by the forces of nature, time, entropy.

Ničeg nema, ničeg nema, [Nothing remains, nothing remains]
 od tebe od mene. [Of you, of me]
 Ostala je samo prazna kuća, [Just an empty house]
 malo stvari ljetovanja našeg. [A few things of our summer holidays]
 Na stolu novine još leže, [A newspaper on the table]
 sa nekim datumima jula. [Dated sometime in July]
 Naša ljubav sad se ruši, [Our love is now crumbling]
 kao pješčana kula. [Like a tower made of sand.]⁵²

The lyrics and melody can, for the duration of a song, veil and screen off the real:visual and give way to the mnemonic. The song becomes an emergent place where the sound intertwines not only with lyrical images but also with those picked up by the listener as secondary retentions, navigating through one's own life and memories, always already mediated. This constitutes the song as a retentional apparatus that synthesises intimate and industrial images. At this point, Michel Chion's discussion about the relationship between music (a pop song) and cinema may prove useful, specifically as he understands a pop song as a "repetitive text that enables different words to stick to the music and thus emphasise the exciting aspect of arbitrariness, randomness of the relationship between lyrics and music".⁵³

Chion's argument is based on specific characteristics of a pop song. It is usually about three minutes long, a result of a record's physical properties, the size and density of grooves squeezed onto a polyvinyl disc, that limit the capacity of a single record. This sets a material limit (interestingly, both in size and durability, space and time) as a function of the standardised format (33/45/72 as the most popular vinyl formats). Thus it defines the reproductive conditions of a song: it can be played back time and again, retaining the form and content (repetition),⁵⁴ but also the song's structure (intro, stanza, refrain, stanza, close; or an overture, a peak and an ending) and its temporal limit. As such it arrests temporal linearity and reinforces the impression of endless recurrence. In its finitude and replayability, the song becomes

a transitory intermediate space where the listener's intimate universe is infused by experiential exteriority: the song becomes an infrastructure of imagination.

Song's endless recurrence structures the musical universe by conjuring, time and again, the fragments and refractions of mediated images and sounds to which individuals and collectivities affectively react. This drives the formation of an intimately shaped narrative where "disparate elements of experience [are] drawn together by the productive imagination into a unified plot which has a temporal span."⁵⁵ As much as by the newspaper, the temporal aspect is foregrounded by invoking the melancholic power of natural cycles as an external marker of ending (but also replaying):

Al još sam uvijek ovdje, [Yet, I'm still here]
 još zagledan u more, [Staring at the sea]
 na vratima vile, [In the doorway of a villa]
 u kojoj tuga spava. [Where sadness sleeps.]
 A kiše su se slile u cvjetove agava, [But the rains have poured into the
 blossoming agaves]
 i ljetu je kraj. / [And the summer's gone.]⁵⁶

Much like in cinema and music, music and consciousness are unified by the binding flow of images. "In temporal terms", Chion writes, music "unifies by bridging the visual breaks through sound overlaps [and] it brings unity by establishing atmosphere as a framework that seems to contain the image, a 'heard' space in which the 'seen' bathes." To reiterate the statement above: "music is independent of the notion of real time and space [and] can cast the images into a homogenizing bath or current".⁵⁷ The diegetic timeframe of the song acts as timeline of mnemonic imagination and sets up a connected or networked solitary space for perhaps random or accidental collectivity, an imagined *we* to participate in. Or, to adapt Stiegler, a sensible community that may experience a singularity: "The artist plays with the secondary retentions of his audience *via* the organization of primary retentions, which he arranges in the form of an apparatus of tertiary retentions."⁵⁸ Although Stiegler refers to cinema, the reference is valid inasmuch as it points out how the song provides symbolic temporal bearings within which the communion of the self and others, the past and the present may unfold: "Without the mnemonic imagination, selfhood would be inhibited and we would not be able to generalise, extrapolate or work at the level of the symbolic."⁵⁹

