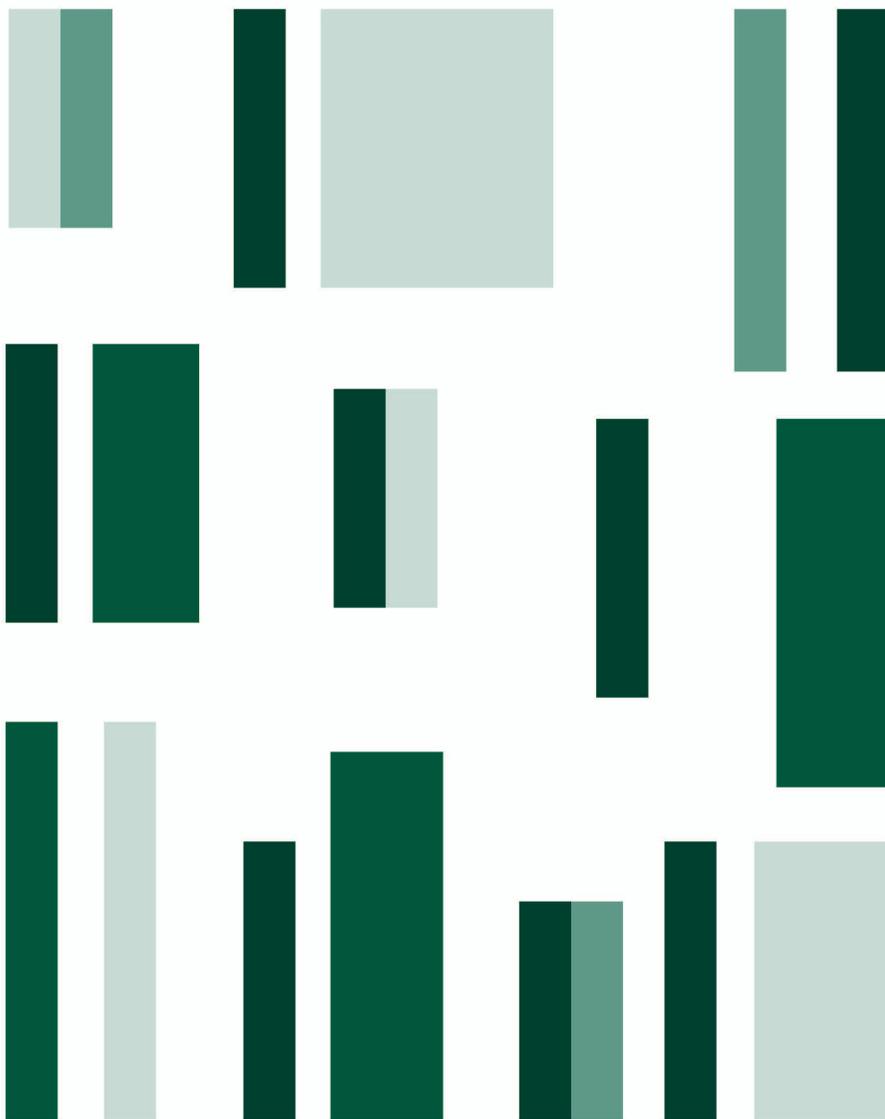


# NOSTALGIA ON THE MOVE

Belgrade, 2017







# Preface

The publication before you is the outcome of the international interdisciplinary project *Heroes We Love. Ideology, Identity and Socialist Art in the New Europe*. The idea behind *Heroes We Love* was to create a collaborative, multidisciplinary project on the until now controversial topic of socialist heritage of 20th century European art. It brought together eight partners<sup>1</sup> from institutional and non-institutional sectors in Slovenia, Croatia, Poland, Albania, Bulgaria and Serbia. The project is aimed at fostering interdisciplinary research on the phenomenon of socialist art and heritage in its cultural, social and ideological, as well as political context, spanning the period from the inception of the communist/socialist states of South-Eastern Europe until the present day. Different aspects of the topic were covered through symposia, lectures, exhibitions, art interventions, publications and web-activities aimed at different audiences. The first phase of the project provided the theoretical framework, the mapping of feature artworks, art forms and artists of the era, as well as questioning the conditions that influenced their production. The second phase of the project addressed contemporary conditions of socialist heritage by focusing on both its destruction and fetishization as distinct phenomena. It also sought to identify the traits of post-socialist art practices in the transition era and the contested interpretations of socialist legacy.

By taking part in the project the team of the Museum of Yugoslavia (the former Museum of Yugoslav History; MY hereafter) focused on the topic of *nostalgia* thus extending the project scope

towards deliberations of phenomena that marked the work of the Museum over the course of the years.<sup>2</sup> This concept has grasped the attention of researchers who have traced it in a wide range of different forms/formats, from media, popular culture, marketing, politics and personal memories in an attempt to comprehend what the role of nostalgia is in processes of commemorating and remembering our past. Taking different shapes, ranging from commemorative practices on the social margins, to contemporary art interpretations, *Yugonostalgia*, has inclined quite naturally towards the site of the MY. If we take into consideration that the lifelong leader of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito has been laid to rest within the Museum complex, in the so-called House of Flowers, both *Yugonostalgia* and *Titostalgia* – as another case specific term coined to include practices of commemorating Josip Broz Tito (Velikonja, 2008) – add another layer of significance to the MY. Both phenomena have inevitably influenced our professional perspective as curators, and especially so, in light of the dilemmas we are facing with regard to the issue of how to deal with contrasted (and often contested) narratives, memories and expectations of groups and individuals addressing (and visiting) the Museum. Additionally, bearing in mind the ethical and professional appeal to create a museum that is an open and inclusive public institution, different challenges have emerged, from those involving planning new acquisitions, to program and audience development.

By organizing the conference *Nostalgia on the Move* we wanted to create a context for our dilemmas,

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1 UGM | Maribor Art Gallery, [BLOK] curators' collective, Zagreb, Dance Centre, Maribor, The University of Primorska, LAZNIA Centre for Contemporary Art, Gdansk, The Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum (IEFSEM) at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Tirana Art Lab, the Museum of Yugoslavia, Belgrade (former Museum of Yugoslav History)

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2 This publication would not have been possible without the help and support of our colleagues: Radovan Cukić, Momo Cvijović, Milena Dragičević Šešić, Dušan Jevtić, Neda Knežević, Aleksandra Momčilović Jovanović, Simona Ognjanović, Ana Sladojević, Sara Sopić, Snežana Trninić, Katarina Živanović.

to test our own methods and approaches, and confront different existing viewpoints regarding ethical and other issues that we face as museum professionals. It was an opportunity to gather researchers from different disciplines, artists and curators in a discussion on key issues underlining museum work. Some of these key questions include how we deal with nostalgia in heritage sites and what are the main challenges within these processes.

The *Nostalgia on the Move* Conference came at the end of a long period of research and reconsideration on the topics of memory and nostalgia within the MY context. The aim was to make a cross-section of actual researches and debates, which would help us pave the way for future enquiry and program activities, and raise questions of interest among researchers, curators and artists who in different ways and with different aims deal with matters of memory, remembrance and nostalgia. The conference gathered mainly researchers whose professional interests are based within the Yugoslav context. For the purpose of broadening the perspective on these phenomena, we decided to include two interviews with museum experts from Russia, alongside texts offering the Bulgarian and Czech perspective, which were presented during the conference. Our hope is that this will help position the different available interpretations of the 'local experience' regarding other forms of remembering and commemorating, in the wider Eastern-European context.

In the introductory text, Mitja Velikonja offers an outline of the different typologies and different epistemological approaches to nostalgia. Velikonja posits Yugonostalgia as one of the epiphanies of post-communist "unexpected" nostalgias focusing on questioning its political potentials as resistance against dominant ideologies and practices – ethno-nationalism and neo-liberalism. The spread of nostalgia throughout post-communist countries is often looked upon as a kind of maladjustment to the present and its requirements. Tanja Petrović's research proposes that we should be attentive to the messages conveyed through the nostalgic narratives and practices of industrial workers. At first glance, their memories might be interpreted as the 'voices of transition's losers' however, her nuanced analysis introduces another angle. Namely,

the affectivity of workers' memories – of themselves as actors of modernization and industrialization – is interpreted as a prerequisite for their positioning as social subjects in the present moment. Their emotional ties to this past are (at least to a certain degree) preventing the remains of socialism – as remnants of a modernist utopia – to be neutralized and forgotten as part of an unsuccessful socialist project.

An interesting dialogue is created between Tanja Petrović and Branko Dimitrijević through their analyses. Dimitrijević is adamant in his interpretation of Yugonostalgia primarily as a *petit bourgeois* longing for the consumerist world of the 1960s and not related to productivism, industrialization or self-management. Dimitrijević claims that the nostalgic paradigm of remembering socialism is as harmful as the totalitarian one and that they both serve the cause of historical revisionism, which neglects to see any positive achievements of this period, arguing for a retrospective view that goes beyond these gaps. This could also be read as a call for a more reflective approach towards the past – one that is not afraid of remembering its contradictions. Milica Popović further develops the idea of Yugonostalgia's political potential by focusing on the last generation of pioneers. In search of new theoretical concepts necessary to understand nostalgic narratives that exceed the national and territorial boundaries, she proposes the concept of meta-national memory.

Starting from a twofold meaning of heritage as 'legacy' (something received from the past) and 'patrimony' (value that is chosen to be transmitted to the future) Nikolai Vukov discusses the challenges in interpreting what has been inherited from communist times as 'heritage' by focusing on public debates regarding monuments and museological representations usually viewed as nostalgic attempts to 'valorize' and 'legitimize' the communist regime. This process is understood as a cornerstone between nostalgia and counter-nostalgia, which is reflected in the various approaches to its visual, material and symbolic legacy. The connotation of "legacy [as] a burden that continues to resonate three decades after 1989 and fails to find due reflection despite (and beyond) the clash between nostalgia and counter-nostalgia regarding the communist period" (Citation from N. Vukov's article in this publication) still prevails

in the Bulgarian and East European context. Muriel Blaive's paper is based on the oral history study carried out in 2005 in the Czech Republic. Choosing a bottom-up perspective, Blaive questions individual agendas and the autonomy of people as social actors in the constricted frame of a one-party regime which, as this study also shows, found a social base and support among the population. There is a discrepancy between the official narrative that produces the image of Czechs as an "inherently democratic" people, and personal memories attesting support of the previous system whilst at the same time denying nostalgia. As Maria Todorova noted in the introduction to *Post-Communist Nostalgia* (2010) nostalgia is more an ascriptive term, one rarely used to describe oneself.

The final section of the publication features articles that focus on questioning the relation of museums and heritage stemming from the so-called recent past. Svetla Kazalarska notes that the musealization of communism has happened a lot faster than that of any previous historical period. Having as subject matter contemporary history, which is still present in the memories of many generations of audiences, provides an additional set of considerations to be taken into account. Kazalarska focuses on representations of childhood in museums of communism and the intersection between how museums construct narratives on the one side, and the ways visitors interpret them on the other. She sees the museum as text, open for reading and interpretation, but also as a ritual space in which this reading happens. Museums cannot control various audiences' readings despite the ideological premises underlying displayed narratives. However, this does not liberate them from ethical considerations and responsibility. Visitor messages found in impression books show a range of interpretations correlating to theories of nostalgia, it being: the critique of the present as an act of memory, a political emotion, a consumption practice, or a reaction to the "deficit of a future".

The texts of Nataša Jagdhuhn and Marija Đorgović follow the common idea of museum as social space, a space of performance, even a ritual. Both authors write about performance as a strategy for recognizing the active role of the visitors and include their agency as an intergal part of the exhibition. These performances are not staged by the museum

but are recognized by curators and the exhibition space is left open to audience intervention. Jagdhuhn follows the transformation of the Museum of „AVNOJ“ from that of a socialist concept and its "visitor as a witness" approach, to the present notion of "visitors as mediators of memories". She claims an active joint position of the museum and its visitors that together "use the power of performative embodiment, assemblies in/for/by museums, now, in changed socio-political circumstances, [in the] attempt to fight for a 'prohibited Yugoslav past' (Ugrešić 2002)."

As curator of the relay baton collection, Marija Đorgović gives an insider's view on the process of dealing with nostalgia within the MY in the past few years. She critically examines the challenges and dilemmas in conceiving museum programmes concerning commemorative practices performed on the site. The current exhibition *Figures of Memory* (on view from May 2015 to May 2017) at the House of Flowers was conceived with the aim of *making visible* the mechanisms of collective memory. It explores how different social groups create and maintain the memory of Yugoslavia and Tito. Museum visitors are incorporated as active participants in the process of reproducing memory and as a constitutive part of the display. Even though this article comes at the end of the publication, it can be read as an introduction providing a micro-context of the conditions that inspired us to organize the *Nostalgia on the Move* conference which, we hope, transgresses the case of one museum and offers some intriguing questions for future deliberation on the elusive issues of memory and nostalgia.

