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THIRD SPACE BETWEEN EARLY SOCIALIST UTOPIA AND ENVIRONMENTAL THOUGHT OF THE 1970S: INTERPRETING PLAY IN THE NOVEL *A WALK THROUGH THE FUTURE* VIA VYGOTSKY AND CAILLOIS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the symbolic, social, and political dimensions of play in the children's novel Šetnja kroz budućnost (A Walk through the Future), originally published in instalments in 1924–1925 and attributed to the Serbian social democrat and union educator Dragutin Vladisavljević. Existing research has identified this novel as the first science-fiction social utopia in children's literature within the Serbian and broader Yugoslav context. The aim of this paper is to explore how two distinct theories of play – one articulated by Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky and the other proposed by French literary theorist Roger Caillois – can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of liminal, or third spaces in the narrative. Lastly, the paper examines how this poetics of space enables insight into the novel's proto-ecological imagery and proto-environmental consciousness.

Keywords: theory of play, third space, liminality, Lev Vygotsky, Roger Caillois, utopian literature, children's literature, ecological imagery

IL TERZO SPAZIO TRA L'UTOPIA DEL PRIMO SOCIALISMO E IL PENSIERO AMBIENTALISTA DEGLI ANNI SETTANTA: INTERPRETARE IL GIOCO NEL ROMANZO PER L'INFANZIA *UNA PASSEGGIATA ATTRAVERSO IL FUTURO* ATTRAVERSO VYGOTSKY E CAILLOIS

SINTESI

Questo articolo esamina le dimensioni simboliche, sociali e politiche del gioco nel romanzo per l'infanzia Šetnja kroz budućnost *(Una passeggiata attraverso il futuro), pubblicato originariamente a puntate tra il 1924 e il 1925 e attribuito al socialdemocratico serbo, nonché educatore sindacale, Dragutin Vladisavljević. Le ricerche svolte finora hanno identificato questo romanzo come la prima utopia sociale fantascientifica nella letteratura per l'infanzia in Serbia e nel più ampio contesto jugoslavo. L'obiettivo di questo contributo è esplorare come due distinte teorie del gioco — quella elaborata dallo psicologo sovietico Lev Vygotsky e quella proposta dal critico letterario francese Roger Caillois — possano contribuire a una comprensione più approfondita degli spazi liminali, o terzi spazi, presenti nella narrazione. Infine, l'articolo esamina come questa poetica dello spazio permetta di cogliere l'immaginario proto-ecologico e la coscienza proto-ambientalista in questo testo.*

Parole chiave: teoria del gioco, terzo spazio, liminalità, Lev Vygotsky, Roger Caillois, letteratura utopica, letteratura per l'infanzia, immaginario ecologico

