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## **RECYCLED/REMEDIATED/REFORMATTED: GORAN BREGOVIĆ'S APPROPRIATION OF THE MUSIC INDUSTRY STRATEGIES IN POP SONG (POST)PRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** This paper is based on the assumption that Goran Bregović's transition from Yugoslav rock star to contemporary Balkan composer, as he defines himself today, has unfolded via the appropriation of the different strategies the music industry (MI) devised in its own, bumpy and often contested, but undeniably technologically constituted transition and transformation during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Notable for his usage of existing (mainly traditional) music even in his rock years, Bregović actually developed some peculiar modes of production that almost neatly matched the MI strategies not only of production, but of distribution and consumption as well. Hence, I shall address the possibilities of interpreting Bregović's creative/production procedures, here defined as recycling, remediation, and reformatting as appropriated

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<sup>1</sup> The basic research for this paper was presented in the talk I gave at the MAMI (Music and Moving Image) Conference at the Steinhardt School, New York City, in May 2012 – "Songs becomings and music for Kusturica's *Underground* - Remediation in the age of Postproduction". There, I dealt with the "nature" of Bregović's song becomings (in Deleuze's sense) from Kusturica's film *Underground* (1995). Here, however, due to the fact that this paper was in a way commissioned from the Sokoj Board on the occasion of the Conference of the European branch of CiSAC, which is to be held in Belgrade in April 2018, I am turning to the issues of strategies that are, in my opinion, constitutive for production (in terms of technology, as in terms of creativity) of popular music. This research was carried out as part of the scientific project of the Department of Musicology of the Faculty of Music in Belgrade *Identiteti srpske muzike u svetskom kulturnom kontekstu* [Identities of Serbian Music in the World Cultural Context], supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

music industry production, distribution and, naturally consumption strategies, show-casing his music for Emir Kusturica's *Underground* and the pop song(s) emerging from it.

**Key words:** pop song, film music, remediation, reformatting, Goran Bregović, music industry

If the music industry relies on the economy of music for which “there is a general consensus that the different processes are connected to one another through complex networks of social relations that link actors, organizations, and technologies” (Leyshon, 2014, 21), and that “four distinctive musical networks”, in Leyshon’s terms, those of creativity, reproduction, distribution, and consumption “(...) possess distinctive but overlapping functions, temporalities, and geographies” (ibid. 25), then the “connected processes” that are constitutive for the music industry, could be theorized as constitutive for each one of its four distinctive networks – the one of creativity<sup>2</sup> being in our focus here. And if that network has, from the early days of the music industry, been shaped and reshaped, over and over again by the (different) technologies of music (re)production, then the creative strategies in the field of popular music can be seen not only as constitutive in numerous “connected processes” of different musical networks, but also as strategies of appropriation of their predominantly technological “nature”. Hence, this account, though only slightly and as a point of departure, adheres to the findings of some music industry studies and music economy analysis, it aims at a theorization of the practice of one (individual) creator, coming from a small country, a practice that, in my opinion, would not be possible without the technological development of the music industry and technologies at the turn of the centuries. It is as if, from the challenges to the music business in the domain of copyright posed by piracy in the early days of the Internet, to the discovery of the new mechanisms of connecting nodes in music production, reproduction, distribution, and consumption networks actualized by streaming today, a paradoxical transition to a new kind of ‘indie’ in the network of creativity had occurred. That transition could be seen as a specific appropriation of the strategies of the music industry by a creative individual, and it became possible only with the advancement of digital technology (with its time/space compressions), and its music (re)production strategies.

Though probably the most widely known pop musician from these parts of the world, and with recordings for important foreign (Universal Classics, Poly-

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<sup>2</sup> “To recap, these networks are as follows: first, a network of *creativity*, formed from the fusion of networks of composition and representation, wherein the music is created through multiple acts of performance,...” (Leyshon, 2014, 25).

gram, Philips) and domestic recording companies (PGP RTB, Jugoton, Croatia Records), Goran Bregović never signed for the majors. One could argue that it was only with his music for Kusturica's films that Bregović got his chance for a new, international career. What strongly connects Kusturica's Palme d'Or films (*Dom za vešanje / Le temps du Gitanes* of 1989, and *Bila jednom jedna zemlja* a.k.a *Podzemlje/Underground* of 1995) to music industry issues, is the fact that their release coincided with crucial global changes (symbolized in the fall of the Wall), one of the consequences being the advance of world music.