Extrapolations from the song's universe to the individual to the collective and from the symbolic to the individual and the collective are noticeable also in

comments to the song video on YouTube. An example of an intimate application of the song's imagined and consuming collectivity to the individual level: "As if it were written just for me, thank you great poet", alludes to an individual taking-on of the song, imagining him/herself into it and recursively making it a soundtrack to his/her life-story. As such, the song as a temporal object that not only inscribes one's personal history into wider social context, but also streamlines and enhances one's feelings: "This song is an eternal yearning for all dear moments". Musically constructed space is made of individual memories and provides a mnemonic sanctuary that induce a reaction: "This song returned me to some ancient and faraway [time and place] and reminded me of my first love." Yet, the song also invokes memories that transcend the individual level, but instead refer to wider listening collectivity, and in some cases even the Yugoslav/post-Yugoslav experience: "We loved one another to his music and his lyrics, raised children on his children's songs and while wars and hatred raged we kept warm on the warmth of his poetry. May he rest in peace. We will never forget him, neither will our children nor, probably, our grandchildren."⁶⁰

This comment is also an expression of a collective past, including individual love and collective hatred that followed the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1991. In this, the song and the response become even more powerful: they fuse the individual and the collective, the past and present, hopefulness and regret. Clearly missing any visual referents, however, the mere mention of war and of love alludes to images in listeners that most certainly are radically different, as each individual experience is. But it is in the capacity of the song to invoke individualised memories that a shared commonality of historical experience is presupposed, much like the radio waves presuppose a listening collectivity. Thus, the song becomes the mnemonic sanctuary of several generations of Yugoslavs who have lost their homeland.

The experience informing the horizon of expectation thus potentiates the universal 'loss of youth': "Only songs remain of my youth, somewhere in Belgrade, with Slavica...", which for many coincides with the loss of homeland. Several commentators make references to towns across the former Yugoslavia, such as Pula, Maribor, Banja Luka, pinning down the mnemonic topography onto the map of an inadvertently gone country where they grew up. As such, the song is a space of recreating a lost commonality and an instantiation of an imagined, fragmented collectivity that arises out of disparate, not necessarily comparable memories.

In the conceptualisation of imagination, Chiara Bottici detects a problem of "how to account for the at times overwhelming influence of social context" on imagination conceived as individual faculty.⁶¹ This has in fact been an underlying presence in this text so far and Bottici's intervention might prove useful. She

proposes the theory of the imaginal, a conceptual tool to address this impasse.⁶² Imaginal means “simply that which is made of images and can therefore be the product both of an individual faculty and of the social context as well as of a complex interaction between the two.”⁶³ For our purposes, unlike Botticci's emphasis on a political frame of reference, the central focus is song as a temporal object and its imaginal aspects. In its musical universe-inducing capacity song provides an audiovisual meeting space of interiority of the individual (intimate) and the exteriority of the social (synchrony), as well as of history (diachrony). Botticci emphasises an important element: “In contrast to imagination and imaginary, the concept of the imaginal emphasizes the centrality of images, rather than the faculty or the context that produces them; therefore, it does not make any assumptions about the individual or social character of such a faculty”.⁶⁴ When speaking of music, it is the emphasis on the centrality of images (not to downplay bodily reactions or emotions, which are also related to images induced by songs, not only its melodic, tonal composition or lyrics) that becomes crucial.

Let me illustrate, with a short mnemographic intervention, the concept of imaginal with reference to another Dedić song, “Balada o prolaznosti” [A Ballad on Transience]:⁶⁵

Kad lutali smo svijetom [As we were roaming the world]
 kao raspršeno sjeme, [Like scattered seeds]
 govorili smo sebi – [We would say to ourselves]
 to je za neko vrijeme. [It's just for a while]
 I ne znajuć da smo [And not knowing]
 na izgubljenom brodu [We're on a lost ship]
 mi vikali smo: "Kopno!" [We were shouting: "Land-ho!"]
 dok gledali smo vodu. [As we watched the water.]