INTRODUCTION

We live in an age in which environmentalist and ecological discourses have become omnipresent, at least in civil society and academia. Nevertheless, mainstream environmental consciousness-raising is often reduced to a mechanism for establishing hierarchies of morality: between those who eat meat and those who do not, or in debates over who generates a larger carbon footprint, thereby sidestepping the crucial relationship between political economy and major ecological issues such as climate change and pollution. To put it simply, the critique of "anthropocentric ideologies" (Oppermann, 2023) has replaced the critique of the capitalist mode of production. This situation may be interpreted as indicative of a deeper crisis. Contemporary ecological discourses tend to reproduce themselves by describing current catastrophes and imagining future disasters, appealing primarily to the fearful aspects of human consciousness rather than to those that foster hope and change. As readers, we risk conflating environmental awareness with catastrophism, which in turn diminishes our sensitivity and receptivity to ecological imageries that do not stem from a sense of guilt and urgency. In general, many dystopian narratives endorse a predominantly individualistic approach (cf. Haraway, 2016), appealing primarily to personal morality. This applies equally to the intellectual current associated with the concept of Anthropocene, namely Ecomodernism. Although its point of departure – the claim that technology is ethically neutral and can therefore be harnessed to mitigate the effects of industrialisation – appears compelling, it ultimately remains an individualistic framework (Asafu-Adjaye et al., 2015, 7). Even if technology could be conceived as neutral in the abstract, the corporations that develop and deploy these technologies for profit are not. The central problem, then, is how, under such conditions, we might constitute a collective subject capable of challenging and disempowering technological monopolies? Most ecomodernist approaches leave this question unaddressed. Nevertheless, narratives grounded in faith in human potential tend to imagine a new collective subjectivity capable of preventing or combating forthcoming disasters. In most cases, their starting point is an attempt to reconstruct or create meaningful social relationships that the capitalist mode of production has systematically eroded. *Šetnja kroz budućnost* (*A Walk Through the Future*),[1] the first science-fiction social utopian narrative in Serbian literature, fosters such imagery. This short novel was initially published in instalments in the children's magazine *Budućnost* [*Future*], 1920; 1923–1929. This magazine's subtitle explicitly labelled it as "the magazine of the organised workers' children." By using this subtitle, the editorship emphasised trade unionism as a fundamental prerequisite for an independent, working-class culture. *A Walk through the Future* is undoubtedly one of this culture's most valuable legacies, ahead of its time and unknown until 2017, when Biljana Andonovska discovered it and introduced it to the research community. She notes that this short novel was published in eight instalments, from June 1924 to April 2025, underscoring both the novel's and the magazine's potential for reassessment of the genres' development in Serbian literary history (Andonovska, 2019, 45). The novel's presumed author is Dragutin Vladisavljević, Serbian social democrat, physician, and workers' educator, whose fictional voice is concealed behind the nickname of a girl protagonist, Mala Zora (Little Zora). In this novel, the protagonist, the girl Mala Zora, falls asleep before the May Day celebration and travels to the future, set in 2024. In this symbolism, comparative literature researchers (Andonovska & Tropin, 2022) would recognise an echo of one of the most influential socialist-utopian narratives, William Morris' *News from Nowhere* (1890). The protagonist's visit to the future society is also motivated by sleep. The societal progress in Morris' narrative is not mirrored by technological development. Quite the opposite, the advancement is reflected in the future society's capacity to curb technological progress in order to preserve natural resources and human well-being. Having found himself in future London, Morris' protagonist first notices the clean water in the otherwise severely polluted River Thames. This symbolism explicitly corresponds with Morris' proto-environmentalist stance, which he also articulated in his review of Edward Bellamy's utopian novel *Looking Backward*, 1888 Morris' commentary was published in the *Commonweal* newspapers, 1885–1894, and the article explains why uncritical celebration of technological advancement, which Bellamy understands as one of the core features of his socialist utopia, can be, at the same time, structurally divorced from a truly working-class and anticapitalist perspective:

> *So looked at, Mr Bellamy's utopia must be still called very interesting, as it is constructed with due economical knowledge, and with much adroitness; and of course his temperament is that of many thousands of people. This temperament may be called*

1 Among researchers, the idea that Dragutin Vladisavljević is the author of this narrative is widely accepted. However, in every edition, including the first bilingual monograph edition from 2024, the narrative is 'signed' by the girl protagonist, Mala Zora (Little Zora). I consistently quote from this edition, the English version.

the unmixed modern one, unhistoric and unartistic; it makes its owner (if a Socialist) perfectly satisfied with modern civilization, if only the injustice, misery, and waste of class society could be got rid of; which half-change seems possible to him. The only ideal of life which such a man can see is that of the industrious professional middle-class men of to-clay purified from their crime of complicity with the monopolist class, and become independent instead of being, as they now are, parasitical. It is not to be denied that if such an ideal could be realised, it would be a great improvement on the present society. But can it be realised? It means in fact the alteration of the machinery of life in such a way that all men shall be allowed to share in the fullness of that life, for the production and upholding of which the machinery was instituted. (Morris, 1889)

This quotation makes several key points that are vital to interpreting the entanglement of play, space, and environmental imagery in Dragutin Vladisavljević's narrative. The essence of Morris's argument, which can also be found both in his own fiction and in that of Dragutin Vladisavljević, lies in shifting the focus from the question of bureaucratic or industrial progress to the experience and quality of life. Humour and moral insight in both stories emerge from the discrepancy between the protagonists' previously degrading experiences and the more humane living conditions of the futuristic setting. Morris openly criticises Bellamy for equating civilisation with capitalist, urbanised modernity and for identifying shorter working hours as the sole means of making labour less burdensome for workers. In other words, besides shifting the focus from productivity to fulfilment, another essential point of Morris' criticism, consistently found in *A Walk Through the Future* as well, is that the mindset liberation must be followed by spatial liberation, meaning setting oneself free from the places of capitalist profit-driven coercion. One such space is "the old school", with the aim of turning children into compliant, disciplined workers. Vladisavljević's text, conceptualised primarily as a pedagogical utopia, shows that unmediated contact with nature and finding satisfaction and joy in work are fundamental to emancipatory education and upbringing. Morris' influence on this Balkan socialist is practically self-evident and has already been noted in the scholarly literature (Andonovska & Tropin, 2022, 160). However, a less obvious aspect is that both ecological utopias also strongly resonate with the intellectual legacy of the environmentalist movements of the 1970s.