On that tide, the subgenre of so-called Balkan music emerged; inextricably linked to the music Goran Bregović created for Emir Kusturica's films. Whatever Balkan music may be, the fact is that globalization, in its typical quasi 'backlash', initially in war and subsequently in the whirl of recycled information without the 'original', has contributed to the re-actualization of the Balkans. However, the 'steadiness' of this becoming-Balkans process as well as the fact that consequently we, from these parts of the world, are all engaged in the game of becoming Balkanians, calls for the products of these processes to be addressed.

Bregović's Serbo-Croatian origin, as well as the fact that he was, as Kusturica, born in Sarajevo, the capital of the SR of Bosnia and Herzegovina – one of the popular music centers of the SFRY, imposed on this musician the devising of strategies that he still uses today. Namely, Bregović these days states that he is a "Balkan contemporary composer"<sup>3</sup> in much the same way as he claimed to be a "Yugoslav rock musician" in the mid-80's. In developing this strategy, there were a number of factors involved, ranging from the aforesaid (in addition to which there have been others, such as: settling in Paris in the 90's, then in Belgrade in the late '90s to 2011, and then in Sarajevo, again – being in all these, and many other places, except Sarajevo, in the same time<sup>4</sup>), from socio-cultural, geopoliti-

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<sup>3</sup> "Goran Bregović describes himself simply as a contemporary composer. Why then does his 'contemporary' sound different from the music of other contemporary composers? Because Goran is from the Balkans. And in the Balkans 'contemporary' is different", official website: <http://www.goranbregovic.rs/biography.html> (accessed on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011). His recent statement follows the same lines: "Well, I'm a composer of contemporary music. My contemporary music is probably different from other contemporary musics, but has the same intention of being contemporary art music. Of course, I'm coming from rock'n'roll where there is a habit to entertain with music. So, always when I write serious music, I have to have fun. I suppose that's a kind of disability that remained from rock..." Interview to *See.biz* given on April 29<sup>th</sup> 2011 "Male kulture kao naša imaju utjecaj kao nikad pre" in: <http://rs.seebiz.eu/goran-bregovic-male-kulture-kao-nasa-imaju-utjecaj-kao-nikad-prije/ar-1897/> (accessed on May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011). English translations by V.M.

<sup>4</sup> In a TV Interview with Petar Popović, when asked what the circumstances were of his growing up, Bregović replied: "Between Serbs, Croats, and Muslims. The rest of my life

cal, and of course, technological. So, one could say that there are actually all the common factors that coexist in popular music production, mediation<sup>5</sup>, and reception practices, its networks of creativity, reproduction, distribution, and consumption. Bregović's transition, his (re)mediation from 'being Yugoslav' to 'being Balkanic', as well as of 'being a rocker' to 'being a composer' notwithstanding his insistence on "being apolitical"<sup>6</sup> create a kind of 'shield' around him that protects him from the (im)possibility of holding on to a stable national identity, and enabling his constant re-creation, performing, and actualization of a kind of unstable one, that he now states to be (once again?) "supranational" – Balkanic?