Mirjana Slavković,  
Curator at the Museum of Yugoslavia  
Belgrade, March 2017





# WHEN TIMES WERE WORSE, THE PEOPLE WERE BETTER

## The Ideological Potentials and Political Scope of Yugonostalgia

### Abstract

*Nostalgia is usually viewed as an intimate, sentimental, escapist, innocent story about a better past, which only makes its audience inactive. Such views forget about the opposite side: as a “retrospective utopia”, nostalgia is an emancipatory, active, engaged story and activity, which by glorifying the past actually criticizes the present and activates its creators and addressees. Based on my field research and comparisons with other “red nostalgias” from Baltics to Balkans, from the Czech Republic to Russia, I will represent various dimensions of Yugonostalgia, especially its ideological potentials and political consequences.*

I was strolling along the streets of Belgrade the night before the *Nostalgia on the Move* international conference organised by the *Museum of Yugoslav History* in late September 2016, when I was struck by the front page of a daily newspapers. It, and the article published several pages later, featured the top Serbian politician, once zealous fan of Chetnik Duke Vojislav Šešelj and recent ex-proponent of

the idea of Greater-Serbian, now fashionably pro-European. Apparently, he had frankly stated that Tito, “albeit having been an authoritarian leader, had left us an advanced State with an aero and automobile industry, which all ex-Yugoslavs managed to destroy”.<sup>1</sup>

To be honest, the statement came as no surprise to me. In fact, I believe it is a very fitting introduction to this introductory text. Today, *nostalgia* is an extremely common term, literally a keyword that can be encountered almost anywhere and at any time. Every city has its own *Nostalgia* bar; nightclubs usually organise *Nostalgic Evenings* on a weekly basis; shopping centres encourage us to indulge in *Nostalgic Shopping*; there is at least one exhibition per year that represents the past in a nostalgic way; politicians accuse each other of being nostalgic of a variety of *ancien régimes*; nostalgia and retro may be found in contemporary design, in street fashion and in vintage cultures. Nostalgia, nostalgia, nostalgia: everyone imagines it in their own way, so it comes as no surprise to hear reference of it in context of apparently better Yugoslav times, as well as it being used by an extreme right-wing politician.

The inflated frequency of the term’s uses testifies to the need to elucidate from arbitrariness, particularity, tendentiousness, in order to provide a clear understanding. In scientific terms, nostalgia is a

<sup>1</sup> Ideological vocabulary as well as film and book titles are quoted in italics throughout the text.

complex, multilayered, volatile, emotionally charged story that glorifies romanticised past times, people, objects, sentiments, and events using binary oppositions to juxtapose them against their inferior counterparts in the present (as hinted at by the title of this text, the view held by many nostalgics that I have encountered during my fieldwork). At the same time, nostalgia laments the irreversible loss of these times and sometimes strives for their recurrence. In order to understand this phenomenon, one must question the contemporary circumstances that have given rise to it: according to nostalgics, nostalgia always reveals more about what is wrong today than what might actually have been so much better yesterday. It is an expression of the desire for stability, certainty, interpersonal understanding and social cohesion in a quickly changing, turbulent, hyper-individualised world that is the present. In this sense, it is a sort of litmus test of current social developments. Therefore, nostalgia was never (merely) an intimate, meditative, innocent and self-fulfilling fairy tale about the past; it can be and is a social and political power with practical impacts in a certain environment.<sup>2</sup>

Most often, nostalgia research is associated with memory studies: nostalgia is “memory minus pain”, an embellished, idealised memory devoid of everything bad, difficult, and ugly; it is the love that stayed and survived in a bitter way; a bitter-sweet remnant. Most of nostalgia research is still done on a positivist, ontological, cause-and-effect level: what is being looked for is the historical fact, the grain of truth in an overly embellished story about the past, something “really” experienced, a first-hand positive experience. I believe this understanding of nostalgia is decidedly incomplete: nostalgia is a narrative just like all other narratives, a fiction that creates its own truth, and not a distorted memory. In terms of epistemology, the Euhemerian approach needs to be replaced by an allegorical one. In other words: today it is not necessary to “actually experience” something in order to feel, sense, know it; internet, mass culture, the omnipresent media, popular science and so on, do not only function as very

efficient substitutes for the authentic experience - they actually function as “new authenticity”.<sup>3</sup> Due to their mechanisms of mediation, the copy is more convincing than the original, a fake appears more authentic than the first sample, the digital is more potent than the tactile, physical experience. In these circumstances, “memory of the past” can freely be borrowed, appropriated, stolen, installed, just like the characters in the film *Blade Runner*<sup>4</sup>. The same applies to nostalgia, which can also be simulated, mediated, virtual, appropriated from “second-hand”: it is no longer necessary to have experienced something wonderful long ago to be nostalgic about it.

This is particularly striking in phenomena that I once termed “new nostalgia”, “neostalgia”, particularly widespread among the younger generations that upgrade the basics of nostalgic stories with their own original cultural elements in their own particular ways.<sup>5</sup> Nostalgia is therefore not an embellished story about past times, about the past *us*, but about the times and the *us* that never actually existed. It is a sort of *saudade*, a melancholic feeling of longing for something that does not exist and never existed in the way it is presented today. It does not refer to the reality of the past but to past dreams, hopes, desires, and expectations; it is an idealised projection of the past rather than its accurate reproduction. In terms of ideology, it is a story about a society that once experienced a brighter future – a brighter future that has already and irrevocably passed.

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I understand nostalgia in three ways. Firstly, as resignation and an escapist strategy, or passatistic fatalism. In this sense, nostalgia is not only an unproductive but also a dangerous form of narration: it is not only retreat after a lost battle with

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2 For a comparison of various definitions of nostalgia, see Velikonja (2008, pp.13-39).

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3 The entire theory of postmodernism is about the “authenticity of the unauthentic” and the social consequences of this fact.

4 Directed by Ridley Scott (1982).

5 For instance, the partisan in Yugo-nostalgic bands’ videos carries a guitar instead of a gun, punks are all of a sudden clad in symbols of communist totalitarianism, socialist leaders drive choppers or may be found on the labels of alcoholic beverages, etc.

the present, but retreat before the battle. Infantile regression: nostalgics therefore remain captives of the past. German-American comparative literature scholar Andreas Huyssen (1995, p.47) talks about “nostalgia of despair”, particularly typical of those members of post-socialist societies that the triumphalist coarseness of the political right degrades as *the losers of the transition*. To them, nostalgia is, to paraphrase Janis Joplin, *just another word for nothin’ else to lose*. Secondly, nostalgia can act as a “sense-filler”, as a means to fill the “crisis of legitimation” which is “directly an identity crisis” of modern societies, as explained brilliantly by German Marxist Jürgen Habermas in his inspiring book *Legitimation Crisis* (1975, p.46). As “motivational structures necessary for bourgeois society are only incompletely reflected in bourgeois ideologies”, it is entirely understandable that “capitalist societies were always dependent on cultural boundary conditions that they could not themselves reproduce; they fed parasitically on the remains of tradition” (Ibid., p.76,77). The abundance of nostalgic images and stories – which are critical of the present at their very core – has been becoming ever more apparent in dominant discourses and institutions over the past years, testifying to the fact that it is seen as more acceptable for people to be focused on a safe past than to think about the challenges of the future. For those in power, the retrospective gaze is always better than the perspective one.

My third conceptualization of nostalgia is in stark contrast to the two described above: nostalgia can also be a dissident discourse and a strategy of resistance against current injustices on the one hand, and against condemning the past and compulsory amnesia on the other. Not just a rejection of reality, but also a construction of another, a parallel, a new-old reality; not just a reaction to existent conditions but also action, aimed at building a better world on verified foundations. At its core, nostalgia involves utopian dimensions and potentials – it could be summed up as a “retrospective utopia” – and as such, it may be a productive starting point for social dissent, the quest for alternatives, protest, even rebellion. It may, which, as it should be emphasised, does not mean that it necessarily does.

The typology of nostalgia is just as complex as its definition. The most basic distinction splits it into personal and collective nostalgia. The relationship between the two resembles the one observed by German sociologist of culture Georg Simmel (2000, p.196) in the realm of fashion: the dialectics of wider acceptance and personal innovation, of conformity and exclusivism, of integration and separation, imitation and individualisation, imitation and differentiation. In other words, we can share the same nostalgic story but also maintain our own special nostalgic corner within it, something exclusively ours, subjective. In her famous work *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001, pp.41-56), Russian-American nostalgia scholar Svetlana Boym distinguishes between reflexive and restorative nostalgia: while the former type is melancholic, the latter strives to restore the old. Furthermore, nostalgia can be instrumentalist, pragmatic, targeted (enabling one to reach certain cultural, commercial, political etc. aims – in brief, nostalgia sells!), but it can also be entirely non-instrumentalist, spontaneous, detached, intimate. Mimetic nostalgia restores the past as it allegedly once was, as it exists in the sweet memories of the nostalgic, as close as possible to their truth – this kind of nostalgia is particularly characteristic for older generations. Satirical nostalgia is the complete opposite of mimetic nostalgia, upgrading old foundations (which it still depicts in an affirmative sense) with unconventional, ironic, witty, “blasphemous” variations: it can be observed in younger nostalgics, the aforementioned “neostalgics”. If the former may be associated with the repro-cultural principle (recreation of the same old), the latter definitely belongs to the retro (combinations of the old and the new). Moreover, nostalgia is ever more present on the internet, in the forms of Facebook profiles, forums, chat rooms, blogs, web pages, You Tube installations, and so on; i.e., it is becoming digitalised, no longer just materialist and directly connected to the physical remains of the past.

The distinction that I consider to be the most important one is the distinction between passive and active nostalgia. The first type is apolitical, asocial, contemplative, sentimental, devoid of any perspective, melodramatic, inert, introspective and

hermetically sealed within itself, in its own time capsule, with practically no social ambitions or impact whatsoever. “For the nostalgic, the world is alien,” explains British-Australian sociologist Bryan S. Turner (1987, p.149). Active nostalgia, on the other hand, is its complete opposite: it uses examples from the past to antagonise the present, it is involved in political and social movements, it is concerned with the idea of a different, “repro” or “retro” future and is fighting for it. To put it very generally: the political potentials and political implications of nostalgia can vary to a great extent – as many critical thinkers note, they are far from always being progressive.<sup>6</sup> For instance, nostalgia for the *golden 1950s* was one of the cornerstones of Ronald Reagan’s neoconservative agenda, just like imperial or Victorian nostalgia was vital to Margaret Thatcher’s. One may also recall Vladimir Putin’s 2005 claim that for Russia, “the collapse of the Soviet Union [was the] major geopolitical disaster of the century”. The goal remains the same: to make the state great again, something we have last seen reiterated – and victorious – in Donald Trump’s presidential campaign.

### III

All points explored above may also be valuable for the consideration of Yugonostalgia, one of the countless epiphanies of “red nostalgia” that appeared unexpectedly, and therefore all the more pronouncedly, in various forms and to differing degrees of intensity, in various fields, ways, and among various groups, in the complicated circumstances of the post-socialist transition. I perceive it as a typical consequence of the liminal state that the once fraternal republics *from the Vardar to Mount Triglav* have found themselves in: trapped between a socialist past and an undefined future, in the “no longer” and “not yet” state. In fact, the regional situation resembles the similarly insecure state of affairs from around a century ago: a conglomerate of small, typically conflicting states,

*Kleinstaateri*, officially independent but actually semi-colonized, nurturing great territorial appetites to their neighbouring states, *the burek republics*, as I like to call them in my sarcastic flashes, economically, financially, and politically dependent on the great powers, multinational corporations and international organisations.

A great deal has been written, discussed, and debated around the subject of Yugonostalgia over the past two decades. On the one hand, it is clearly becoming more and more consumerist (the revival of old trademarks and products), aestheticized (retro, repro and vintage cultures), popularized (nostalgic festivals, exhibitions, different activities), politicized (even on the political right, as the introductory example demonstrates), pop-culturalized (the *oldies-goldies* culture, which revives only the pop aspects of those times), objectified (focused primarily on paraphernalia, memorabilia, museum exhibitions, etc.), infantilized (reduced to stories from our childhood and youth), spectacularized (sports achievements, *space projects* and other curious endeavours are foregrounded) and banalised (focus is typically placed on the small everyday details of life in those days). We are therefore dealing with passive nostalgia, acceptant of the status quo of contemporary societies, their commodified, acceptable, diverse, tamed version; in short – their kitsch.

On the other hand, Yugonostalgia is doubtlessly also one of the kernels of resistance against dominant ideologies and practices of our times – ethno-nationalism and neo-liberalism. As such, it is certainly active, engaged, even militant. Its essence has to do with class – it is the voice and activities of the masses that have been pauperised, cheated, disappointed, humiliated and marginalised during the post-socialist transition. This voice counters the winners of the transition: against war profiteers, chauvinist insinulators, business magnates, diverse *nouveaux riches*, who legally or illegally *privatized* (i.e. stole) what once was common property. Here are the strategies of such active Yugonostalgia:

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, American social critic Christopher Lasch (1991, p.99), the aforementioned Bryan S. Turner (1987, p.152) and American historian David Lowenthal (1989, p.30).

- social critique (targeting contemporary injustices, unemployment and chauvinism from the point of view of a better past),<sup>7</sup>
- defense of the past (resistance against historical revisionisms, against “de-Yugoslavization” of the past of these nations),<sup>8</sup>
- extroversion (public engagement, involvement in public actions rather than self-ghettoization),<sup>9</sup>
- and direct political activism (participation in anti-systemic activities and demonstrations, in leftist civil-social movements, etc.).<sup>10</sup>

Another aspect that has to be taken into account when researching Yugonostalgia, is not just what is “inscribed” in it, how subversive its messages are, but also what is read, and how; which direct effects it has on its addressees and in the broader society.

This “guerrilla” form of nostalgia transcends its increasingly ideological, pop-cultural, and commercial incorporation in dominant discourses and institutions, as it explicitly foregrounds the progressive essence of Yugoslavia:

- its autochthonous anti-fascism (apart from Albania, it was the only occupied state in WWII, which almost completely took care of its liberation by itself),

- accelerated modernization (the Second Yugoslavia transformed itself from a premodern society into a modern/postmodern one in its 46 years of existence),<sup>11</sup>
- emancipation (of three of the most discriminated groups of the time: youth, women and peasants),
- and multiculturalism (in the forms of both an ideology and practice of *brotherhood and unity*).