In the following section, I will argue that ecological theory and critiques of globalisation enable us to identify key concepts for interpreting proto-environmentalist utopias. Then, I will demonstrate how the idea of *third space* connects to the theories of play developed by Vygotsky in his essay "Imagination and Creativity in Childhood", originally published in 1926, and Caillois in *Les jeux et les hommes* (Man, Play and Games) from 1958, and why the spirit of play, as they understand it, is essential to the creation of democratic institutions in (future) society. Finally, I will elaborate on how eco-theories of the 1970s contribute to the interpretation of the novel *A Walk Through the Future*.

THIRD SPACE AND THE RIGHT TO EXIST AS A SOCIAL BEING

The period between Paul B. Sears' provocative essay "Ecology – A Subversive Subject" (Sears, 1964) and the first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, in Stockholm, was the moment when, for the first time in human history, scientists and intellectuals institutionally recognised that economic growth must be limited to preserve the biosphere. Nevertheless, ecological theory in the 1970s did not resort to catastrophism or appeal primarily to individual morality; instead, it continued to draw on the wave of massive leftist movements of the twentieth century and retained its faith in the power of the collective subject. This anthropological optimism is also reflected in the title of Lester Brown's pioneering study, *World Without Borders* (Brown, 1979), one of the earliest studies on the socio-economic impacts of environmental issues. The title of this book is not just a metaphor for humanist or internationalist ideologies. Instead, it reflects a new reality brought about by globalisation. As Brown remarks, the concept of permanent economic growth, followed by continuous rises in living standards, has permeated every corner of the Earth. The price for this growth, which nevertheless failed to eradicate famine and poverty, was excessive exploitation of natural resources that endangered the biosphere, reminding communities across the world of how entangled they are. He quotes the example of the Danish celebration of the storks' return from Africa. However, in 1969, only 70 pairs of storks returned to Denmark (down from 10,000 previously), as pesticides used against locusts along the Nile River poisoned the majority of the stork population (Brown, 1979, 31). Nevertheless, Brown identifies the unity of the biosphere, as opposed to the borders as socio-political constructs, as a source of activist hope. The globalisation of the economy led to the reconfiguration of boundaries between private and communal life. As early as 1973, Andre Gorz, an Austrian-French social theoretician widely

known for his concept of *difficult socialism*, wrote about how the development of the car industry turned cities into a living hell:

> *For entire generations, the large city was an object of fascination, the only place worth living in. Why did this reversal occur? For a single reason: the automobile made cities unendurable. Because of cars, cities became foul-smelling, noisy, suffocating, dusty, and congested – to such an extent that people no longer feel the desire to go out in the evening. Then, once automobiles had killed the cities, even more cars, faster ones at that, became necessary in order to escape from them onto highways, toward ever more distant suburbs*. (Gorz, 1982, 102)

Here, Gorz describes the same impact of industrial development on private and communal life that American sociologist Ray Oldenburg witfully encapsulated as the exchange of *community time* with *commute time* (Oldenburg, 2001, 4). Also, Oldenburg introduced the concept of the *third place* as "a setting beyond home and work in which people relax in good company and do so on a regular basis" (Oldenburg, 2001, 2). Third place, therefore, embodies the area between an individual's privacy and public spaces. The division of space into what Oldenburg termed "unifunctional zones", residential areas on the one hand and spaces dedicated to profit generation and consumerism on the other, led to the gradual erosion of communities in a purely social sense. A great deal of Mala Zora's journey to the future takes place in the forest, which I regard as a third space, a location far off from both the traditional school setting and home. Moreover, the whole point of the advanced approach to education is that it allows children to explore the third space safely through free movement and unconstrained play in nature. One of the scenes of unrestricted play in the novel vividly illustrates this claim. Zora stops the car in the woods, and the children begin to play with lambs:

> *We got out of the car. The lambs started jumping around us. A kid goat hit me on the head and knocked me over into the grass. I pouted and wanted to cry, but the others laughed so much that, instead of crying, I also started to laugh. At that moment, an adult female comrade came by and shouted at the naughty four-legged rascals: "These little devils! They think this is a gymnastics class, and they want to compete with you and roll in the grass with you." We went on into the woods together with the lambs and kid goats. We did not walk normally but ran and jumped like lambs. It wasn't really clear who was jumping more and rolling more in the grass – us or the little lambs; everything was completely mixed up*. (Little Zora, 2024, 155)