As such, Bregović has devised an equally (un)stable and unique creative personality that, as I have already pointed out, could be seen as appropriating/

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continues in the same circumstances, as well. I was registered in Slovenia, since the taxes were lowest there. I loved Sarajevo more than anything in the world, longed for it whenever I left for longer, but it was stupid to pay this kind of taxes in Sarajevo. (...)“ (underlines by V.M.), Transcript of the TV Interview with Petar Popović from 1994, at <http://milosm.cool-freepage.com/Intervju%20Bregovic.html> (accessed on May 16<sup>th</sup> 2011). And in 2011, he explains what, today, Sarajevo means to him: “From this year I'm again registered in Sarajevo (laugh). My official residence is Sarajevo, again. Don't know if there is a scientific explanation for the lifetime/vital excitement of a birthplace, the very place you were born in. There's nothing reasonable there. (...)”. Interview to *See.biz* given on April 29<sup>th</sup> 2011 “Male kulture kao naša imaju utjecaj kao nikad prije” in: <http://rs.seebiz.eu/goran-bregovic-male-kulture-kao-nasa-imaju-utjecaj-kao-nikad-prije/ar-1897/> (accessed on May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Keith Negus introduces the concept of “mediation” as a way of “conceptualizing processes that connect production to consumption” in the field of popular music. More in: Negus, 1996, 66–99.

<sup>6</sup> Asked by Petar Popović in the abovementioned TV interview about his successful avoidance of politics, Bregović replied: “Politics is something that really does terrible things to Yugoslavs. Not only during Communism. A thousand years of stupid and hideous politics. I really don't know how these people manage to bear this kind of curse of going through the same things, over and over again. By the way, I cannot understand how it is that with people who are known to be clever, the same trick always works. It's sad that these people never experienced the good effects of politics. It 's only normal that everyone speaks and thinks of politics when it affects them. I thought I should not create anything connected with politics. Yet, you know, as the years passed, it was hard for me to resist it.”

Transcript of the TV Interview with Petar Popović from 1994, at <http://milosm.coolfreepage.com/Intervju%20Bregovic.html> (accessed on May 16<sup>th</sup> 2011). And in a later interview he states: “Just as I could not organize a non-bombing, I couldn't organize a bombing. Nobody knew that the attacks would begin. We should not be telling people the wrong things. Artists have no political power. There was some artist in history who tried to enter politics, to be active – that didn't go down well. Politics is another gift and another vocation.” in: <http://rs.seebiz.eu/goran-bregovic-male-kulture-kao-nasa-imaju-utjecaj-kao-nikad-prije/ar-1897/> (accessed on May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011).

performing procedures and strategies of different musical networks of the music economy/music industry, such as recycling, remediation, and (re)formatting. Needless to say, the three constantly overlap, intertwine and relate one to another (as is the case with music industry networks), enabling the continuous circulation of music products/songs/information. Theorized, these strategies lose their specific temporalities and promote a new kind of geography. Mixed, and overlapping in one creative individual, they are similar in their origin to the materials they use (already existing ones) and by their very mixture, to the postproduction strategies of contemporary art practices as Bourriaud describes.<sup>7</sup> Still, in order to point to their provenance, which lies probably within the scope of music industry practices rather than in contemporary art production practices (in as much as these two can be ‘separated’), and to distinguish this in relation to the music/entertainment industry’s terminology in which the term postproduction has its own specific meanings, I here chose to ‘join’ recycling, remediation, and reformatting strategies under the term (post)production, denoting a particular creative procedure.

### **Recycle, or “*adapt and survive*”. From Stravinsky, via “Underground” tango to “Ausencia”**

Notorious, even in his Yugoslav days, for “borrowings” Bregović, in a way, recycled his glory exactly through that notoriety, challenging the “keepers of tradition” while appropriating one of the technological procedures in the creative musical network of the times: sampling. Thus, the recycled traditional music primarily of the Roma people became “original” world music by Goran Bregović. In this aspect, Bregović’s creative decisions, provoked by Kusturica’s artistic

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<sup>7</sup> As it is well known, Nicolas Bourriaud in a kind of theoretical postproduction strategy ‘borrows’ the term from the cultural industry’s “tertiary sector” linked to the “service industry and recycling”. “Since the early nineties, an ever increasing number of artworks have been created on the basis of preexisting works; more and more artists interpret, reproduce, re-exhibit, or use works made by others or available cultural products. This art of postproduction seems to respond to the proliferating chaos of global culture in the information age, which is characterized by an increase in the supply of works and the art world’s annexation of forms ignored or disdained until now. These artists who insert their own work into that of others contribute to the eradication of the traditional distinction between production and consumption, creation and copy, ready-made and original work. The material they manipulate is no longer *primary*, it is no longer a matter of elaborating a form on the basis of a raw material but working with objects that are already in circulation on the cultural market, that is to say, objects already *informed* by other objects. Notions of originality (being at the origin of) and even of creation (making something from nothing) are slowly blurred in this new cultural landscape.” (Cf. Bourriaud, 2002, 13).