In brief: Yugoslavia was an anti-fascist, modernizational, emancipatory and multicultural project<sup>12</sup> – and passive nostalgia manages to completely disregard all of these dimensions. Active nostalgia, on the other hand, must also account for the various mistakes, injustices, delusions and crimes of this very same Second Yugoslavia, the unpleasant and painful memories, rather than denying, avoiding, forgetting or excusing them.<sup>13</sup>

I believe that the difference between commodified and political, passive and active Yugonostalgia also involves a temporal component. The dramatic 1990s, when newly formed states wanted to get rid of any kind of real or symbolic link to the former federation, may be called the period of *former Yugoslavia* or *ex-Yugoslavia*. Links to the former federation were demonised, or negated in the best case scenario, as if they had never existed. The calmer 2000s saw a shift towards new ideological discourses, political practices and cultural choices of these states. Quietly, as if through the back door, the idea of the *Yugo-sphere* – an informal and unbinding belonging to the region once known as Yugoslavia – began to gain momentum, as pointed out by Tim Judah (2009). This may be described as quiet “continuity using different means”. Lately, even Yugo-nostalgia has begun to be considered acceptable by official institutions and discourses:

7 Harsh criticism of the current situation from the point of view of a more just past can be observed in different fields: from demonstrations against the system to memorial books at Yugoslav *lieux de mémoire*, from pro-Yugoslav graffiti to federative, republic and communist symbols in lyrics and appearance of Yugonostalgic music bands, from hundreds of web pages and Facebook profiles on the topic, to public opinion data which (for many people surprisingly) testifies to considerable support for the former state, political system and its leader.

8 Manchester-based anthropologist Stef Jansen (2000) claims that in the nationalist 1990s, it was dissident memory that was decisive for maintaining a positive remembrance of Yugoslav times.

9 Nostalgic events are gaining popularity and have an ever richer cultural programme (and were very soon accompanied by stands selling nostalgic clutter).

10 This is particularly present in Bosnia-Herzegovina where over forty closely connected “Josip Broz Tito Associations” are active in all of its three entities, altogether accounting for over 20,000 active members. Following the Yugoslav socialist tradition, they regularly and vocally take part in the state’s political debates.

11 Modernization processes of secularization, urbanization, electrification, industrialization, de-patriarchization, political participation and the construction of the welfare state only started after the war.

12 See elaborate discussion on the topic by Croatian social critic Darko Suvin (2014).

13 Cf. an excellent study on the need for a critical culture of remembrance on the territory of the former Yugoslavia by Serbian sociologist of memory Todor Kuljić (2012).

of course, in its limited, domesticated, demilitarised, consumerist-popular-cultural-spectacular version. It is the period of *post-Yugoslavia*.

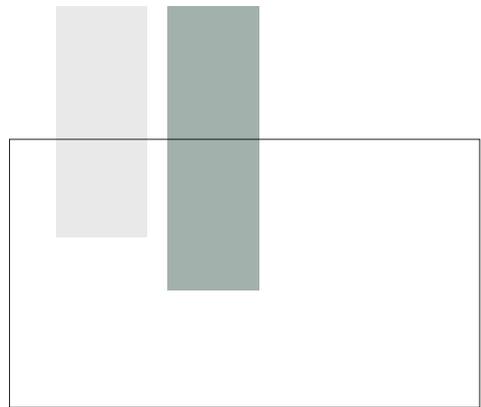
To conclude: the political potentials and political implications of Yugonostalgia should neither be underestimated nor overestimated. On the one hand, to paraphrase Georg W. F. Hegel, *the cunning of nostalgia* lies in the very fact that even if the nostalgic does not reflect or criticise the present situation, this very situation is being heavily questioned insofar as nostalgic unintentionally affirms a completely different social, political, economic and cultural organisation from the one we are facing today. Therefore, even passive, sentimental and not merely active, engaged nostalgia implies social criticism. On the other hand, its very commodification makes it lose its axis entirely: socialist and multicultural Yugoslavia, a radical Other in relation to current affairs, is transformed into a kind, attractive, and safe otherness from another time, i.e. into a nearby exoticism. Therefore, I feel that the greatest danger to nostalgia today comes not from the anti-nostalgics, fervent opponents of everything that Yugoslavia once was (from its socialism to its anti-fascism etc.) and what they represent today, but from the “domesticated” popular-cultural and consumerist Yugo-nostalgia, which efficiently forgets the radical emancipation once effectuated by Yugoslavia.

#### IV

This presentation did not aim to offer an elaborate and multilayered assessment of the ideology and politics of nostalgia or, more specifically, Yugonostalgia. I do not want to create the impression that I consider nostalgia to be the only or dominant critique of current affairs: actually, I would be concerned if this were the case. Much more imaginative forms of resistance on the territory of the former federation today stem from different ideological starting points and from newer experiences undergone by alternative movements at home and abroad. The text was conceived as a starting point of a conversation, an introduction that opens more questions than it can answer; the statements that it foregrounds should serve as inspiration for further

discussion rather than their framework, or as firm theses. It is linked to the starting points of other panellists from our September conference, as well as to the debates that followed. Therefore, I would like to end by citing a very short list of ten of what I consider to be the best texts on the topic – for further reading and reflection.<sup>14</sup> Other answers to the question whether (Yugo-)nostalgia actually has any ideological potentials and real political implications will be given in the course of this scientific conference.

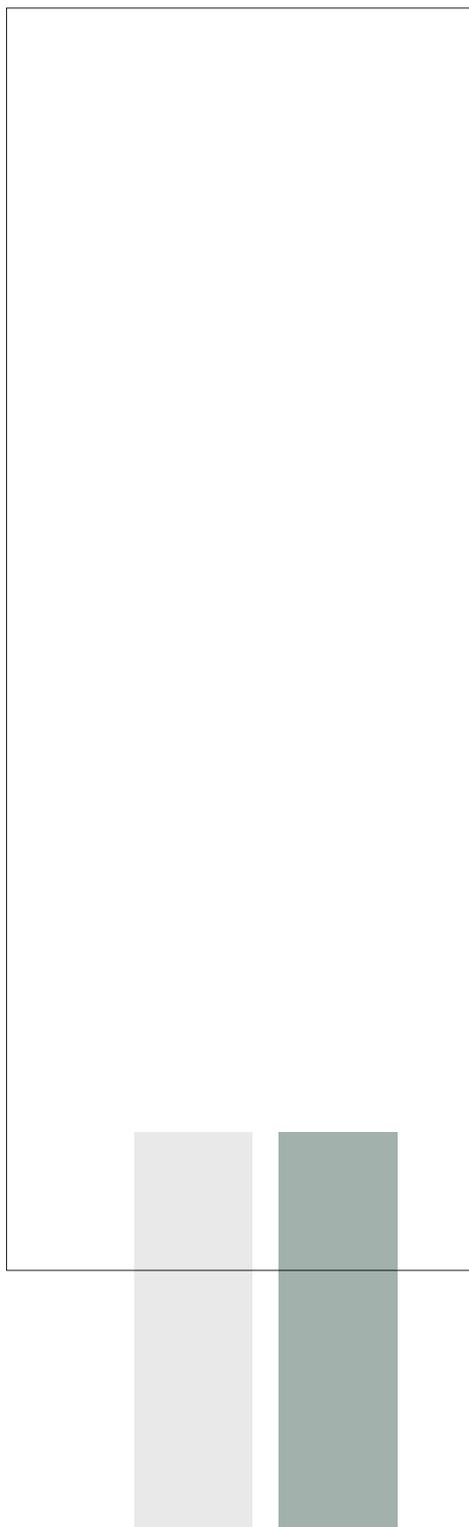
Translated by Natalija Majsova, PhD



<sup>14</sup> Here is the list (three are also cited in the Selected bibliography).  
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# NOSTALGIA FOR INDUSTRIAL LABOR IN SOCIALIST YUGOSLAVIA

## or Why the Post-Socialist Affect Matters

### Abstract

*Resorting to the example of memory of industrial work in socialist Yugoslavia, I suggest an interpretation of Yugonostalgia that differs from the dominant interpretations, according to which nostalgia represents a sentiment that paralyzes and prevents autonomous reflection on the past. I understand Yugonostalgia as the phenomenon “associated with a deeper knowledge about social life” (Blackmar, 2001, p.328) and I warn about the aspects of affective and emotionally engaged workers’ memories of the life in socialism that are more broadly socially relevant and surpass lamenting over the lost social security. Nostalgia that characterizes these memories does not prevent, but rather, allows operators of socialist industrialization and modernization to re-experience themselves as social actors. Nostalgia has the capacity to intervene in the present by encouraging tensions and creating discomfort, preventing socialist industrial ruins, the ruins of a modernist utopia, to be pacified, affectively neutralized and be sent back to history, or simply be ignored and gradually forgotten as the remains of an inappropriate socialist past.*

### Introduction: Nostalgia and Industrialization

Industrialization in 19th century Europe and the accompanying feeling of the acceleration of time caused a wave of nostalgia and the emergence of “a desire to recapture what life was before” (Angé and Berliner, 2014, p.3). The opposite process of deindustrialization in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, along with the decline of heavy industry and collapse of social worlds that were built around it, was followed by a proportionate wave of nostalgia. Between these two waves, Europe – for the large part of the 20th century divided by the Iron Curtain – shared the vision of the future inscribed in the processes of industrialization, urbanization and modernization. As Zygmunt Bauman (1992, p.222) reminds us, it is modernity with its Enlightenment message in which capitalism and socialism are “married forever”.

The European “socialist East” and “capitalist West” although ideologically sharply divided, shared a commanding modernist vision of the future (Blackmar, 2001, p.325) at the height of the industrial era, which was characterized by often overlooked interactions and correlative inspiration.<sup>1</sup> The decline

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<sup>1</sup> The works of Western novelists in the 1970s and 1980s “eulogize not only the last hopes for a socialist alternative and a singular prospect

of the era, coinciding with the end of socialism and unification of Europe within the European Union framework, revealed telling differences in the ways in which the experience of industrialization and modernization in the second part of the 20th century is collectively remembered. In the West, the industrial past of the 20th century was, at least in part, considered capitalism's natural evolutionary step (cf. Blackmar, 2001, p.338; Janowitz, 1990, p.1, quoted after Edensor, 2005, p.13) and embedded in natural cycles of birth and death, growth and decay (Barndt, 2010, p.270). Although not without difficulties,<sup>2</sup> Western industrial ruins and legacies became parts of historicized narratives and subject to musealization, aestheticization and re-naturalization (cf. Barndt, 2010, for Germany; cf. Benito del Pozo and González, 2012, for Spain). It proved to be much more difficult, however, to incorporate the experience of socialist industrialization into trajectories of European history, memory and heritage, because the socialist period is generally perceived as an unnatural rupture in the development of East European nations, and thus the accession of post-socialist countries to the EU is depicted as the return home after this episode of non-Europeanness (Petrović, 2014; Velikonja, 2005). In many former industrial areas in post-Yugoslav states, ruins of socialist industry bitterly correspond with the general deterioration of living standards, health, social and economic security to which citizens are being exposed in the last twenty-five years. In rare cases where big industries are preserved through privatization, or new factories are open, workers are subject to the violation of basic rights and the whole population is exposed to environmental pollution and health risks.<sup>3</sup>

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for international solidarity, but also a particular vision of collective and collaborative work" (Scribner, 2002, p.237). Charity Scribner discusses the novels of John Berger and Leslie Kaplan in which "parallels are constantly drawn between working life in France and Central Europe, particularly Poland during the years of Solidarity." According to her, "a critique of their works discloses the depth of the Western intellectual investment in an idealized 'Other Europe' in the nineteen seventies and eighties" (Scribner, 2002, p.239).

2 Cf. the volume *Heritage, Labour and Working Classes* (Smith, Shackel and Campbell, 2011).

3 For the disastrous scope of late industrial conditions in the towns of former Yugoslavia and other post-socialist states, see e.g. Berge, 2012; Matošević and Baćac, 2015; Pelkmans, 2013; Petrović and Vukelić eds., 2013; Potkonjak and Škokić, 2013.

Preoccupied with a *European* future and neoliberal modernity (Lankauskas, 2014, p.54), post-socialist Europe itself has become intolerant of any form of nostalgia, and particularly to nostalgia for socialism; in future-oriented and triumphalist discourses, nostalgia is seen as a sign of moral weakness, irrationality and the inability to find one's way in the process of ongoing social and economic transformations. It is seen as a "result of a feeling of having lost out in the transition from communism to democracy" (Ekman and Linde, 2005, p.357).

Among various nostalgic takes on socialist past, nostalgia articulated by (former) industrial workers seems particularly unwelcome. It is almost entirely interpreted as a result of their failure to find their way in new circumstances and a strategy related to difficulties they encounter in the process of "getting by in post-socialism." Moreover, this nostalgia is seen as damaging to the legitimacy of workers' claims and further worsening their already dire position in post-socialist societies. For example, David Kideckel (2008, p.13) stresses that "nostalgia for socialism focuses on security – of one's job, of the community, of physical life." For him, "such selective use of [the] socialist model is ultimately futile and frustrating for effective agency, as it elevates relations and conditions that are thoroughly discredited today. Collectivist practices make little sense in postsocialist institutional contexts and have little support among either globalizing elites or the hard-pressed, but energetic, middle classes".

These negative attitudes towards postsocialist nostalgia fit into larger dominant views on nostalgia, most critically articulated by David Lowenthal (1985) and Christopher Lasch (1991). They understand nostalgia as a passive, paralyzing and unproductive feeling, "a term that posits a veil of distorting sentiment, a longing that can never be transformed into active motive or critical insight" (Sontag, 1977, p.69).



In this article I want to offer a different interpretation of post-socialist nostalgia articulated by industrial workers. Following Dominic Boyer (2010, p.27), I suggest that “we should take seriously the fact that nostalgia talk in many contexts means something more or other than resignation to ‘westernization’ and melancholy for how much better or easier or younger life once was”. Focusing on actual experience and memory practices of industrial workers in former Yugoslavia,<sup>4</sup> this article suggests that their nostalgic narratives and reminiscences are not merely a way to negotiate better individual treatment and the broader society’s assistance; they are more than mere “pinning for social safety that never really existed” (Scribner, 2003, p.11). The article argues that workers’ nostalgia for socialist times, expressed through affective and engaged narratives about socialist labour, is a critically important ingredient of their social agency and a prerequisite for their self-perception as political subjects.