It is no coincidence that Mala Zora learns one of the formative lessons in the woods. Here, two points need to be highlighted. First, Zora's ability to control herself and not burst into tears is an outcome of social collaboration. As relatively new findings in developmental psychology suggest, all higher mental functions are products of social cooperation (Berk, 1994, 32). Further, engaging in collective fervour promotes joy. Also, it is worth noting that this act of individual emotional maturation could be regarded as a rite of passage in which Zora acquires the core values of the new community – joyfulness, deep connection to all living creatures, spontaneity, and attunement. This ritualistic aspect allows us to interpret the novel's third space as a liminal space. In anthropological research, liminality is understood as a phase in which neophytes "submit to an authority that is nothing less than the total community" (Turner, 1969, 364). In this process, a neophyte experiences symbolic rebirth, now as a member of the community, because the community is "the repository of the whole gamut of culture's value norms, attitudes, sentiments" (Turner, 1969, 364). The result of the process is what anthropologist and ethnographer Edith Turner termed *communitas*, the sense of liberating interconnectedness whose essential component is also joy in the immediacy of the moment (Turner, 2012, 12). It is obvious how all of the above applies to the scene of erratic play with lambs and Zora's experience. Play thus emerges as the most effective way for a child to encounter communitas. Research by Jean Piaget (2001), perhaps the most widely known psychologist of child development, emphasised the importance of play for the development of complex cognitive functions. However, in the 1990s, Western psychology discovered the previously unknown (in the West) theories of the Soviet scholar Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934). His vital contribution was demonstrating that play, especially forms that require children to costume themselves or assume specific roles, is crucial to learning emotional self-regulation and social cooperation (Berk, 1994, 38). Roger Caillois' cultural theory corresponds with Vygotsky's insights. Drawing on the cultural-historical method of the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, Caillois (*1958*) shows that all forms of play, not only those based on assuming roles, enable the child to experience *communitas* and to exist as an active and joyful member of the community (Kajoa, 1965, 90). The dizziness experienced by Zora and her companions in their play with goats and sheep is referred

to in Roger Caillois's terminology as *ilinx*, a state of disorientation. Caillois's theory of play is based on the assumption that the principles of games correspond to primordial human needs, and he classifies the games accordingly. These include competition (*agon*), the pursuit of chance (*alea*), mimicry (*mimicry*), and the need for the loss of control, which is realised through *ilinx*. Caillois (*1965*, 88) argues that precisely because play responds to primordial impulses of the human being, these impulses can be satisfied only under ideal conditions, which is to say conditions of limited time and space (*Caillois, 1965, 88*). In other words, over the course of the play, the third space takes shape as a liminal space. Without clearly established boundaries between mundane life and the life enacted in play, play itself loses its meaning. Vygotsky arrives at a similar insight, but from the perspective of the role of play in a child's cognitive development. He argues that although a child experiences a desire to play, they must postpone immediate gratification of that desire for play to be possible at all. On the cognitive level as well, play is inseparably linked to liminality. It corresponds to the psychological function known as the *zone of proximal development*, that is, a zone of discomfort in which the child is enabled to behave 'as if' they were more mature than they actually are. Through such behaviour, the child becomes so (Berk, 1994, 36). As an imagined situation, play, according to Vygotsky, is also always a negotiation of the rules (Vigotski, 2008, 107). Thus, in the play, the child comes to understand and embrace the mechanisms of self-regulation.

For both Caillois (1965) and Vygotsky (2004), play represents a creative principle through which children come to understand and experience freedom. Caillois (1965) places particular emphasis on the fact that play must be free to preserve one of its vital properties – uncertainty. In the Romance languages, the very word *future* carries a connotation of uncertainty and unknowingness, of that which is yet to come. In illustrating how the child's brain functions, Vygotsky explicitly links creativity with the notion of humans as beings capable of dealing with the future as the unpredictable:

> *If human activity were limited to the reproduction of the old, then the human being would be a creature oriented only to the past* […] *A child's play very often is just an echo of what he saw and heard adults do; nevertheless, these elements of his previous experience are never merely reproduced in play in exactly the same way they occurred in reality. A child's play is not simply a reproduction of what he has experienced, but a creative reworking of the impressions he has acquired.* (Vygotsky, 2004, 9–11)