vision and supported by the academic musicians he surrounded himself with, for making film music at first, peculiarly resemble the music industry's own dealing with sampling and borrowing in the domain of copyright issues from 1980s onward.<sup>8</sup> Yet, the recycling strategy is embedded in the very nature of the music industry and the logic of its economy. From the early days of radio, sound films and gramophone records, the music industry devised the strategies of remediation<sup>9</sup> and recycling. The former, here understood as repurposing, as the way to promote the product/song in different media, thus enabled its multiple reproductions and wider/longer consumption, that should/could lead to the latter, which could be realized as the cover version, but with the advance of technology of sampling, could also lend life to the 'completely' new product. Hence, that Bregović would recycle and remediate his music/product for Kusturica's *Underground*, is not at all strange in terms of the music/entertainment industry. Yet, that he would appropriate recycling strategy as the creative procedure in the making of "original" (film) music is not so common for its networks of reproduction and distribution.

Oddly enough, the song that will be in focus here, initially recognised in its soundtrack version as "Ausencia" (Portuguese for: absence), and sung by the prominent fado singer, Cesaria Evora,<sup>10</sup> does not belong to "Balkan sound". It is certainly quite different from the "Mesečina" (Moonlight), and "Kalašnjik-ov"<sup>11</sup> that made Kusturica-Bregović and Balkan music so famous. Yet, its music seems to be crucial for the narrative of the film, the different remediations of its theme conveying different emotions, ranging from melancholy, passion, longing, hassle (dert – Turkish), covering the tragically (WAR) as well as the tragicomically (COLD WAR) realized aspects of the story (by Dušan Kovačević and Emir Kusturica). Generally speaking, songs' becoming at the level of the film – soundtrack relation, is based on remediation that is common for traditional music making and between its two basic media – instrumental and vocal, i.e. dance/dancing and song/singing. Understandably, the 'instrumental' aspects of the music materials are more prominent in the film itself, yet their re-mediability inherent to their quasi-folkloristic origin, make them suitable candidates for songs. Thus, the only actually and partly sung song of the three songs in the film

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. for instance: Rosen (2008), Jones (2014), Frith (2001), Buyn (2016), etc.

<sup>9</sup> On remediation as a concept used here, see: Bolter and Grusin (2000), Mikić (2014).

<sup>10</sup> Sound-track for the movie in which "Ausencia" is on track 2, can be found at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gp\\_iP\\_UIPTU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gp_iP_UIPTU); for all the examples related to this paper see also the playlist at the official New Sound YouTube channel: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZ-t\\_2SKutBY&list=PLNFGwrMs0-Xzo9GYGsuBaxxOc6704\\_IUJ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZ-t_2SKutBY&list=PLNFGwrMs0-Xzo9GYGsuBaxxOc6704_IUJ)

<sup>11</sup> Sound-track, track 1, see link above.

is “Mesečina”, which also provides the clue for the kind of remediation Bregović was after in general. He usually starts with instrumental fragments of the song, or he insists on different media solutions, achieving a kind of ‘technological’ remediation of the same music content. For instance, we hear the instrumental/Roma brass band version of “Mesečina” before the song is sung by the three main characters during the frantic climax in one of the ‘kafana’ scenes. As for “Kalašnjikov”, it opens and ends the film in the same brass band ‘format’, and in that respect, with its carousel-like logic it underlines the ‘vicious cycle’ the film aims to achieve both with its form and its ‘endless’ story, its equation and constant exchange of the ground–underground; past–present; left–right; good–evil; love–hate; tragic–comic, human–animal; moral–amoral, etc... The lyrics and vocal added in the soundtrack song, only enhance this logic of equation that comes close to the absurd, for only the rare ones could understand anything except the title, since the whole song is sung by the members of the band in the Roma language, and that paradoxically works perfectly well for affecting a kind of notorious Balkan ‘craze’ in the process of reception.