## The Cable Factory in Svetozarevo as Socialist Project

The discussion in this article is based on site-specific ethnographic research<sup>5</sup> conducted among the workers of the Cable Factory in Jagodina,<sup>6</sup> Serbia

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4 The issue of industrialization is particularly relevant in the case of former Yugoslavia, for at least two reasons. Firstly, because industrialization and modernization in Yugoslavia were almost exclusively socialist projects; the modernization of Yugoslav society was achieved through deagrarianization and industrialization (cf. Marković, 2002) and in this sense Yugoslavia differed from other socialist countries, which already had established working class culture (for the case of Poland, see Kenney 1994). Secondly, because the role of the worker in Yugoslavia was central for construing the cosmopolitan, internationalist, modern, and supranational identity of Yugoslavs in the socialist period – an identity that was wilfully disregarded by nationalist elites in post-Yugoslav societies. Ruins of the industrial era strongly connected with socialism evoke ruined possibilities for the negotiation of identities as an alternative to divisions along ethnic and religious lines that currently dominate post-Yugoslav spheres.

5 I conducted fieldwork in the Cable Factory Jagodina on several occasions between 2004 and 2012. I sincerely thank my interviewees for their time and readiness to share their thoughts and memories with me.

6 In 1946, the town was named Svetozarevo after Svetozar Marković, the nineteenth century founder of Serbian socialism. In 1992, the original name, Jagodina, was reinstated, hence the use of both names in this text. When referring to the period between 1946 and 1992, I use Svetozarevo, however, in quoting workers narratives, I often use Jagodina with reference to the same period because the original name remains current in everyday life despite the formal name change.

– a community where memory and perceptions of the past are highly conditioned by the particular working environment. Built after the Second World War, between 1947 and 1954, this factory was one of the first and the largest socialist projects in Tito’s Yugoslavia.

The Cable Factory in Svetozarevo was founded in May 1947 by the Yugoslav federal government. Construction began in October of the same year and was a part of Yugoslavia’s First Five-Year Plan – the first of many government initiatives designed to jumpstart the country’s planned economy. The factory is located near the village of Majur, approximately 7 kilometres from Svetozarevo, and was the first among many other major developments that were later built in Svetozarevo and its surrounding areas. The Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia played a key role in the construction of the factory. The memorial plaque in the factory yard reads as follows: “13 thousand members of the People’s Youth from the whole Republic [of Yugoslavia], together with expert workers, engineers and technicians [...] built this factory and finished the majority of the works by November 29, 1952 [the Day of the Republic]. Once again, the People’s Youth of Yugoslavia have given a gift to our people, the Communist League and comrade Tito, in remembrance of the considerable efforts made in the building of our socialist homeland.” The inhabitants of Svetozarevo, the village of Majur and other neighbouring places also played an active role in the construction of the factory.

The following decades were characterized by constant development. Booklets published to commemorate the factory’s tenth and twentieth anniversaries proudly emphasized modern technology, growing production rates, and extensive cable exports to all continents (Fabrika kablova, 1965; Industrija Kablova, 1975). The factory was organized and run according to the principles of socialist self-management, which attempted to make workers the collective owners of factories and was best summarized by Tito’s famous slogan “Factories to the workers.” Self-management was implemented through the activities of the Council of

Workers, which was established in 1950, the Board of Representatives, Councils of Working Units, and various other committees. From 1955, the “Kablovi” (*Cables*) biweekly became the main source of information for workers and reported on important issues related to the factory and community life.

The factory radically changed the landscape of this predominantly agricultural region as well as the way of life and living standard of its population. Prior to its construction Svetozarevo, located some 130 km south of Belgrade, was a small settlement of 11,000 people. Ten years later, the population doubled. The factory also changed the demography and the way of life of the population living in its rural surroundings. In addition, many families from other parts of the country, mostly from southern Serbia and Kosovo, settled in nearby villages and became factory employees. Thus, the factory’s working class had a predominantly agricultural background. Since there were no qualified workers, their training for the cable industry was organized in the factory from the very start, first as job training and later as secondary schooling. There was also a medical centre on factory grounds with a number of physicians and nurses. Such organization, as well as cultural and

other activities within the factory, made it the centre of the workers’ social life.

These changes were also reflected in the traditional structures and value system of the neighbouring village population: the status of factory workers became highly prestigious as many families spent less time with agricultural work although never completely abandoning it. One of the interviewee stressed that one could hardly get a bride unless one worked in the factory, thus, working-class membership became a question of social prestige and guaranteed a position which brought economic stability and benefits otherwise unavailable to those living in rural areas.

## The Scenery of Nostalgia

The Svetozarevo Cable Factory shared the common destiny of many other giant enterprises in socialist times: as socialism began to disintegrate, cable production gradually declined amidst a countrywide economic crisis, signalling the end of an era of prosperity and high production. Another characteristic that this factory shares with other industrial enterprises of Yugoslavia can be found in the fact that socialist ideology and planned economy were not replaced when socialism ended. The factory was too large, had too many employees and was far too deep in debt to be quickly privatized. Consequently, it is still waiting to be integrated into the transition process. This case shows that there are places where transition—the process of restructuring, redefinition and regeneration for the purpose of moving toward a market economy—has yet to begin. Therefore, this case contradicts the dominant notion of transition as a dynamic process, including many changes with a disorienting and transformative effect on people.<sup>7</sup>



<sup>7</sup> The situation I found in the Cable Factory Jagodina sharply contrasts the one described by László Kürti (1999, p.195) who did fieldwork in the post-socialist Csepel Works: “Many people were also working two or three jobs; their time, which had been regulated by the party, trade union, or the Communist Youth League earlier, was now under the constraints of the market and money”. The situation in Jagodina is, on the other hand, common to many industrial areas in Serbia (for Kraqujevac, see Rajković, 2015).

One can assume that the factory's present is, in fact, an extended past: upon entering the yard of the cable factory in Jagodina today, one notices the lingering signs of the decomposition and decay of buildings that were once gigantic and monumental. Crumbling facades, rust and ramshackle machines create the impression of time having stopped in the late 1980s. During UN sanctions against Yugoslavia in the 1990s, factory production was reduced to a minimum and has never really recovered. For almost fifteen years, however, thousands of workers have continued to come to work every day, witnessing gradual decay and deterioration. The decay is reflected in the decline of employee numbers from 9,500 in 1986 to less than 2,000 in recent years, as well as in the company's spiralling debt, totalling some 100 million euros (*B92.net*, 27 October 2013; *Večernje Novosti*, 8 August 2016).

Surrounded by decay, the remaining workers resurrect the socialist past not only through their reminiscences, but also by arranging their working

habitat in ways that evoke better times when they were treated with respect and dignity. Thus, the walls of many workplaces and offices are still decorated with framed portraits of the Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito. This is not a product of apathy due to which old symbols were simply never removed after the system collapsed, but rather it is a conscious and active political statement. One of the interviewees explained that while all of Tito's portraits, once a mandatory decoration in public spaces, were removed from factory rooms, they later reappeared on many walls, including places where they had not been before. Even though, Tito disappeared from the walls of schools and other public institutions – tapestries and embroideries with his portrait were replaced by Orthodox icons in Serbian homes – today, the framed portraits of “the greatest son of all Yugoslav nations” appears to be the natural decoration for the work environment, hidden from public view. This might be due to the fact that no other form of decoration would be an appropriate substitute. Sitting below Tito's portrait,



framed in a nice golden frame, a leader of a small work unit explains his motives in keeping the portrait on the wall:

*In the beginning, I wanted to keep the portrait because of its nice golden frame. But then I decided to keep Tito's photograph as well. We left his portraits. What else could we have done? It was much better in his time. We had everything then. We used to go on vacations, we had secure jobs. Now we have nothing and we cannot go anywhere.*



For the Cable Factory workers in Svetozarevo, Tito was an authority figure whose status in world politics reflected the self-confidence of the whole country and its people. They enthusiastically recall Tito's three visits to the factory—in January 1956, April 1964, and April 1973—and point to them as additional illustrations of the factory's glorious past when they as workers had dignity and agency:

*Tito visited the factory three times. It was impressive. All of us would get goose bumps when we would see Tito. He would always come in the company of world leaders. Once he was*

*here with Sékou Touré [president of Guinea], the other time with Ben Bella [the first president of Algeria 1963-1965].*

*The world's elite was Tito's company. After all, he had such a glorious funeral; like no other world politician.*

*I remember when Tito visited the factory with Ben Bella. I was young then and we all went out and gathered at the crossroads. It was very spectacular: a mass of pioneers, with red scarves and blue caps...*

*Tito built highways – we worked with wagons and shovels. He built factories – we worked hard in shock brigades. He made manufacturing plants and everything else. And those who came after, they never did anything.*

The hall of the central administrative building of the Cable Factory in Jagodina (Serbia) houses a small exhibition which was set up in socialist times, and is still carefully maintained, even though the factory has been in a state of decay and disintegration for twenty years. The exhibition displays the factory's produce, photographs of workers in the production process and Tito and his guests from world politics visiting the factory.

## The Personal and the Social in Post-Socialist Nostalgia

General deterioration and poverty inevitably create a physical setting that causes the workers to feel humiliated and perpetually trapped in an uncertain, grim reality that triggers nostalgia for the past. The past is always perceived as better not only in material terms, but also in terms of dignity and respect the workers enjoyed under socialism.

A sense of personal degradation and humiliation is strongly emphasized by the workers when they talk about the postsocialist period. Many of them point out that the situation they are facing now is

so drastically different from the one in the past that they can hardly comprehend what has happened to them:

*If someone had told me a few years ago that I would be working for 150 or 200 euro a month, I would not have believed them. No one could have imagined what was to happen to us. When you observe the current situation from the past perspective, it seems like a scary movie...*

*If someone told me that there would be a time when I would live from day to day, I would have wished to die. It is a terrible feeling when you live this way, in such insecurity, when you wake up in fear and are not able to buy even the most basic things, such as underwear.*

These are accounts of individual and very personal forms of humiliation that expose the workers as a social group who feel the consequences of “transition from socialism to democracy” in the most immediate, corporeal way. Forced to strive for basic existential rights, and deprived of political means to secure them, workers from former Yugoslavia often succumb to existential means and radical bodily interventions: a powerless working mother burned herself in the presence of her children, while a worker from Novi Pazar in Serbia cut and ate his finger (Gregorčič, 2010). Marta Gregorčič reports on many other similar cases: “180 workers of the privatized construction enterprise ‘1 May’ in Lapovo (Serbia) who had not received their salaries for 8 months, decided to commit collective suicide on June 10, 2009. They lay down on the tracks at a local train station, the Belgrade-Niš railway line, the very same one which they themselves had built many years ago. 250 dismissed workers joined them. They also received support from more than 200 workers of the electrical company in Rača, who were on the fifteenth day of their hunger strike” (Ibid.).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The text of the play “Radnici umiru pevajući” (*Workers Die Singing* – the title refers to the “Thorn Birds” TV series, which was translated into Serbo-Croatian as “Ptice umiru pevajući” / *Birds Die Singing*) written by Olga Dimitrijević is a brutal story that thematizes the humiliation and physical deterioration of workers in a factory in Serbia.

Narratives of the Jagodina Cable Factory workers are deeply and overtly nostalgic. Articulated among the crumbling and devastated ruins of what was once a manufacturing giant, their memories are aural and experiential. There is sharp contrast between the silence of the machines today and the memory of noise which, for the workers, has become a symbol of the factory’s bygone prosperity:

*It was really nice back then. Much better... Everyone worked and that caused constant noise.*



*It was very crowded and noisy in the factory so that no one dared allow "civilians" to walk around because they might be injured.*

*Everyone was working. There was a noise. When you approached the factory you would hear the noise because all the machines were switched on.*

*When Tito used to come to the factory, workers would go out to greet him, but the machines would not stop. Those working in production had to continue with their work and all the machines were operating. Now when someone comes, we see to it that some of the machines are working; to be able to show something. A single machine would produce 3000 tons of PVC back then, and now the whole factory cannot produce that much. Everyone used to work, all units... It was loud, when one approached to the gates a loud noise could be heard. Machines were hissing and humming, all of them were switched on.*

*When approaching the factory, one could hear the noise as far as the bridge. The noise was so loud.*

Although deeply anchored in personal experience, these aural and visual memories reflect more than a bodily experience of industrial work in socialist Yugoslavia and the immediate, bodily humiliation in the aftermath of socialism. They are sharply contrasted with the present, and my interlocutors often finish their reminiscences with apathetic comments, such as: "...and look at us now...", suggesting that not words, but a simple glance is needed to perceive the tragic and degrading present. It would be wrong, however, to interpret "us" in such comments as the sum of impoverished, humiliated individuals who nostalgically recall times when they were personally better off. Workers' memories that I gathered in the Jagodina Cable Factory are essentially narratives of socialist modernization in the second half of the 20th century, and the sharp contrast they underline is also the contrast between the past in which workers perceived themselves as actors of modernization, and the present in which they are deprived of social agency.