I was reminded of these verses during the 2015 migrations from North Africa and Turkey/Middle East to Fortress Europe. People had been trying to reach the EU for years, undertaking dangerous journeys across land and sea. What brought the song to memory was the image of a drowned child on the shore of an island that filled the media at the time. The song, of course, was written in a different time and with a different mission to mark the vagaries of growing up and of living. In its unpremeditated future, however, it fused with a radically different historical and geo-political context that refuted its melancholy with the harsh reality of life. The listener is always embedded in the ‘now that knows not of its future’, yet still invests into it;

'migration' as the reality of the now, and as a metaphor, is telling in its own right. The following verses again read well in the contemporary situation:

Kad rađala se sreća [When happiness was born]
i čekala je slava, [And glory awaited]
pomišljali smo opet – [We thought again]
to nije ona prava. / [That's not the one]

...

Kad gubili smo život, [When we were losing our lives]
govorili smo: "Neka" [We said: "Let it"]
i vjerovali čvrsto, [Believing resolutely]
da pravi tek nas čeka. [The real life still awaits us.]⁶⁶

At the same time, the listener situated in between his/her own and mediated past experiences and secondary retentions, can only inform his/her expectations of whatever the future may bring from his/her horizon of experience by reference to mediated content. Then again, this leads to the realisation that any knowledge in-and-of the present entails an anticipation of the future, and its limits. Moreover, despite the belief in endless opportunities, in adjustability of the future, any present always already possesses the seeds of future's ending. The verse below clearly states: we may be saying see you (future), but in fact we're always saying good-bye (end):

Dok vjerovali još smo [While we still believed]
da svaki put se mijenja, [That everything changes]
mi rekli smo si zbogom [We said Good-bye]
govoreć doviđenja. [While saying See you.]⁶⁷

In the industrial age, the past can be endlessly replayed, it can repeatedly reoccur in a recorded temporal object. Still, the way the song was inscribed into a singular listening event during the migrations demonstrates the capacity of the imaginal to elucidate "the possibility of freeing oneself from one's own particularities and creating images of what is not immediately in front of us."⁶⁸ It shows the capacity of the song to render-in-flux a selection of images from different temporal or spatial contexts.

The music and the imaginal thus re-create and co-create a mnemonic commonality of being. In this case it is expressed through sadness, inevitable loss, and the passing of time and life. Such feelings are shared in YouTube responses to

Dedić and his music that refer, again, to wider existential topics: “Arsen ... the proprietor of sadness and the master of despair”. Such sentiment is not uncommon in other comments: “I don't know what after him there's left to say about oneself, about anything ... ‘completely unexplicated and somewhat out of fashion’”.

Even years after his death, Dedić remains a pop cultural icon, a sentimental haven that to many presents and for many reconstructs the crumbling present in providing trans-historical mnemonic referents. These can be assimilated, incorporated as temporal objects in spatially and temporally dissociated, yet interconnected post-Yugoslav, migrated and dispersed, consciousnesses: “Who'd have said that all life's essence fits into a couple of verses. Arsen did that with this song.”

While most comments do not directly infer the imaginal they do demonstrate how the song induces imagination through alluding to symbolic spaces as the necessary emotive condition of commonality. For example, “When friends are gone and the days pass slowly..”, clearly lacks any visual reference but is evocative enough to conjure the feelings of loneliness. Decontextualised from the song and recontextualised into the listener:commenter's consciousness, the verse emphasises the unbearable burden of loneliness. Yet, it also provides a template for “an active synthesis of the past, present and future, which results in the creative production of new ways of understanding the past [...] as it is lived, retrospectively considered, and retroactively assessed”.⁶⁹

The inscription into an *imagined we* presupposes a common space where an individual's imaginal is engaged to partake in the collective symbolic realm; to recall Bottici, face-to-face communities need representation through an image to exist among individuals and collectivities.⁷⁰ (Political) Communities, to emphasise, are imaginal, not imagined beings: “in contrast to the imaginary, imaginal beings are not only the product of the actions of individuals but also, in turn, what shapes the imagination of the individuals themselves [...] and thus, in a way, what constitutes them.”⁷¹