It is precisely this human capacity to recreate and reorganise elements that lies at the heart of proto-ecological utopias. In Morris' novel, the people of the future have chosen to halt technological development at a certain level to allow other aspects of the economy, culture, and society to thrive at the expense of technology. The social utopia envisioned in Mala Zora's dream clearly continues the trajectory initiated by William Morris (1834–1896) and Victorian socialism. In his other writings, Morris points out that machines can perform certain tasks that are done manually, but also vice versa. By underscoring the bidirectional relationship between manual and automated labour, he shows that his critique of technology, or, in his own terms, of "machinery", is not a mere disdain for innovation and mechanisation. This critique is grounded in a profound reflection on technology's purpose and overall influence on culture and society. Or, as he puts it bluntly, the goal is for humans to master the machine, rather than the other way around (Morris, 2019, 105). At the same time, Mala Zora's oneiric adventure also unintentionally addresses its own future. Its capacity to conceive the quality of human experience as inseparable from comprehensive social progress, reflected primarily in a constructive rather than destructive attitude toward the biosphere and life in general, aligns it with breakthroughs in ecological theory during the 1970s. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Vladisavljević's short novel, as well as the proto-environmentalist thinking of Victorian socialism, had no genuine intellectual allies on the left before new social and environmental movements emerged in the 1970s. Socialist imagery of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was saturated with symbols articulating workers' agency and authority within industrial systems. However, Morris' and Vladisavljević' visions stand out from the tropes of the struggle for socialism and traditional social-democratic activism in that they do not picture socialism as an end in itself or as a transitional phase toward a communist society, but rather as a social framework that favours more sophisticated and noble aspects of human behaviour. In their views, socialism functions as a playground for the future. In his book *Envisioning Real Utopias,* Marxist sociologist Erik Olin Wright (2011) thoroughly theorised the principles by which the vision of socialism as a playground of collective liberty can be entrenched. First, socialism does not rest on irrational faith in the nobility of the human spirit. Rather, it fosters hope in democracy as a process. More precisely, it is a belief that democratic decision-making empowers more civilised impulses of human nature – solidarity, compassion, and respect for people by virtue of their shared humanity. The second principle concerns curiosity and the capacity for exploration. Socialism is understood as a collective experimental undertaking

aimed at repeatedly testing the limits of democratic processes. The desired outcome would be the creation of institutions that expand those very limits (Wright, 2011, 293–296). The concept of the institution serves as a link between the keywords of this research: third space, the theories of play developed by Lev Vygotsky (2004) and Roger Caillois (1958), and the proto-ecological imagination in the novel *A Walk Through the Future*. In this novel, third space and play are understood precisely as social institutions whose aim is to expand the boundaries of what is possible and desirable within the educational system. Moreover, among the many theories of play, I draw specifically on Vygotsky and Caillois because each of them, from their respective perspectives – Vygotsky from developmental psychology and Caillois from aesthetic and cultural theory – conceptualises play as a social and cultural institution. The institutionalisation of play in the novel *A Walk Through the Future* allows children to make mistakes or bend the rules without being punished. This happens when other children share with Mala Zora how they were granted the freedom to go by car without adults' supervision. During the meeting where the adults were supposed to vote on whether teachers should accompany children during outdoor lessons, the children organised to influence the outcome. The boys kept making jokes, distracting the adult comrades so much that many didn't even hear the voting question. Meanwhile, the girls lifted the arms of their large dolls, making it look as if far more 'hands' were raised. Because of this tactic, the children won the vote.

When Mala Zora calls it fraud, the children explain that such a word no longer exists in their society; instead, it was perceived and rewarded as children's resourcefulness. The children even wrote about this event in their magazine *Dete u prirodi* [*A Child in Nature*], and the adults rewarded them for their cunningness. As a result, the comrades decided that factories should start producing small cars for children. The same educational spirit connects the institutionalisation of play and the unhindered exploration of nature as the two pillars of the first socialist utopia for children in Serbian literature.