## Narratives of Modernization

In official discourses during the time of socialism, modernization was the central topic, synonymous with industrialization and concomitant processes of urbanization, as well as a changing way of life. In a booklet on the occasion of the factory's tenth anniversary, the construction of the factory is perceived as a milestone that caused a population boom and led to the betterment of all aspects of life. Old Svetozarevo is described as a settlement with an "undeveloped industry and a deficit of communal objects, an undeveloped network of education and health institutions, and a virtually non-existent infrastructure" (Fabrika kablova, 1965, p.38). The town's cultural life was described as having been inadequate for a socialist society: "there were numerous bars and only one small cinema" (ibid., p.38). According to the booklet, the factory completely changed the image of the town: after it was built, "many communal problems were solved and the cultural centre was built, thus making Svetozarevo a modern, beautiful and pleasant town" (ibid., p.37). During his visit to the factory in April 1973, Josip Broz Tito wrote the following lines in the factory's guest book:

*During the visit to this modern cable factory in Svetozarevo, we were first of all impressed by the improved technological process, and particularly by the workers' community, which masters this technological process so successfully. The factory in this town has a great impact on the transformation of Svetozarevo and the improvement of the living standard in this region (Industrija kablova, 1975, p.3).<sup>9</sup>*

Modernization is also the most important theme in the reminiscences of factory workers. Most of them recall the first years of socialism and the building of the factory as a period that not only improved

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion on different forms of imagining modernity, propagated by Jagodina's long term mayor and municipal president Dragan Marković Palma, see Petrović 2016. Modernity enforced by Mr Marković entirely excludes any experience of socialist modernity and agency of Jagodina's citizens, marginalizes public spaces in the city and deprives its citizens of any sense of agency.



everyday life, but also brought new knowledge, technology, experiences, and broadened the physical and symbolic spaces of the individual. One of the oldest workers explains:

*In 1953 my father was sent from Belgrade to Jagodina to build a power plant. He was among some ten people in the country who knew something about electricity then... There was no electricity in Jagodina then, but between 1953 and 1967 not only the town, but also every village in the region received electricity. That is something I cannot explain to my son who was against the communist rule. Do you know that we built the highway? We could hardly wait to go there to work, there were waiting lists because it was impossible for everyone to go... My son told me that we were fools because we wanted to work without pay. But on that highway I saw a black man for the first time. There were international working brigades coming to build the highway: Englishmen, Americans, Spaniards... When would I otherwise have had an opportunity to meet a black man?*

Another interviewee remembers the time he first came to the factory:

*When I came here, I was impressed. The factory had everything: buses from Jagodina to the factory, the train... At the train station, there was a roof over the railroad tracks. Before that, one could see covered railroad tracks only in Belgrade.*

The train that connected Svetozarevo with the factory was used for transporting material and workers and was also for a long time the only means of transportation for the villagers in the neighbouring areas. Thus, the train not only made people's lives easier, but it also endowed the inhabitants with the modern notion of perpetual progress. Employment in the Cable Factory meant the enjoyment of numerous benefits: good salaries, secure health insurance, summer trips to seaside resorts built especially for workers, and many other achievements of socialism. All of the interviewed workers nostalgically remember these benefits:

*We would go to the seaside each year. I used to go camping. The factory would pay for camping and travel costs, and when I returned, a whole salary was waiting for me. We used to go to Čanj, Srebrno, Rovinj [seaside resorts in Croatia and Montenegro], we have our resorts there. Everything was provided for. And there is nothing now.*

*We could even go to the Brioni islands. Times were different then...*

*Every worker could go on vacation, in summer and winter. Also, apartments were built for workers, entire living quarters. In such circumstances people worked with pleasure. There was a feeling of security. Now, we only have the fear of tomorrow.*

Remembering vacations in other Yugoslav republics expresses a longing not only for the material benefits of socialism, but also for a larger space that belonged to workers and symbolized a more extensive spectrum of possibilities and a higher status. One of the workers explains:

*I had a red [Yugoslav] passport, and could travel everywhere without a visa. We would be sitting on the city square, and would, just for fun, decide to take a train to Italy. A Swiss offered me 15,000 Swiss Francs for my passport. We loved our red passport so much in those times; I would never sell it... And now I cannot go anywhere without visa, not even to Romania.*

The narratives of modernization told by industrial workers are in dissonance with present dominant political discourses in which Europe and modernity are notions intrinsically connected to the future. For the workers, the end of socialism and the democratization have not led to the adoption of European/Western values, but, on the contrary, have further dissociated the region from Europe. A worker summarizes this view: "We were a part of Europe much more in socialism than we are now." According to the workers, the end of socialism witnessed not only a precipitous drop in

their living standards and the constriction of their traveling space, but has also led to the factory's distancing from European production standards, which characterized the factory's operation during socialism. Workers proudly emphasize that working standards in the factory were the same as those in western societies, that the factory had export agreements with western countries, and its competitiveness on western markets:

*We were selling cables to Americans. The "Gorenje" industry from Slovenia also used to buy micro-cables from us. We used to export large amounts of cables to American, Russian, French, German, and Belgian markets. We used to have ideal working conditions and equipment – we had overalls that guaranteed protection at work. Each six months we used to get new overalls and other equipment. Also, workers had more nutritious meals than those who worked in administration. Everything was well organized and precisely defined. I believe that the same kind of organization existed in the West.*

*All of us used to have new work equipment. And look at us now—we are like beggars, dressed in these old, worn out overalls.*

A sociologist who established a psychological and sociological department, the equivalent of the human resources department in the United States, nostalgically remembers the times when he subscribed to the most prominent English and French sociological journals: "The university professors would come to me to borrow literature because the factory had journals that could not be found in their departments," he remembers with pride. The psychological and sociological department ceased to exist years ago and he now works as an administrator.

These narratives about lost modernity that dominate worker's memories on industrial labour in socialism, picture a world in which workers possessed agency and perceived themselves as actors in economic and social processes in

socialist Yugoslavia. This is in sharp contrast with their self-perception in post-socialism. As shown by Jessica Greenberg (2011, p.89), the inability of individuals in Serbia to perceive themselves as “capable of agentive action or moral interiority” significantly influences their attitude towards societies in which they live. Similarly, Maja Petrović Šteger (2013, p.151) describes that her Serbian interviewees “would often state that the everyday facts of their lives made it hard for them to imagine themselves actively participating in remaking, or just in contesting, the political and economic fabric in contemporary Serbia. The prevalent feeling of loss of normalcy in Serbian society “points to a loss of a particular understanding of agency, in which there is a correspondence between one’s desires, the effects one’s actions have in the world, and the ability to manage the reception of those actions by others” (Ahearn, 2001, quoted from Greenberg, 2011, p.89).

Even the stories about Tito and his glorious visits to the factory function so as to emphasize this aspect of agency. Although it is tempting to link the prominent place Tito holds in workers’ memories to his patriarchal figure and the paternalistic relationship of the socialist state to its citizens,<sup>10</sup> one should not overlook the fact that Tito’s prominence, influence and the results of his modernizing efforts actually serve as an index of the workers’ own agency and participation in the project of modernization. In one of the worker’s statements quoted above, this is linguistically manifested by alternation of the words “Tito” and “we” that suggests their interchangeability (“Tito built highways – we worked with wagons and shovels. He built factories – we worked hard in shock brigades”).

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10 Boris Buden (2002, pp.20-22) sees the patriarchal father image of Tito as an essential characteristic of the ideology of Titoism: “The Yugoslavs were created as a mass of people whose collective identity was pressed within a political discourse which began and ended with ritually staged scenes of pledging oaths of allegiance to the leader. On the other hand, Tito, as an indisputable authority, guaranteed security and communal spirit, as does the patriarchal father of a complex family. As an internalized father-figure authority, he played the role of a symbolic representative of general moral norms, socially recognized values, and phylogenetically acquired cultural achievements, thus laying the foundation for the development of collective consciousness”.

## Conclusion: In Defence of Nostalgia

As already noted by researchers of nostalgia, this concept found particularly fruitful soil in the area of post-socialist studies (Angé and Berliner, 2014, p.1). One may even speak of “nostalgification” as a dominant paradigm that “governs much of the research concerned with social remembrance in contemporary Eastern Europe” (Lankauskas, 2014, p.36). Very often, nostalgia is the term uncritically attached to *any* positive reference to the socialist period (Petrović, p.2011), but the way it is understood and assessed is reduced to two interpretational frames: it is mostly seen as either the banal commodification of socialist objects and symbols (and, as Nadkarny and Shevchenko, 2014, p.63 lucidly note, as the triumph of capitalism), or proof of dangerous, atavistic cultural attachments (Ibid.), false consciousness (Gille, 2010, p.283) and malady (Todorova, 2010, p.2). In addition, post-socialist nostalgia is an ascriptive term that “continues to be avoided as self-description” (Ibid., p.7). It is typically reduced to consumerist and consumption practices and relationships, to what is the most accessible, visible, banal, and kitschy (Slapšak, 2008).

All this may provide good reason to avoid the term postsocialist nostalgia and to choose a different angle to observe memory practices related to socialism in Eastern Europe. Avoidance of nostalgia seems even more reasonable when we speak of memories of industrial labour in socialism: workers, with their socialist experience and postsocialist reality, are paradigmatic “little people”, the ones towards whom we as researchers feel compassion (Gille, 2010, p.288), but also as modern cultural Others. As David Berliner (2014, p.29) argues: “nowadays, the fragile and little Other is no longer the disappearing cultural savage, the powerless colonized (although it still can be in specific cases). No, it’s rather the poor, the weak, the suffering, the powerless facing social instability, urban poverty, economic migration, war and political disempowerment”. Few social groups fit this description better than the generation of aging, humiliated workers found among the ruins of former socialist industrial giants. Ascribing

nostalgia to their memories of socialism holds the danger of their additional othering, orientaling and exoticizing (Lankauskas, 2014, p.40).

Well aware of the risks, I nevertheless insist on the conceptual framework of post-socialist nostalgia when discussing memory discourses and practices of industrial workers in former Yugoslavia. Following Hugh Raffles (2002, p.332) I argue for the “re-signification of contaminated language rather than its rejection” and see nostalgia as an important concept in the postsocialist world, both politically and axiologically. In the case of memory practices related to industrial labour in socialism, nostalgia does not confirm, but challenges the normative view in which postsocialist Europe is “temporally out of sync with future-oriented visions of Western modernity” (Lankauskas, 2014, p.40). In narratives, practices and memories of industrial workers, nostalgia is not in opposition with modernity – it is essentially *about* it. As Frances Pine (2002, p.111) stresses in the case of Poland, “what people remember about socialism is the pride in production and their labour, and also the sense of being a part of a project that was *modern* and directed towards the general good”.

Several characteristics of these memories transcend a specific postsocialist context and reflect broader, postindustrial (and postmodern) longings and anxieties. The nature of the relationship between producers, production and products has dramatically changed in the postindustrial era, and overwhelming changes have also affected the ways in which labour has been understood, performed and valued in the last few decades. Across the late industrial world these changes have triggered nostalgia for “our products” and for the self-perception of being the agent of one’s own modernization. In this respect, Charity Scribner points to “the transition from industrial manufacture to digital technologies,” which “has left its mark on European culture” (Scribner, 2003, p.17). This transition, followed by the fragmentation and globalization of production processes, affected not only the ways people work and understand

their labour, but also their emotions, affects and yearning.<sup>11</sup> The philosopher Alexandre Kojève (1989, p.27) thus describes the importance of the vanished attachment between workers and their products: “The man who works recognizes his own product in the World that has actually been transformed by his work: he recognizes himself in it, he sees it as his own human reality, in it he discovers and reveals to others the objective reality of his humanity, of the originally abstract and purely subjective idea he has of himself.”

This generally postindustrial and postmodern condition of the contemporary world in which attachment to the product of one’s labour has been lost, is crucial to the understanding of the universal aspects of workers’ nostalgic narratives in postsocialism. It sheds important light on the fact that “the socialist project, particularly its investment in heavy industry, was not restricted to the ‘other’ Europe, nor did its lifeline terminate abruptly in 1989” (Scribner, 2003, p.15). In spite of this, however, the socialist industrialisation and its legacies remain largely absent from common European memory of the 20th century and from discourses of European modernity. For example, the map of the ERIH network (European Route of Industrial Heritage) does not include any of the former Yugoslav republics and most of Eastern Europe (See: <http://www.erih.net/anchor-points.html>). Poland and the Czech Republic are included in the map, but are represented by older, pre-socialist industrial heritage sites. Likewise, the volume *Heritage, Labour and Working Classes* (Smith, Shackel and Campbell, 2011) discusses the nature of working class heritage in contributions “from a number of Western countries including the USA, UK, Spain, Sweden, Australia and New Zealand”, but not a single contribution deals with post-socialist/Eastern European countries, and the editors do not problematize or justify in any way the absence of post-socialist working class’ heritage from the volume. In former Yugoslav societies, where there is a general lack of interest in industrial

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<sup>11</sup> Mathew Crawford (2009) provides an insightful reflection upon these changes and their consequences.



legacy,<sup>12</sup> only older industrial legacy attracts the attention of experts.<sup>13</sup>

Another reason to talk about nostalgia in the case of industrial labour memory in socialist Yugoslavia, instead of using more neutral vocabulary of social memory (Vodopivec, 2007) or post-Fordism and its discontents (Kirn, 2010), is in nostalgia's affective, emotional dimension. The nostalgia of industrial workers ubiquitous in Jagodina's Cable Factory may most adequately be defined through the words of Dejan Kršić (2004, p.31) who sees nostalgia as an enraptured gaze, stressing that the "real object of nostalgia is not a fascinating image of a lost past, but the very gaze enraptured with that image". The workers' affective, passionate, sensory memories reveal them as engaged social subjects, and recall the agency they are longing for. This makes nostalgia a practice with a mobilizing, legitimizing, and even an emancipatory character.

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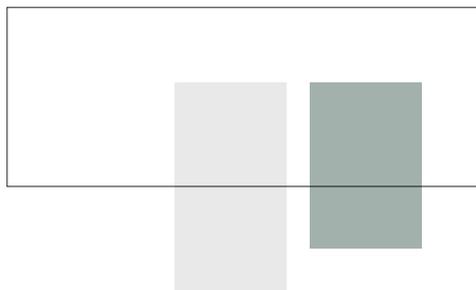
12 Cf. Deutsche Welle: Propadanje industrijske baštine – slučajnost ili namjera?. *Nacional*. February 16, 2010; Mesarić, 2010; Matos, 2005; Ćirić, 2010.