Turning back to “Ausencia” it should be said that the prominence of its material is crucial for the dramaturgy of the film, and Bregović’s usual procedure could be observed in the fact that the song is not sung in the movie itself, the remediation takes place in the field of instrumental music. Besides “Ausencia”, the soundtrack offers yet two more, one purely instrumental and the other, partly vocal-instrumental versions of the music – “Underground Tango” for string quartet, and “War” for orchestra and traditional female vocals (Bulgarian singers).

So, before becoming “Ausencia”, the song’s-to-become melody, has been danced, mourned, grieved and lamented to in the movie. “Tango” for string quartet is heard clearly from the gramophone record Marko plays while courting Natalija, dancing with her in the midst of the Allies’ aerial bombardment of Belgrade in 1944, in a conclusive farewell to the wartime civilian Belgrade culture inclined to the Western style of entertainment, the wartime life style that also closes the first part of the movie (WAR).

The tragicomic, grotesque remediation of the string quartet Tango was reserved mainly for the film’s second part (COLD WAR), and it was achieved by adding the harsh sound of the tamburitza, by an accelerated tempo, and the changes in the strings’ articulation, in their most convincing ‘covering’ of the ‘accidental’ drowning of Crni’s son, Jovan, and the ‘remediation’ of the action ‘underwater’.

As for the scene of Nazi’s bombing of Belgrade that marked the beginning of the war in Yugoslavia in 1941, balancing the final scenes of total devastation

of some place, somewhere on the battlefield in Yugoslavia in the early '90s, a less 'innocent' remediation of the War music is used. It is characterized by the sombre pedal of the deepest orchestra registers, above which one can hear the 'oriental', half-step downward motion, sobbing, lamenting colours added to the melody, and additionally strengthened by timbres of traditional instruments. The remediation in play becomes more complex and bears less and less similarity to 'repurposing', if one pays attention to the song accompanied by the orchestra/ added to the orchestra. Bulgarian singers sing the 'tango' melody to the lyrics of the 'old-town' Serbian song "Stani, stani Ibar vodo" that will be sung a little later in its 'real' version by Crni.

This kind of 'mix', proving (post)production to be Bregović's 'second nature', is actually typical of his output 'outside' movie music – mixing and matching different songs and lyrics of his own, traditional, or songs and lyrics by his colleagues, has become one of his trademarks. Digging even deeper this time, and surely with the help of renowned Serbian composer, Isidora Žebeljan, not only in respect of instrumentation and orchestration, Bregović borrows and recycles the main theme of his tango/Ausencia etc., from the two bars of the main theme (b. 9) of the "Piano Tango" by Igor Stravinsky (1941).<sup>12</sup> Could it then be that the decision to mix and match the tango's generic, passionate longing and Balkan dert, enables the 'becoming' of the Balkan sung tango, the subsequent affect of which is actualized, and by means of the 'universality' of emotions, in the 'saudade' meets 'dert' (notoriously untranslatable words that signify a similar mix of emotions of sadness, unease, nostalgia, mourning...) in the fado-tango song "Ausencia"?

### **Remediation/Reformatting, or *dolce vita*? From Portugal, via Serbia and Poland, to Greece and...**

It seems as though, just like the film would not let go of the 'tango' music, Bregović could not let go of the suddenly 'discovered' potentials of the remediation strategies of this particular song. It 'surfaced' in his diverse collaboration with prominent Balkan and Central European pop singers, in the years following the Cannes success of the film *Underground*.