LOOKING BACKWARD AND FORWARD: VLADISAVLJEVIĆ'S EARLY ECOLOGICAL UTOPIA IN THE SPOTLIGHT OF 1970S ECOLOGICAL THEORY

Before exploring the link between environmentalist theories and *A Walk Through the Future's* imagery, I mapped out the key elements of proto-environmentalist consciousness in this novel. Resistance to reconciliation with hyper-mechanised and hyper-industrialised society is articulated through the protection of the third space as a zone of playfulness. In the socialist utopia of Dragutin Vladisavljević, values and norms are organically acquired through institutionalised play. Biljana Andonovska and Tijana Tropin summarise the gist of Mala Zora's journey as follows: "It is a time of realised communism, imagined as a children's paradise on earth, founded on a balance between advanced, functional technological progress and a return to nature and spontaneity" (Andonovska & Tropin, 2022, 160). This article further develops arguments that Andonovska (2018) had offered in the introductory article that accompanied the first reprint of *A Walk Through the Future* in *Emitor,* a periodical dedicated to science-fiction literature in the year 2018. It is precisely this respectful relationship with nature that allows us to read *A Walk Through the Future* as an ecological utopia as well. The subversion of capitalist logic in this novel emerges as a crucial principle of upbringing. Whereas the capitalist system of production destroys natural resources and thus the possibility of unmediated contact with nature, degrading and reducing nature into a means for industrial and technological development that generates profit, the workers' society in Mala Zora's dream regards technology as a mere instrument for technical improvement. This futuristic society highly esteems and nurtures the organic unity of the living and the non-living, the human and the non-human, as an end in itself. This is particularly evident in two instances. Firstly, in the title of the aforementioned children's magazine *Dete u prirodi* [*A Child in Nature*]. Moreover, children's right to organise in ways that imitate political organising within working-class institutions, such as unions, goes hand in hand with 'social upbringing', which shocked Mala Zora most. As one of the comrades she met in a new environment explains:

> *We are not brought up by special educators, nor are we taught about morals in classroom lessons by teachers, as they used to be called in the old times, a hundred years ago, before workers' order existed. We are raised by lambs, goats, birds, bees – all of Nature. Upbringing as it is today was once only dreamed of in the old days by a few children's friends, such as Jean Jacques Rousseau and Pestalozzi, but it really only happens today when comrades who are mothers decide for themselves how to bring up their own children.* (Little Zora, 2024, 169)

The episodic structure of this short novel allows readers to grasp crucial didactic and ideological points quickly – Mala Zora wakes up to discover a whole new world, symbolically represented by the school of inverted norms. It is self-evident that the school functions as a site of representation, since it is

a place where people learn to act in a socially acceptable manner. The narrator's positioning highlights a stark contrast between the mortifying past, which is indeed Zora's everyday life, and the more joyful childhood of the kids she meets in the future. Unlike the school of the past, this schooling system takes a more holistic approach to upbringing and an utmost willingness to examine and recognise children's needs, rather than a strict set of rules to discipline children into submission. The fundamental difference between the capitalist present and the socialist future lies in the relationship to corporal punishment and to space. While the capitalist world relies on corporal discipline, physical hierarchies, and restrictions, the new working-class society embraces free movement, abolishing hierarchies between women and men, teachers and pupils, and humans and the rest of the biosphere.

However, the situation is not entirely black and white. Vladisavljević's utopia allows free exploration as a key learning method. This utopian society nonetheless includes some mechanisms of surveillance and control. Adult comrades monitor children via radio stations even when they are out of sight, while children's vehicles operate along predetermined routes. This remains a major contradiction in the novel, which, however, does not mention any similar mechanism that would apply to the adults as well. Here, it is worth noting that at the end of the story, we learn that the police do not allow the workers' procession to pass through the city; instead, the participants are forced to take a side road. This scene shows that social hierarchy and repression directly determine who has access to cultural and natural resources. Moreover, Mala Zora is utterly surprised by the spontaneity and freedom of the new school, which becomes painfully evident when contrasted with the spaces and places to which she and her real-life peers were confined. As an illustration, during what turns out to be a history class in the future, Zora and her new classmates watch moving pictures about elementary schools at the beginning of the twentieth century, when one of the slides shows the following description: "A little further on you can see a shack with a sign 'Primary School.' The tavern building is new and much nicer than the school" (Little Zora, 2024, 164).