13 On the relationship between nostalgia and heritage, see Berliner 2012.

The importance of the affective and the emotional in relation to the memory of socialism for present day political subjectivities in postsocialist Europe becomes clear when we take into account the ways in which postsocialist subjects are seen through the lens of "an ideology called transitology" (Buden, 2014, p.124). Boris Buden points to the paradox that "marks the jargon of postcommunist transition: those who proved their political maturity in the so-called 'democratic revolutions' of 1989–90 have become thereafter, overnight, children!" (ibid., p.123). This paradox is based on the "cynical idea that people who won freedom through their own struggle must now learn how to enjoy it properly" (ibid., p.125). The metaphor of postsocialist subjects as children, just like transitional ideology in its totality, does not leave any room for memory, and especially not for nostalgia: children are "untroubled by the past and geared totally towards the future," which makes them "the almost perfect subject of a democratic restart" (ibid., p.124). What is more, the absence of a past or social amnesia in the foundations of transitional ideology requires social anaesthesia: "social contradictions of postcommunism, such as the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the dismantling of all

forms of social solidarity, enormous social injustices and widespread suffering – they all remain affectively unoccupied (...) This social anaesthesia is one of the most salient symptoms of postcommunist transformation” (Buden, 2012, p.78). Engaged, affectionate recollections of participation in the modernist project such as the ones the workers shared with me during my fieldwork in the Cable Factory in Jagodina, on the other hand, prevent such social anaesthesia and interrupt triumphalist and paternalistic discourses in which modernity is still to be achieved by postsocialist subjects – once they grow up. The nostalgia they emanate maintains tension and restlessness, preventing the socialist industrial ruins of a modernist utopia from being peacefully naturalized and consigned to history or just ignored and forgotten as signs of an “inappropriate socialist past.”

As stressed at the beginning of this article, socialist industrialization was an integral part of European modernity. The same is true for postsocialist nostalgia of industrial labour. It makes remembrance of the 20th century European modernist project “unsettled and unsettling” (Blackmar, 2001, p.333), preventing the pacification, aestheticization and fossilization of the memory of industrialization and its reduction to a linear historical narrative – all common results of processes of musealization and the making of industrial heritage (Barndt, 2010; Muehlebach, 2017). In this light, nostalgia reveals itself as a reminder of not only the past, but also of the values necessary for imagining the future, such as intergenerational and universal solidarity, responsibility, communality, value of work as such, and maybe the most important – personal and collective autonomy.



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## IN-BETWEEN UTOPIA AND NOSTALGIA

### or How the Worker Became Invisible on the Path from Shock-Worker to Consumer

#### Abstract

*The main cultural symptom of “post-socialist” transition is the transition of social imagination – from the one driven by the enthusiastic formation of the new egalitarian society, which is culturalized by the idealisation of labour and forces of production, to imagination stemming from the hypothesis of easy-going affluence and demonstrative abundance for which the very figure of the worker, and labour as such, have become undesired ideological residues. This text is concerned with the cultural conditions of the fading figure of the worker, and of the ossification of working-class identity as ideological locus. The shift of imagination occurred at the very moment when utopian imagination faded and nostalgic imagination emerged. If we look at the*

*early processes of post-socialist transition in the 1960s, the utopia of production reached its cultural crisis as it became ideologically ritualised and creatively stale. Mainly through cultural influences and mediated imaginaria, another, counter-utopian utopia of the possible became dominant as a form of social imagination. By returning to some examples from the very rich cinematographic production of socialist Yugoslavia, this text explores conditions of the cultural disavowal of the worker in circumstances of changing social imagination, but also argues for the emergence of modes of critical remembrance of Yugoslavia, those beyond narratives of “totalitarian discourse”, on the one side, and nostalgic narratives, on the other.*

There are conflicting imaginations at work in the cultural practice of *Yugonostalgia*. However, most commonly the character of *Yugonostalgia* does not imply a sentimental longing for the actually existing socialist order – with its self-managed organisation of labour, social ownership over means of production, collectivism and egalitarian spirit, etc. Rather, it is a nostalgia for an imagined hybrid-type society – that may for the purposes of my argument be named

*consumer socialism*<sup>1</sup> – a nostalgia for the process of *post-socialist transition* in which all the benefits of the socialist system are supposed to be maintained whilst the liberal prioritisation of personal affluence and happiness appear to be seamlessly introduced. Post-socialist transition is usually located in the period after 1989, however, as I have already

<sup>1</sup> For discussion on “consumer socialism” see: Dimitrijević, 2016.

proposed, we may identify the cultural symptoms of transition as emerging in socialist Yugoslavia as early as the late 1950s and continuing throughout the sixties (Initially proposed in Dimitrijević, 2005), when a set of economic reforms introduced some elements of “capitalist imagination” within the socialist structural logic. In the nostalgic view these elements are associated with different modes of the culturalization of politics, with consumerist brands, leisure and entertainment culture, and with the reawakening of national identity cultures.

The main cultural symptom of this transition is the transition of *social imagination* – from the one driven by the enthusiastic formation of the new egalitarian society, which is culturalized by the idealisation of labour and forces of production, to the imagination stemming from the hypothesis of easy-going affluence and demonstrative abundance for which the very figure of the worker, and labour as such, have become undesired ideological residues, reminders of the “unattractiveness” of the socialist egalitarian imagination encountering the consumerist promise in which labour is culturally concealed. Here we are interested in the cultural conditions of the fading figure of the worker, and of the ossification of working-class identity as ideological locus.

This shift of imagination occurred at the very moment when utopian imagination faded and nostalgic imagination emerged. For instance, already in the cultural production of Yugoslavia in the 1970s, there were significant signs of an emerging cultural production of nostalgic imagination. Let us mention as the prime example the immensely popular TV series “Grlom u jagode” (*Hard to swallow*, Dir: Srđan Karanović, 1975), first aired in the autumn of 1976. The series practically established the mode of 1960s “nostalgisation” with its ten episodes set in one year of the decade. In this series Yugoslavia was somehow already a thing of the past: remembrance of emerging modernisation is already nostalgia for *le temps perdu*. “Grlom u jagode” conditioned many forms and aspects of contemporary Yugonostalgia, and its famous musical score (by Zoran Simjanović)

clearly operated as a trigger for nostalgic moods among several generations of the urban middle-classes. This coming-of-age story is about a middle-class experience in socialism; it is about the dream of the perfect blending of socialism and consumerism, retaining the egalitarian humanism of socialism, whilst at the same time freely imagining its irresistible Other.

If we look at the early processes of post-socialist transition in the 1960s, the utopia of production reached its cultural crisis as it became ideologically ritualised and creatively stale, and increasingly more of an object of irony than the affirmation of the emerging middle classes. Mainly through cultural influences and mediated *imaginaria*, another, counter-utopian *utopia of the possible* became dominant as a form of social imagination. The philosopher Radomir Konstantinović in his influential book *Filozofija palanke (Small-town Philosophy)*; Konstantinović, 1991) from the late 1960s, describes this counter-utopianism as *utopianism of the possible* that signifies the end of utopian imagination yet also the only achievable form of a (counter-)utopian promise. It is grounded upon the imagination of personal well-being without the dangers pertinent to the “big world”; a life of security achieved by peripheral stagnation but enriched by dreams of the affluent world. It is an extended moment of innocence, transforming the utopian drive into a nostalgic stasis.

As if *utopia* and *nostalgia* stand for unambiguous opposites; as if where there is utopian imagination there is no nostalgia and where there is nostalgia there is no utopian imagination. Nevertheless, both discursive formations operate within one and the same repository of powerful images, and these images overlap as much as they require an equally powerful *fetishization* masking their uncertainty and fragility. For Marx commodity fetishism implied the obliteration of the dark reality of labour employed to manufacture a certain commodity – e.g. the labour of under-aged sweatshop workers in fancy designer clothing – and such a fetishization is also a condition of the relation to the image of labour and labourer in both utopian and nostalgic

imagination. We shall look into the conditions of this disavowal of the *worker* in the circumstances of the changing social imagination and its consequences for the emergence of more urgent modes of critical remembrance, beyond the images created, on the one side, by totalitarian narratives and, on the other, by nostalgic ones.

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During the course of its development, Yugoslavia was persistently faced with the fundamental dilemmas that also the Bolshevik authorities faced in their agonistic efforts aimed at creating a new state that was supposed to manage their vision of a new society. Following the brutal period of “wartime communism”, which increasingly led towards anarchy that Lenin tried to prevent, there arose increasing doubts concerning the ability of the proletariat to “spontaneously” realise new social goals, and the inevitability of a gradual restoration of capitalist economic relations (the New Economic Plan), thus strengthening the technocratic-expert segment of society, which was supposed to restructure the economy based on “Taylorist” principles of a rigid organisation of labour. On the other hand, the proletariat itself turned out to be the central burden when it came to the realisation of these principles of social and the organisation of production: its inherited backward habits, lack of culture, misunderstanding of the essence of new social processes, laziness and lack of productivity at work, etc. “A Russian worker was a bad worker compared to a worker in developed societies”, Lenin wrote once; and in many of his recorded comments, he expressed admiration over the way in which Western societies achieved a high degree of work organisation, and he even wrote that the new socialist society should take the Swiss post office as its role model, which he greatly admired during his exile in Zurich in the first decade of the 20th century. (Priestland, 2009, p.74).

The new vision of “modern socialism”, according to Lenin, was based on a “harmonious economic machine” managed by experts, who, in the case of “workers’ immaturity” should even resort to

“dictatorial powers”. That was how, in 1921, the “League for the Scientific Organisation of Labour” was established, for the purpose of exposing and resolving the problem of “wasting time and laziness in factories and offices”. Cultural and civilizational differences were often emphasised in order to explain the reasons behind the unwillingness of the masses to accept their responsibilities in developing a new society. Russia was seen as the scene of a civilizational struggle between Western values and work ethics, which it was necessary to adopt, and “Asian values that corrupted Russian people and their behaviour”, as written by Nikolay Chernyshevsky, the author of the famous novel *What Is to Be Done?* (1863), which was the most influential “operational manual” for developing revolutionary imagination, primarily among the Russian youth in the final decades of the 19th century. The novel’s heroine dreams of a society wherein men and women live and work in a great, well-lit and air-conditioned glass palace, in which they all attain absolute collective and individual happiness by working rationally and according to plan during the day, whilst in the evenings they unwind together at spectacular balls and collective parties.

According to Lenin and Trotsky, socialism was not possible if the working class did not undergo a process of “cultural revolution”, which presupposed a fundamental shift in education and the creation of work ethics, i.e. the acceptance of those values that Lenin, whose mother brought him up on Lutheran ethics, personally adhered to, but did not recognise in the masses whom the revolution was supposed to liberate spiritually. Hence the attempt at creating a new Soviet state resulted in the increasing attention that the chief leaders of the October Revolution dedicated to the problems of everyday life – that is, possible steps that could be taken with a view to educating the masses and changing inherited backward habits. Thus Trotsky, in 1923, published a book entitled *Problems of Everyday Life*, wherein he does not view the transformation of society merely in terms of regulating economic relations, but also of regulating everyday relations “on the micro-level”, first of all in the family, within the framework of which

a communist may be faced with, as he put it, “the reactionary mentality of a woman who is not a Party member, originating from the kitchen and the laundry” (Trocki, 1981, p.176).

Setting aside the misogynist character of the above cited statement, what Trotsky wanted to initiate here is a profound transformation of the private sphere, determined by particular interests, into one guided by communal interests, while recognising “the predilection for having fun, leisure time pursuits and merriment”, which are “an entirely justified part of human nature” (Ibid., p.65). Nevertheless, it was prohibition (and alcohol was the main fuel of “having fun, leisure time pursuits and merriment”) that was very meticulously carried out after the revolution, so that now the search began for ways in which “leisure time pursuits could be turned into means of collective education”. In this respect, it was first of all film (going to the cinema was thought of as a substitute for going to church) that was supposed to play the key role of providing a link between leisure time pursuits and education, and also in developing new cultural habits that would eliminate the greatest problem when it came to raising the level of awareness of the masses: alcoholism, lack of hygiene, obscenity in communication, conservative and religious habits, etc.

This confrontation with the masses and their socially backward everyday life would become the main ideological obstacle both in the USSR and later on in Yugoslavia. Over time, those in whose name the revolution was carried out were tacitly characterised as “insufficiently mature” for social transformation, and thus paradoxically became a kind of unwanted surplus that obstructed the purity of the vision of a new ideal society. In their efforts aimed at realising the modernist, scientific, planned socialism, socialist states were confronted with the fundamental social effect of modern progressivism, which, as Marshall Berman once described it, “first pushed the poor outside its field of vision” (as in the case of the first modern urban planning, which occurred in Paris in the 1840’s), only to make their misery and poverty, as a consequence of modernisation, even more visible: the bright light of modernity “lights

the rubbish dumps and dark lives of the people at whose expense this light shines” (Berman, 1983, p.153). Such images of the misery of the working class could not be brought into connection with the new socialist society, and had to be erased from the field of vision, for it was precisely these images that constituted a visualisation of unjust social relations in industrial capitalism. Still, as Trotsky also concluded several years after the revolution, or as Henri Lefebvre would similarly conclude later, changes in the political superstructure do not *ipso facto* lead to a change in real life. Poverty and misery always look the same and symbolise social injustice, and their elimination presupposed the necessity of intervention in everyday life, a kind of a “micro-revolution”. On the other hand, the world had to be made to look visibly prettier, so that the impulse to hide that which “the bright light of modernity” inexorably lit up became the central mechanism of political and cultural censorship.

The situation in Yugoslavia in 1945 was as critical as it was in Russia after the revolution. New social models had to be built upon the ruins; models in which the figure of the worker would be elevated to a powerful, moral and self-sacrificing model supposed to play the leading role in the realisation of a new system. In the first ten years or so, what was created was the culture of idealising and aestheticizing the worker, the culture in which new heroes of labour were praised, following the role model of the Soviet Stakhanovites: among them, as the central symbol, the greatest Yugoslav “strike worker”, Alija Sirotonović, was particularly idealised. In 1949, he mined more coal than Stakhanov himself – which was used after the break-up with Stalin to emphasise once more that the Yugoslav model was more correct and effective than the Soviet one. However, with new economic measures introduced from the late 1950’s onwards, the heroisation of productivism was met with increasing scepticism, even irony, within the idea of a new society aestheticized in a different way; it was a society that gradually shifted from the phase of *productivism* (sacrificing for the system) to the phase of *consumerism* (enjoying the fruits of the new system).