The song "Ausencia" became widely known to ex-Yu audiences when it became "Tabakera" in 1997, sung by Zdravko Čolić<sup>13</sup> in different arrangement

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<sup>12</sup> It should certainly be interesting to further investigate the "origin" of Stravinsky's *Tango*, bearing in mind his own "notoriety" for borrowings. Recording with score at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_\\_IfuUH8MTY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__IfuUH8MTY)

<sup>13</sup> Official video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=att1PWXm5dU>. Album "Kad bi moja bila", published by Komuna in 1997, CD-163.

(guitars, double-bass, drums), with a slightly changed tempo, and of course to different lyrics, but basically evoking the same emotions, in the Serbian language.

The two 1999 “formats” are quite different. “Ta-bakiera” sung by Polish singer Kayah,<sup>14</sup> uses the ‘usual’ remediation procedure – transferring the same content to a different music media format, yet achieving a quite different effect with a string quartet+guitar+drums, a female voice combination, and their specific treatment. In the case of Georgos Dalaras’s Greek effect in “Pou Na’Sai Tora, Anna”,<sup>15</sup> Bregović chooses to mix speech and singing over the ‘tango becoming a rebetika’ accompaniment of bouzoukis. Dalaras sings only the chorus, while in most of the song he recites verses that are actually the Greek translation of the song which is famous among the inhabitants of the ex-Yu space, created by Croatian singer-songwriter, Arsen Dedić – “Ne daj se, Ines”.<sup>16</sup>

As far away from the film of its origin as it may seem, it actually powerfully recalls the scene of the ‘tango dance’, in which while dancing, Marko, the unaccomplished (revolutionary) poet, recites love verses to Natalija. In addition, it could be said that Marko’s verses have been actually remediated from the ‘70s TV film by one of *Underground*’s screenwriters, Dušan Kovačević.<sup>17</sup>

Possibly proving the above-mentioned ‘universality’ of emotions, thus in a way excluding the notion of Balkan music as such, and paradoxically by the “Balkan contemporary composer” himself, the songs ‘abandon’ the film, and its soundtrack and enter the stratum of the music industry, realizing a number unexpected affiliations. It could be argued that Bregović appropriated the “format shifting”, a procedure of the industry, which is basically remediation (shifting content from one format to another) and, more importantly – which is legal. Yet, this format shifting understood as a creative strategy goes beyond mere remediation and repurposing, coming closer to recycling and (re)covering, while it geographically shifts the content, shrinking space in a way that is at the same time similar and different to the ways the contemporary music industry does this. Such an appropriation of its strategies enables Bregović to create his own individual/independent poetics and practice of (post)production.

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<sup>14</sup> Recording at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4pNtuwPVzhM>, First published as “Kayah & Bregovic” in 1999, by Zic Zac in Poland, 74321634812.

<sup>15</sup> I discussed Bregović’s collaboration with Dalaras at length in: Mikić (2013). Recording of the song at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZgRXeZksO0>; Album “Thessaloniki – Yannena With Two Canvas Shoes”, Minos-EMI, 4942634, 1999.

<sup>16</sup> The most popular interpretation of the song was performed in 1985 by actor Rade Šerbedžija. Music and lyrics by Arsen Dedić.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. final scene of Kovačević’s *Zvezdana prašina* [*Stardust*], RTV Belgrade, 1976, directed by Jovan Konjović.

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## Summary

Trying to interpret the status and place of pop music artists who belong to the so-called "small" cultures and "small" music industries, and in the contemporary context, this account starts with the assumption that contemporary technologies that constitute music industry networks, transit to individual pop practices, similar to Bourriaud's concept of postproduction, yet relying even more on the music industry's "nature". It has been shown here that this transition, transfer or appropriation results, maybe, in paradoxically becoming a new kind of "indie" - not only as an independent publisher in terms of the music industry, but rather in terms of an independent individual creator, who also, by the very act of appropriating music industry strategies in the process of creation, determines the "destiny" of his product's geographical dissemination/distribution in a new way. These appropriated strategies, denoted as recycling, remediation and reformatting are here discussed on the example of music for *Underground* (Kusturica, 1995) and its further ramifications in Goran Bregović's individual output.