As a contrast to the devastated educational infrastructure, surrounded by an inn and drunken people, the school of the future appears as a harmonious unity of nature and civilisation conceptualised without mutually exclusive binarism. Vladisavljević's *A Walk Through the Future* unmistakably inherits a Morrisian contempt for the technocratic, scientistic style of management, later termed Taylorism in labour theory (Braverman, 1974), and explicitly articulates the notion of the human being as an integral part of the biosphere rather than its superior or, let alone, master. In this regard, *A Walk Through the Future* persistently stages what a process of unlearning *industrial mythology* would look like at the level of everyday organisation and experience. When such a need arises, the educators allow the children to change their schedule and conduct a hygiene lesson instead of maths. This is how one of the 'comrade educators' addresses the pupils:

> *Children, instead of a calculation class we have just had a class about cleanliness and health or, as it is called, hygiene. We held this class in this great hall, with one side open and looking out into the woods. As we talked about how to take care of our health, the birds chirped and flew from blossoming branch to blossoming branch which bend down as though they want to enter the hall. In the woods, sheep and goats and little lambs and kid goats are jumping cheerfully across the grass and through the bushes, and their bells seem to be calling you there as well.* (Little Zora, 2024, 163)

The goal of this narrative sequence is to demonstrate what school education would look like if liberated from serving industry and social hierarchies as its primary purpose.[2] When Zora is confused by the absence of benches in the classroom, her companion explains:

> *The adult comrade who teaches us told us that in the old days there used to be, but they noticed that when children sat on such benches, they only looked attentive but didn't think about what they were being told. They sat numbly on the benches, did not move and thought little, and did not think about what they were being taught, but only listened and memorised things by heart like parrots, without understanding anything. That is why we decided to throw the benches out of the school classroom and now, as you can see, some children are standing, some are sitting on chairs, some on the floor, in whichever group suits them best.* (Little Zora, 2024, 157)

2 Vladisavljević's utopia corresponds not only with ecological but with pedagogical theories of the 1970s as well. This parallel further evokes Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, first published in 1968, in which the educational process plays a pivotal role in mediating between the dependent position of the oppressed in the present and their liberation in the future (Freire, 1990). Stanley Aronowitz explains Freire's position as follows: "The oppressed are situated within an economic and social structure and tied to it not only by their labour but also by the conditions of their psychological being. The task of his pedagogy is to encourage the emergence of a specific kind of discourse that presupposes a project for the formation of subjectivities that is increasingly separate from that of structure" (Aronowitz, 2015, 121).

Obviously, liberation starts with treating human bodies with dignity and respect. However, such an educational approach would be incompatible with industrial settings that require future workers to adjust their biorhythms to the needs of capital. I borrowed the term industrial mythology from Rudi Supek (1989), a Yugoslav social scientist and the only person from Yugoslavia who attended the above-mentioned 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. At that time, climate change, overpopulation, pollution, and CO_2 emissions were officially identified as global challenges with the potential to annihilate humankind and civilisation. One year later – and three years after L. R. Brown published *World Without Borders* – Supek released his study *Ova jedina zemlja* [*This Only Earth*] in 1973. Its subtitle, "Are we heading toward catastrophe or toward a Third Revolution?", clearly reflects the author's position, which implies that, following the two industrial revolutions, a further ecological revolution is required to enable the genuine and sustainable development of society. After two industrial revolutions, which enabled the rapid growth of the world's population, it became necessary to unlearn the fascination with industrial development (and the profits it generates), which persisted even in the left-wing circles. Supek explicitly challenged a frequent socialist and trade-unionist 'industry creates workplaces' argument as a fundamental inability to think beyond the capitalist framework in the long run. He openly poses the question, "What use is life to me if I were to live on the 536th floor of a skyscraper, if I were to breathe oxygen and drink water from some devices located on lower or higher floors of this enormous building?" (Supek, 1989, 23). This illustration clearly corresponds to his theoretical argument as well: two industrial revolutions unfolded under the aegis of growth for the sake of growth and profit. The third, essentially an ecological revolution, would have to impose limits on this expansion. Supek also firmly believes that "the ruthless exploitation of nature is merely a consequence of the ruthless exploitation of humans" (Supek, 1989, 45).

It appears that Vladisavljević's literary utopia gave imaginative and poetic form to this insight half a century earlier. Although capitalism is driven by an obsession with perpetual progress, it simultaneously destroys the environment, thereby intensifying society's temporal responsibility toward future generations in a profoundly negative way. The present generation cannot, even in theory, encounter those whose lives will be significantly worsened by escalating environmental degradation. It was precisely the ecological theories of the 1970s that (re)introduced awareness of both the social, spatial, and temporal dimensions of the ecological crisis. Or, in Andre Gorz's words, "the socialism of economic growth presents a distorted image not of our future, but of our past" (Gorz, 1982, 35). This notion prompts us to reread the history of emancipation in a way that includes those voices that were more farsighted than the mainstream left. *A Walk Through the Future* is, thus, a fundamental part of that legacy, which, unfortunately, remained invisible and under-researched for a long time.