In this process of social transformation, it was Western cultural representations that played the most important role, for they glamorised consumer lifestyles, that is, in their aestheticization, they separated the signified from the signifier: the image of capitalist production as inhumane and of work in capitalism as “alienated” disappeared in “the bright light of shop windows and advertisements”, in fetishized images wherein the West no longer appeared as the realm of inhumane work but only as a place of wellbeing, with crystal clear swimming pools, modern cars, nice-looking well-groomed people, a space where there is no work, but only leisure and fun. Such a fetishization, carried out within the cultural imaginarium, made the actual act of production invisible, which was precisely what constituted the initial idealisation in the efforts aimed at creating a socialist society – what happened was a fetishization of the image of “the Western lifestyle”, precisely through the mechanism that Marx (1976) described as “commodity fetishism”: the social relations in the West, as presented, are devoid of references pertaining to the real production circumstances and the work process. In such a break of causality between production and consumption, fetishism reflected a “false consciousness” (“false consciousness” being the Marxist definition of ideology) of the real status of goods and services, and of social relations on the basis of which those goods were produced and those services provided.

Reviewing the consequences of the French bourgeois revolution, Walter Benjamin observed that one century later *égalité* developed its own “phantasmagoria”, whereas *la révolution* came to mean “sales”. As Benjamin was paraphrased by Susan Buck-Morss (1991, p.284): “The social goal, of course, was material plenitude, which is the reason why the dream functioned legitimately at the manifest level of the picture of collective desire. However, the commodity-related form of the dream generated the expectation that the international, socialist goal of mass well-being could be provided through national, capitalist means, and this expectation dealt a death blow to the revolutionary policy of the working class.”

Another well-known theory of “fetishism” also points to the process that happened here. To Sigmund Freud, a fetish is a “substitution”, or “a mask that covers and denies the traumatic image of nothingness and constructs a phantasmatic space, a surface and that which the surface hides” (Mulvey, 1993, p.11). Even though Marx’s and Freud’s theories of fetishism are not homologous, in both theories fetishization operates through the metaphor of a non-transparent, polished and reflective surface that hides something due to its own shine: be it the psychic trauma of symbolic castration or the indexation of production and the awkwardness of its real outlook – the gloom of factory work, and thereby the exploitation of workers. Causal relations are lost and referentiality is denied. What we are dealing with here is not merely a desirable object as particularly fetishized, but the creation of a fetishist *mise-en-scène*, a mass spectacle promising a “rich view”, as the film theorist Dana Polan puts it speaking of the phantasmatic space of Hollywood movies that creates a massive screen onto which collective fantasies are projected (Quoted in *ibid.*, pp.6-7)<sup>2</sup>.

It is important to point out here that the phantasmatic spaces created by Hollywood movies and those that were constructed in the language of socialist realist painting, operate here on a similar level of cultural fetishization. An emblematic example of this is the film *Love and Fashion* as a cultural representation that connects both these cultural influences.<sup>3</sup> Then again even a cursory glance at the paintings of “socialist realism” in the USSR reveal a very similar world of dreams: the space of a crystal clean modern city, lit by bright sunlight and filled with clear *lazure*, inhabited by attractive, smiling people who are engaged in sporting activities, enjoying ice-creams next to newly built swimming pools,

<sup>2</sup> The English word ‘screen’ can mean both a surface onto which moving pictures are projected or something that masks or hides.

<sup>3</sup> This film, directed by Ljubomir Radičević, made in the summer of 1960, was seen by a great number of viewers, and would remain the most impressive cultural symptom of crossing from the era that was still entirely marked by the consequences of the war and the ideology of organised socialist productivism, to the era of “market socialism” and relative economic prosperity. For more details on this film, cf. Dimitrijević, 2009.

fraternising and talking in the metro, driving new cars while above them planes fly in the sky. If we take the well-known speech of Maxim Gorky, delivered at the First Congress of the Association of Soviet Writers, as the basic blueprint of socialist realism, we shall notice that here “realism” is understood as an art form that must be “supplemented” in order to achieve “romanticism, which forms the basis of myth, and is very useful for helping to stimulate a revolutionary attitude towards reality, *an attitude which practically changes the world.*”

Hence Zhdanov’s definition of socialist realism that he proposed at the same Congress was that it is a “depiction of reality in its revolutionary development” (Quoted in Morozov, 2003, p.71). The main opposite of socialist realism was not some generalised idea of “decadent modernism”, but rather a “critical naturalism” as “realism without romanticism”, as a literary method that, in the words of Gorky, “makes no claims in its criticism of everything, or even worse, accepts a claim that it has rejected itself” (ibid., p. 72). As opposed to naturalist realism, socialist realism is characterised by the feature that it “dares to dream” (Hoberman, 1998). The visual culture of socialist realism articulated in this way presupposed the concept of a utopia happening and unfolding right before our eyes, which is not a thing of the far future but something that is practically within our grasp; something that constitutes a kind of “suspension of temporality”, or a “substitute for history”. Stalinism was characterised by the proclamation that “the first phase of communism has already been successfully completed”, and that “life has been improved and become merrier”.<sup>4</sup> As Slavoj Žižek (2001, p.108) concludes in his characteristic manner, “Stalinist socialist realism was effectively an attempt to establish ‘socialism with a human face’, to re-enter the process of industrialisation in the restrictions of traditional psychological individualism – in the texts, pictures and films of socialist realism, individuals are no longer presented as part of a global Machine but as warm and passionate beings.”

The basis of the modern utopian visual phantasm has always contained the ideal of the modern city, whose skyline forms the basic *mise-en-scène* of the new society. In the pictures of some of the main protagonists of the painting of social realism, such as Alexander Deineka, Yuri Pimenov or Ivan Vladimirov, the city (mainly Moscow) is recognisable but “supplemented by romanticism”, by being purified of all “naturalist” references. In such a purified picture of the modern city, there is no place for the unrefined looks and backward habits of the masses of workers and peasants, who become increasingly unsuitable for this “human face of socialism”, for they are reminiscent of the necessity of the inhumane and cold discipline of planned productivism. In two pictures and one large mosaic by Alexander Deineka depicting “Stakhanovites” as heroes of socialist labour, their looks (smiling faces, dressed in white clothes) in no way point to the conditions of the work that they have done; they become “models” in the ideal city, only not one that is imagined in the future but one that is already “reified” and commodified in visual culture. In the film *Love and Fashion*, the city is also purified, not only in a literal but also in a metaphorical sense (purified of the naturalism of physical work), and a similar thing happened in real public spaces, when, one year after the making of this film, a hurried “Potemkinisation” of Belgrade ensued, as the city prepared to greet the delegations participating in the first Conference of Non-Aligned Countries held in Belgrade in 1961.

The thesis that the figure of the worker was removed from the sphere of visual culture may sound paradoxical, in view of the fact that the ideological concepts were based upon it. However, the idealised figure of the worker was itself fetishized to such an extent, and so disembodied of any physical reality and “bare life” in the production process, that it could no longer be compared to the physiology of a man “of flesh and blood”. A real worker, sweaty, dirty and tired of work, the one who spends his free time in a bar, and not additionally educating himself in the transformation of his own consciousness – could not meet the highly positioned ideological image of himself that had been created, could not

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4 Quotes from a speech delivered by J. V. Stalin (ibid., pp.21 and 33).

match the constructed ideal. When this ideal of the worker disappeared from the sphere of mass culture during the course of the 1960's, at the time when the new commercial cultural industry formed its ideals through the figures of actors, singers and models, he no longer possessed any cultural symbolisation.<sup>5</sup> As far as visual culture was concerned, the worker disappeared as the productivist utopia was transformed into a consumerist one – the worker disappeared in the excessively strong glare of his ideal self.

The appearance of consumer culture in Yugoslavia during the 1960's signifies a transformation of the egalitarian utopian imagination, as part of the class struggle, into a benevolent social consensus, and an imagination of an idealised progressive modernity without contradictions. The consumerist dream became a substitute for the unrealised utopia, and it gradually became a cultural practice that attended the loss of the revolutionary ideal. Hence the official reaction to some artistic practices during the 1960's was particularly harsh towards those works that served as a reminder of the fact that this ideal had been neglected (that is, that it remained only as the demonstrative content of a disembodied ideological discourse), and that introduced the practice of "anti-romantic realism" amidst the "aestheticization" of the seemingly reached artistic freedoms. The best example of this may be found in Yugoslav cinematographic practice during the 1960's; films usually referred to with the term "Black Wave". We are not dealing here with the polemics whether this term should be upheld to describe a particular phenomenon, but rather we are interested in the mode in which this term was initially introduced as a negative term to serve the purposes of the ideological condemnation of "reality distortion" in those films

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5 When this issue began to be discussed more openly, that is, the attitude of the media in the process of forming a new consumer society, it was concluded that "the production hero" had been replaced by "the consumption hero". (Cf. Odnos sredstava informisanja prema potrošačkom društvu [The Attitude of the Media towards the Consumer Society], 1981) With Tito's model already drawing to a close, in a book whose title was almost comical, at least speaking from the point of the general framework of the period in question, "it was revealed" that the consumer psychology had deformed the process of the development of socialism into communism. (See: Ilić, 1984)

that insistently dwelt on themes of moral decay, violence, poverty, obscenity, triviality.

Such a repetition of the socialist-realist condemnation of "naturalism" in literature had an additional and very significant tone. The critic who initiated the political campaign in Yugoslavia against the "Black Wave", and who actually introduced this term, Vladimir Jovičić, formulated his criticism of the "uncommunicative nature" of these films, not just by resorting to the usual phrases used by the proponents of socialist realism, but by adding remarks on the negative influence of these films on the development and lucrativeness of the film industry (specifically the one initiated by the films such as *Love and Fashion*), that is, on their very "market performance", as he branded these films as being responsible for the financial crisis of the Yugoslav film industry (Jovičić, 1969, pp.22-29). This kind of marriage between social realism-based ideological rhetoric and pro-market rhetoric is of key importance as the symptom of an attempt at building new social consensus, in which such films were presented as obsolete in a two-fold ideological closure.

What characterised most of these films, were the issues of the essentially antagonistic character of modern society, issues of searching for modes of social *dissensus* and of challenging the idealisation of social harmony. In their actualisation of the repressed social antagonism (of class struggle), "Black Wave" authors played the role of an "unacceptable political subject who produces political dissent by challenging the established identifications and classifications, and opposing them to the heterology of emancipation" (Rancière, 2004, pp.85-90). As Jacques Rancière has shown, if there is a connection between art and politics, then it should be designated by using the notion of *dissensus*, as a form of resistance to the idealisation of the social consensus. *Dissensus* opens up in the conflict between the *sensual* and the *meaningful*, in the conflict that does not have a clear *destination*. "Black Wave" films positioned this conflict between the sensual and the meaningful amidst Yugoslav political circumstances, first of all

as the relationship between the *concrete body* and the *abstract idea*.

In the most important examples of the “Black Wave”, the ideal image of the working class (i.e. “the established identification and classification”) was confronted with the “heterology” of mere existence and its social and cultural manifestations. What these films have in common is the process of the “defetishization” of workers in order to make them visible and tangible again – an image that was ideologically awkward. Today, this is the joint characteristic of the most representative “Black Wave” films, and generally of the cinematography in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, as exemplified by: *A Man Is not a Bird* (1965) by Dušan Makavejev, *The Awakening of a Rat* (1967) and *When I Am Dead and White* (1968) by Živojin Pavlović, *I Even Met Happy Gypsies* (original title: *Skupljači perja / Feather Gatherers*) (1967) and *The End of the World Will Come Soon* (1969) by Aleksandar Petrović, *Pictures from the Life of Strike Workers* (1972) by Bata Čengić, etc. Within the context of Yugoslav cinematography, there came into being two particularly striking “film essays” that actually postulate the conflict between the sensual and the meaningful through the conflict between the utopian and the corporeal: *Early Works* (1969) by Želimir Žilnik, and *WR Mysteries of the Organism* (1971) by Dušan Makavejev. Finally, it can be said of the entire film opus of the director Želimir Žilnik that it deals with “the dead angle of ideology”, that is, with “the controversial symptoms of the powerlessness of ideology to operate successfully in keeping with the principles that it proclaims”. Žilnik’s approach was indeed one of “materialist dialectics”, which “locates symptomatic opposites within the very material practices through which they move, without remaining imprisoned inside idealistic contradictions – therefore, precisely within that which differentiates Marx’s dialectics from Hegel’s” (See: Dimitrijević, 2010).

Earlier in this decade, in 1963, Dušan Makavejev made a short documentary film titled *The Parade* (1963), in which he recorded the circumstances of the materialisation of Yugoslav “political everyday

life”, that is, the concrete circumstances under which public celebrations that ritualised the official ideology were organised. Even though the film was actually commissioned in order to document the official parade organised on the public holiday 1 May, Makavejev approached his object “laterally” – not as the aestheticization of a public ideological spectacle (the commissioned “aestheticization of politics”) but as a heterological visualisation of that which such spectacles actually hide: the immediate reactions of the people attending the event, or of those who had certain duties in its realisation, therefore, that which was located outside the constructed scene of the aestheticized ideological imaginarium. In Makavejev’s own words: “I wished to introduce a corrective factor into the official attitude towards the parade, and to do so from the position of someone who believes in that system. Quite simply, I was not of the opinion that the system could not be changed. I thought – if we position ourselves as people who have accepted the system, it will grant us the right to change it” (Nikodijević, 1995, p.33). Makavejev’s intention turned out to be a provocative and “dissensual” intervention in the public perception of ideological manifestations, confronting them with “undisciplined” practices that cannot be subordinated to the planned organisation.