5. Always Coming Back ...

The analysis of lyrics, user comments and mnemoethnographic inserts, read through songs as temporal objects, posit Dedić's songs as mnemonic infrastructure: a song kick-starts mnemonic processes, potentiates memories, and brings memories into a public:corporate space of encounter. As a temporal object, synchronised with consciousness, a song is decidedly intimate in its capacity to induce memories, yet, being external to consciousness, it also affects other consciousnesses (in different ways). As much as it can never affect one person in the same way twice, and it can

never affect a (mnemonic) collectivity in the same way synchronically or diachronically. A collectivity, especially a fragmented one, will nevertheless be reconstituted through collective consumption of music and will be re-formed in each new listening by the 'mere awareness' that other people are listening. Much like with the phenomenon of the radio: we do not know who is listening, or where, but radio waves as a technical infrastructure of imagined co-existence and emotion give us the presupposition that *someone is*. This enhances the link between primary and secondary retention, as Stiegler notes, and the following passage is worth quoting in full:

[with] the technical possibility of analogic recording of a *temporal* musical object, and the ability to repeat it technically, the link between primary and secondary retentions has become obvious: clearly, even though each time it is repeated it is the same temporal object, it produces two different musical experiences. I *know* that it is the same temporal object, because I know that the melody was recorded by a technique producing a co-incidence between the stream of what was being recorded and that of the machine doing the recording. I know that the recording mechanism's time coincided with the melodic flux. And this co-incidence of machinic flux and that of the temporal object produces, for the flow of consciousness of both the object and its recording, a conjunction of past, reality, and this effect of the real that Barthes identifies in photography and that is replicated in the realm of sound, the difference being that as Barthes points out in the case of photography there is the *pose*, whereas in the case of phonography, of recorded sound (as in cinema), there is *flux*.⁷²

While listening, one can imagine that a situation where acousmatic collectivity is rendered by music will potentiate the "capacity to consider the point of view of others and thus to form images of what it must be like to find oneself in their shoes."⁷³ Similarly, a detemporalised and deterritorialised community formed around a video in YouTube may be garnering participation from different points in place and time. Yet, the technology of social media, not too dissimilar to being constituted as a flux (although differently from radio and television being punctual media),⁷⁴ aligns temporal dislocations into a temporal object such as a YouTube video; even if just for a limited time or a one-off opportunity one is given while watching a video and reading comments.

The mnemonic in music, then, is necessarily bound to always bring the past into the present. In this it is always already defined by the imaginal, entangled in the

interplay of the three types of retention. In the context of Dedić's songs, the past, as we have seen, is decidedly related to memories of lost youth and love, and is often tied to the mythical and symbolic of the sea, and the liminality of the shoreline. In the post-Yugoslav context, this also contributes to mapping the mnemonic landscapes of a lost homeland, which is reinforced by the fact that the feelings of loss and restitution. These were detected in Dedić's music ever since the 1960s when Dedić first took the stage as a young singer-songwriter. By the late 1970s the cultural critic Igor Mandić had already detected the mythisation of Dedić's persona and poetry. Dedić may "seem, in the context of contemporary (popular) culture a prototype of a synthesis. As a person and as a singer, he manages to bring together many disparate things, he manages to find what was lost [...]: the warmth of soul, contemptuous sentimentalism, some sort of backward romance [...]"⁷⁵ Since the time of the late 1970s, as well as until and after the collapse of Yugoslavia, and even 30 years on, in the eternal today of the musical universe, Mandić's words are valid: "in these cruel months, thousands of listeners enthusiastically accept the message: Dedić gave them back something that was lost, he reinstated the dignity to the emotionality that has been devalued."⁷⁶

Today, Dedić's music emerges from the past, it may even be said that it always has been from the past, to reconstitute and reinvent emotive topographies of a lost time. For it is often in the past, that forever inaccessible temp:territory, that eternity awaits randomly to be repeated in its unforeseen future; even if with different new meanings.

The past, as Dedić alludes to in "Vraćam se" [I'm Coming Back], is always here.

Možda pošli bismo dalje, [Perhaps we'd have gone farther]
 da se ne vratimo nikad, [Never to return]
 ali dobro su nas čuvali ti lanci. [But the chains protected us all too well]
 Za toplu obalu djetinjstva bili smo vezani ko čamci, [We were tied up as boats
 to the warm shore of childhood]
 život sav. [Our entire lives.]
 Vraćam se... [I'm coming back.]