CONCLUSION

This essay begins with a subtle polemic against posthumanist theories, because they diminish the significance of the human subject in the pursuit of environmental and climate justice. It concludes by linking early socialist utopias with ecological theories of the 1970s. Third space, liminality, and the theories of play developed by Vygotsky and Caillois enable us to access deeper symbolic layers of the short novel *A Walk Through the Future*. When read together, these theories open new possibilities for interpreting Vladisavljević's vision of an educational system that fosters solidarity and equality among people. Without third space and play as settings and practices through which humans express their innate resourcefulness, desire for freedom and unpredictability, it does not seem achievable to liberate oneself from a capitalist worldview that privileges linear growth, efficiency, and the constant disciplining of bodies in space. Without such a transformation, no ecological policy could be effective in the long run. Third space and play, as understood by the authors discussed here, guide us toward those aspects of humanity that strive for harmony with nature rather than domination over it. Such an interpretation points to the conclusion that a return to the human(ist) subject, rather than a bold rejection of its significance, is the path toward new views of environmental and social justice as inseparable from each other. This also explains why, unlike ecomodernist projections, texts such as Vladisavljević's can offer us some hope. Whereas posthumanist and ecomodernist theories more or less implicitly antagonise the individual subject and its environment, Vladisavljević's novel, like the ecological theories of the 1970s, demonstrates how the process of reshaping the individual subject can be dialectical. In this way, it provides material for reflecting on the constitution of a radically democratic collective subject, one that would not rely on the negation of history, as critiques of the Anthropocene often do, but rather on the incorporation and reinterpretation of all previous emancipatory experiences and visions.

RAZISKOVANJE TRETJEGA PROSTORA: INTERPRETACIJA IGRE V OTROŠKEM ROMANU *SPREHOD SKOZI PRIHODNOST* SKOZI VIGOTSKEGA IN CAILLOISA

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POVZETEK

Skozi teorijo igre, kot sta jo razvijala Lev Vigotski (1896–1934) in Roger Caillois (1913–1978), avtorica v članku preučuje otroški roman Šetnja kroz budućnost (»Sprehod skozi prihodnost«) – socialistično utopijo iz obdobja 1924–1925, ki jo pripisujejo socialdemokratu, zdravniku in pedagogu delavstva Dragutinu Vladisavljeviću. Pri tem razvija tezo, da osrednjo vlogo znotraj pedagoške in protoekološke domišljije romana zavzemata igra in tretji prostor. Študija sledi pripovedi o Mali Zori, deklici, ki sanja o prihodnji delavski družbi, kjer izobraževanje ne bo potekalo v togih in discipline polnih šolskih učilnicah, ampak v skupnostnih prostorih in igrivih naravnih okoljih. Te prostore, v katerih se odvije sanjski prehod Male Zore v protikapitalistično družbo, avtorica označi za liminalne ter jih sledeč Rayu Oldenburgu (2001) preučuje kot tako imenovane tretje prostore, ki se nahajajo onkraj prostorov doma kot dela, s čimer omogočajo družbenost, svobodo in kolektivno veselje. Opirajoč se na Vigotskega, članek prikaže, kako v romanu prav igra spodbuja čustveno samoregulacijo, ustvarjalnost in družbeno sodelovanje. S Cailloisovo taksonomijo igre, zlasti z ilinx kot užitkom dezorientacije, članek osvetli v romanu uprizorjene ekstatične, skupnostne igre z živalmi v naravi. Skozi dialog z omenjenimi teorijami prikaže vlogo in razumevanje igre v »Sprehodu skozi prihodnost« kot družbeno institucijo, ki goji solidarnost, spontanost in prakso deliberativne demokracije. V navezavi na ekološki socializem Williama Morrisa (1834–1896) in socialistično jugoslovansko ekološko teorijo 1970-ih let, kakršno je razvijal predvsem Rudi Supek (1989), ki je poudarjal omejitev rasti, kolektivno odgovornost ter enotnost med ljudmi in preostalo biosfero, avtorica v zaključku umesti roman v razvoj okoljevarstvenega mišljenja.

Ključne besede: teorija igre, tretji prostor, liminalnost, Lev Vigotski, Roger Caillois, utopična literatura, otroška literatura, ekološke podobe

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