The past (or is it the memories?) never lets go, it keeps reverting our gaze to the haven of the bygone. In forgetting, there is the future of new beginnings: returning, or repeating and replaying, never brings closure. We are defined by our past but we can never return to where, or when, we have left.

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Notes

- ¹ On Dedić's music in Yugoslav cinema see Irena Paulus, "Yugoslav Film and Popular Culture: Arsen Dedić's Songs in Films," in *Made in Yugoslavia: Studies in Popular Music*, ed. Danijela Š. Beard and Ljerka V. Rasmussen (New York: Routledge, 2020), 49–57; see also Martin Pogačar, "Yugoslav past in film and music: Yugoslav Interfilmic Referentiality," in *Remembering Utopia: The Culture of Everyday Life in Socialist Yugoslavia*, ed. Breda Luthar and Maruša Pušnik (Washington: New Academia Publishing, 2010), 199–226.
- ² Walter Murch, "Foreword," in Michel Chion, *Audio-vision. Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 7–25, 7.
- ³ Ann E. Bigelow, Michelle Power, Nancy Mcquaid, and Ashley Ward, "Distinguishing Mother–Infant Interaction from Stranger–Infant Interaction at 2, 4, and 6 Months of Age," *Infancy* 13 vol. 2 (2008): 158–71, 159.
- ⁴ The acousmatic, as the proto-technical decoupling of sound and vision, presupposes hearing the voice of a person from behind a screen and allows for a denser focus on words to tease out meaning, and to disambiguate the content from the form, this clearly does not presuppose the absence of imaginings or images. Pierre Schaeffer, *Traité des objets musicaux* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1966), 91; see also his 'Acousmatics', in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, eds. Christopher Cox and Daniel Warner (London, New York, Continuum, 2004), 76–81, 77; Michel Chion, *Audio-vision. Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 71.
- ⁵ Stable if we set aside the deterioration of the recording or the intrusion of the technical-material or event-peripheral into its making; see Michael Pickering, "Sonic Horizons: Phonograph Aesthetics and the Experience of Time," in *Time, Media and Modernity*, ed. Emily Keightley (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 25–44; Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound. How Technology Changed Music* (Berkeley, CA, London: University of California Press, 2004); Martin Pogačar, "A Microphone in a Chandelier: How a Secret Recording Sparks Mnemonic Imagination and Affect," *Memory Studies*, forthcoming.
- ⁶ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3. Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 18.
- ⁷ Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3*, 19.
- ⁸ Chiara Bottici, *Imaginal Politics. Beyond the Imagination and the Imaginary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 90.
- ⁹ David Bowie, "Sound and Vision," *Low*, 1977.
- ¹⁰ Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley, *Photography, Music and Memory. Pieces of the Past in Everyday Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 34.
- ¹¹ Although as Siegfried Kracauer cautioned, it is not at all equal to nature itself as 19th century realists tended to believe. Siegfried Kracauer, *History. The Last Thing before the Last* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1995), 50.
- ¹² Pickering and Keightley, *Photography, Music and Memory*, 34.
- ¹³ Bernard Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery, 1. The Hyperindustrial Epoch* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 17.

- ¹⁴ Elodie Roy, *Media, Materiality, Memory. Grounding the Groove* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 11
- ¹⁵ Cf. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
- ¹⁶ Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound. How Technology Changed Music* (Berkeley, CA, London: University of California Press, 2004), 25.
- ¹⁷ "Amalia Rodrigues – Que Deus Me Perdoe", Ilhem M (14 August 2013), YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mdRme9Ht2Sc>.
- ¹⁸ Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 3, 12.
- ¹⁹ With public:corporate mnemonic theatre I refer to the media ecology defined and dominated by platforms that define and delimit social interaction, as well as make it infrastructurally and existentially dependent with little social accountability.
- ²⁰ Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering, "For the Record. Popular Music and Photography as Technologies of Memory," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 9 vol. 2 (2006): 149–65, 150; italics added.
- ²¹ Keightley and Pickering, "For the Record," 150.
- ²² Claire Colebrook, "Fragility, Globalism, and the End of the World," <https://www.ctrl-z.net.au/articles/issue-7/colebrook-fragility-globalism-and-the-end-of-the-world/>, 2017.
- ²³ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 104, 106.
- ²⁴ Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 3, 19.
- ²⁵ Koselleck, *Futures Past*.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 107, 109.
- ²⁷ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever, Until it was No More. The Last Soviet Generation* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005).
- ²⁸ Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 3, 9, 10.
- ²⁹ Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery*.
- ³⁰ Colebrook, "Fragility".
- ³¹ Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 3, 9, 10. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery*.
- ³² The song was originally written by Slovenian poet Janez Menart (1929–2004) and published in his 1955 book *Prva jesen*; in translation it appeared on Arsen Dedić's album *Rimska ploča* in 1979.
- ³³ Arsen Dedić, "Nježnost u mraku", *Rimska ploča* (PGP RTB, 1979).
- ³⁴ N. Katherine Hayles, *Unthought. The Power of the Cognitive Nonconscious* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017), 116.
- ³⁵ Hayles, *Unthought*, 116.
- ³⁶ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 107, 108.
- ³⁷ Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering, *The Mnemonic Imagination, Remembering as Creative Practice*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 7.
- ³⁸ Keightley and Pickering, *The Mnemonic Imagination*, 7.
- ³⁹ Arsen Dedić, "Nježnost u mraku."
- ⁴⁰ Keightley and Pickering, *The Mnemonic Imagination*, 75.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 54, 61.
- ⁴² For a discussion of networked listening see, Pogačar, "A Microphone in a Chandelier."
- ⁴³ Dedić, "Nježnost u mraku."
- ⁴⁴ Keightley and Pickering, *The Mnemonic Imagination*, 7.

- ⁴⁵ Arsen Dedić – Nježnost u mraku,” bugasjuga (9 December 2008), YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NG2pjVRURnQ>.
- ⁴⁶ Keightley and Pickering, *The Mnemonic Imagination*, 8.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 57.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 57.
- ⁴⁹ Arsen Dedić, “Vraćam se,” *Vraćam se* (Jugoton, 1975).
- ⁵⁰ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World since the Age of Philip II* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 370.
- ⁵¹ Predrag Matvejević, *Mediterranean, A Cultural Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) 95.
- ⁵² Arsen Dedić, “Kuća pored mora,” *Čovjek kao ja* (Jugoton, 1970).
- ⁵³ Michel Chion, *Glasba v filmu* (Ljubljana: Slovenska kinoteka, 2001), 196–97; my translation.
- ⁵⁴ Chion, *Glasba v filmu*.
- ⁵⁵ Keightley and Pickering, *The Mnemonic Imagination*, 63.
- ⁵⁶ Dedić, “Kuća pored mora.”
- ⁵⁷ Chion, *Audio-vision*, 47.
- ⁵⁸ Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery*, 90.
- ⁵⁹ Keightley and Pickering, *The Mnemonic Imagination*, 63.
- ⁶⁰ “Kuća pored mora – Arsen Dedić,” acaziki (18. January 2013), YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8e1IZgpaA6w>.
- ⁶¹ Bottici, *Imaginal Politics*, 5.
- ⁶² Ibid..
- ⁶³ Ibid.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid.
- ⁶⁵ Arsen Dedić, “Balada o prolaznosti”, *Arsen 2* (Jugoton, 1972).
- ⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ Bottici, *Imaginal Politics*, 96.
- ⁶⁹ Keightley and Pickering, *The Mnemonic Imagination*, 75.
- ⁷⁰ Bottici, *Imaginal Politics*, 90.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., 96.
- ⁷² Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 3, 21.
- ⁷³ Bottici, *Imaginal Politics*, 100.
- ⁷⁴ See Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).
- ⁷⁵ Igor Mandić, “Anatomija jednog kulta” in *Mitologija svakidašnjega života* (Rijeka: Otokar Keršovani, 1976), 20.
- ⁷⁶ Mandić, “Anatomija jednog kulta”, 20.

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