As opposed to the “Potemkinisation” in the film such as *Love and Fashion* (the beginning of this film was shot in the same place as Makavejev’s documentary), Makavejev’s “de-Potemkinisation” of public space was not greeted with a favourable reaction from the authorities. *The Parade* is one of those films whose public screening was banned by the Commission for Reviewing Films, even though, as was the case with all “bans” in Yugoslav cinematography, this one remained vague, for the film (in a somewhat shortened version) was still screened at certain festivals. According to the testimony of Dušan Makavejev, since the justification of the administrative ban was not quite clear, he personally went to see the man who signed this decision (the well-known theatre critic Eli Finci) to ask him about the reasons for the ban. The answer he received was evasive and pertained to a laconic recognition of irony in the director’s artistic

method ("making fun of the day of the international proletariat"), and the only thing mentioned specifically were "those roast sucklings that people were carrying in the film" (ibid., p.34) alluding to a scene depicting traditional "homely" habits of the people who had come to attend the parade, which remained a customary way of marking the "1 May early rising feast" as a folk celebration. Thus, what bothered the Commission was not any latent anti-socialist content (as was the case with the not at all banned film *Love and Fashion*), but the actual everyday practice that the socialist system had not transformed, which, in fact, the system did not have the capacity to transform, hiding it instead by means of the fetishization of a political spectacle. A spectacle, moreover, that was actually supposed to speak out in the name of the working class and the proletariat, for the occasion was dedicated to marking the holiday of labour. Therefore, what was at work here were the questionable ways of "using" labour day on part of the proletariat itself, which were considered to be insufficiently "culturalized", and thus inappropriate to the idealised image of it that had been created.

Dušan Makavejev's *Parade* exposed an essential problem connected with the development of a socialist social imagination. If the system was primarily created "in the name of workers", it gave rise to the question how, after the evident abandonment of the aesthetical regime of productivist enthusiasm, the worker was supposed to be represented under the changed economic circumstances. In view of the economic reforms initiated towards the end of the 1950's, such a figure no longer reflected the ideological core of the Yugoslav system. The mythologisation of work as sacrificing for the system could not hide the reality of production (dirty work in dark mines, white-hot iron foundries, muddy fields), and it could increasingly less hide the reality of everyday life outside of work – the actual life story of Alija Sirotanović contributed to a loss of faith in the "apotheosis" of production, for this man (in the final analysis, as opposed to Stakhanov himself, who enjoyed personal benefits from his strike workmanship), over time, lost any representative social role he may have had, and lived in poverty in

a village close to the mine in which he attained his short-lived glory.<sup>6</sup> An exceptional testimony to this is the 1972 film directed by Bata Čengić titled *Pictures from the Lives of Strike Workers*.

Among certain better known examples, we shall, in this context, mention an undeservedly less recognised film that belongs to this era, which, in an intriguing manner, deals with the change of the paradigm of productivism at the core of the issue of working class identity, within the framework of the new situation of economic and market reforms. The 1968 short documentary film directed by Bojana Marijan titled *The Merry Class*, focuses on the issue of how to spend the "free time" of the working class as a sphere of personal creativity outside production work, but within the space of production (the factory). The film focuses on workers caught up in the "no man's land" between the heritage of self-management, which declaratively gave them the power of political and economic decision-making, and their increasingly marginalised role in the sphere of public representation. This film, most of all, reveals the workers' awareness of class stratification: "The proletarian class is offended to be exploited by others – it works and others reap the rewards", is what the film's protagonist sings at the beginning, in the manner of Mexican music, following which he testifies to the strike that the workers tried to stage on account of low salaries and high norms (a strike was actually the greatest taboo of socialist self-management, for there was actually no discourse within which one could ponder the possibility of workers "striking against themselves")<sup>7</sup>.

The film primarily testifies to the transformation of those who were the protagonists of the culture of productivity into those to whom the only thing left

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6 The most significant research into this phenomenon was conducted by Andrea Matošević, as evidenced by his manuscript "Radnička klasa ide u raj. Modeli, prezentacije i imaginarij udarništva u socijalističkoj Jugoslaviji [The Working Class Goes to Heaven. The Models, Presentations and Imaginarium of Strike Workmanship in Socialist Yugoslavia]" (2010).

7 It is interesting to note that it was none other than Dušan Makavejev, in an article (Student, 7/10/1975) written while he was a member of the "Communist Youth", who described how he explained to foreign students that there were no strikes in Yugoslavia, for workers could not strike against themselves.

is an undefined sphere of consumption for the realisation of creativity in the form of a creative re-interpretation of cultural references, and thus a politicisation of these references. Workers are shown here with all the attributes and habits that made them “undesirable” in the sphere of culture (alcoholism, obscenity, lack of hygiene, etc.) – for their salary, “sufficient to pay the rent and buy them fifteen bottles of beer”, could get them nothing more than that – but in the context of their “cultural creativity”, they could present those habits, as well as their political attitudes, through singing, playing, dancing, reciting poetry, *gusle*-playing, pantomime, etc. This film is about the tactics of the cultural activation of workers, which would be discerned by the French theorist of “practices of everyday life” Michel de Certeau as “tactics from below” which “process” the cultural production, that is, do not bow down to cultural production as its passive consumers but reproduce it, only not in the way that this cultural production expects it of them, but by creating a new “art of use”: “a speech act which is at the same time a use of language and an operation performed within it”. Therefore, it is a possibility of a *creative use* and not a mere *consumption* of a cultural text (Certeau, 1988, p.31).

*The Merry Class*, is an example of cultural production that may be seen as marginal yet still an integral part of the existing and rather propulsive film production system in SFRY, therefore not as a dissident film but as a *dissensual* film within the scope of socialist cinematography and the socialist cultural policy. Also, it is the main protagonist of this documentary, the outspoken rebellious factory worker and amateur musician, who is in the *dissensual* relation to the main fictional protagonist of the post-socialist transition: a passive, fantasising figure, a *naive subject of transition*. As early as the 1960s, a film critic Dejan Đurković, tried to describe this new protagonist inaugurated by a whole wave of entertaining films, at the time, dealing with new forms of imagination of contemporary life, of which the most famous example is the already mentioned film *Love and Fashion*. For Đurković this new “hero” is “some foolish goodie of an unclear class origin, and of an unclear spatial or temporal specificity,

half-idiot and quarter-imbecile who embodies a general Yugoslav tendency for riches and affluence” (Đurković, 1961). This subject of transition places his trust in the system around him but is comically inadequate in it and spends most of his time daydreaming and fantasising like, for the sake of an example, a character like Ljubisav Popić in the aptly titled entertaining film “Pusti snovi” (*Empty Dreams*, by Soja Jovanović) produced in the same year, in 1968. Like certain other characters portrayed by one of the most famous comic actors of the era, Mija Aleksić, the naive subject of transition is a caricatural replacement for a naive true-believer of the declared socialist ideology.<sup>8</sup>

The naive subject of transition is also the nostalgic subject, the postmodern nostalgic subject longing for the never-happened. But this “never-happened” is not structured as some imagined future that is *still-never-happened*, but as an actual *never-happening*. This is why this subject is ideal for the current ideological conjuncture as s/he is neither the subject who remembers the past nor the subject who imagines the future. In order to structure a non-nostalgic remembrance of Yugoslav socialism that would be capable of bearing some meaning for any future socialist imagination, one does not only need to counter the totalitarian paradigm in which the antagonisms in Yugoslav socialist society are interpreted in the form of state terror over dissenting subjects, but also the nostalgic paradigm which disavows these antagonisms. The foundational failure of the Yugoslav socialist system is that it perceived the notion of class struggle as being somehow resolved. If the memory of Yugoslav socialism is to have any meaning in future socialist imaginations (and this could be its only recuperation) this foundational failure needs to be tackled beyond the reactionary fantasy of a proposed totalitarian terror or the nostalgic fantasy of a harmonious Belle Époque.

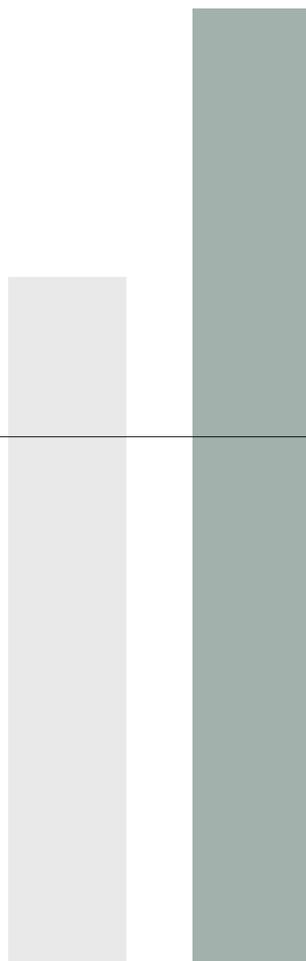
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8 On the “naive subject of transition” see: Dimitrijević, 2016, pp.120-121.

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## YUGONOSTALGIA

# The Meta-National Memory Narratives of the Last Pioneers

### Abstract

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*Taking into account the specificities of (post) Yugoslav neostalgia (Velikonja, 2010) there is a strong need for theory to take a closer look at the multiplicities of both Yugoslavia and its nostalgia(s). Introducing the political aspect of nostalgia, with particular focus on the last generation of pioneers (born between 1974 and 1982), we are leaving the banalizing official post-communist discourses (Buden, 2012) on nostalgic transition losers and those academic discourses that deny nostalgic sentiments of the ability to generate a political movement or a programme (Horvat and Štikš, 2015). Within revisionist political and cultural discourses, nostalgia emerges, through Svetlana Boym's concept of counter-memory (Boym, 2001), in public spaces without state control and without the control of dominant discourses of political elites, and as such is being translated into reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2001, p.49).*

*Through this reflection, the last generation of pioneers creates memory narratives that interweave the political and the nostalgic. These narratives perform as "noeuds de mémoire" – exceeding attempts of territorialisation and identitarian reduction (Rothberg, 2010) and through their multidirectionality (Rothberg, 2009), they emerge as meta-national Yugonostalgic memory, creating a new paradigm in the political field*

*This essay aims to provide further reflection on possible theoretical frameworks for understanding the phenomenon of Yugonostalgia and its place within the political imaginary of the last pioneers. Remaining embedded in research and theory, I have decided to structure this article as an invitation to a dialogue, rather than a fully rounded academic article. The present political phenomena demand new perspectives and thinking about Yugonostalgia remains a challenge.*

## From Passive Sentimentalism to the (Possibility of) Articulated Resistance

Looking at the current political and social contexts of ex-Yugoslav countries, regardless the differences and specificities of their transitional journeys respectively, the mainstream discourse remains overwhelmingly “post-communist” (Buden, 2012) – since the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Yugoslavia was either ignored or represented as the worst period in its history. The “losers of the transition” are prominent in both media and academic insights regarding the phenomenon of Yugonostalgia and for the political elites anti-communism, including anti-Yugoslavism, has been the “key ideological tool” (Stojanović in Listhaug et al. 2010, p.232).

The idea of Yugoslavism (the Panslavism of South Slavs) existed since the beginning/middle of the 19th century (Rajakovic in Rupnik, 1992). The main idea of Yugoslavism is based on the cultural and linguistic proximity and complementary economies of the territories inhabited by the Slavic peoples in the Balkans (Čalić, 2013). Yet in the 1981 national census, approximately 5.4% of the population declared themselves Yugoslavs (Ramet, 2006). Even if the idea largely precedes the “second” Yugoslavia, anti-Yugoslavism neglects the fact of the existence of a monarchist Yugoslavia from 1918 to 1939, solely focusing on socialist Yugoslavia (1943-1991).

Anti-Yugoslavism has been manifesting itself as the ruling, mainstream and somewhat unavoidable common denominator for all politics and policies of ex-Yugoslav countries. Whether it has been institutionalized through, for example, the constitutional ban on forming any new Yugoslav alliances like in the constitution of the Republic of Croatia, or has remained political and often bordering with the absurd, like in the case of the mayor of Zagreb, Milan Bandić, who prohibited a cake in the shape of the red star to enter the City Hall on the occasion of the 100th birthday celebration of the partisan and honorary president of the Anti-

Fascist League of Croatia, Juraj Đuka Hrženjak. Anti-Yugoslavism has also been indirectly strongly supported by European tendencies and policies. In the context of a number of European declarations and resolutions condemning and remembering “victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes”, revisionist efforts in ex-Yugoslav countries were legitimized and Ustashe and Chetnik movements were fully revived as legitimate ideologies and forces in the World War II, even more so as victims of the Yugoslav “totalitarian communist regime”. Besides the political efforts of revisiting Yugoslav history, the academia, including a number of what Georges Mink would call, activist historians, fervently joined.

The ex-Yugoslav space was renamed in order to follow revisionist tendencies and to avoid any references to a common past – we are now inhabiting Southeastern Europe, or the Western Balkans, or just simply “the Region”. Significant absences and depersonalizing forms, all different discursive strategies (Fairclough, 2004), further strengthened, to the extent in which they reflected the realities of the ex-Yugoslav through the erasure of memory of Yugoslavia.

Historical revisionism is everywhere. Yugoslavia, as an idea of a common state of South Slavs, was and still is presented as a failure by the political elites in their efforts to legitimize their nationalist or neoliberal positions (or often both), linked with efforts towards nation building processes in the early 1990s. Histories multiply as official discourses decide on what to remember and what to forget. Street names have changed in many post-Yugoslav cities of the new states (Radović, 2013; Jouhannau in Mink and Neumayer, 2007). Monuments from Yugoslav times have been demolished and/or neglected (Horvatinčić, 2015) and history schoolbooks have been adapted creating new versions of history (Stojanović in Listhaug et al. 2010).

Erasing the past of a country in which most of today's active population was born, created a dynamic of its own. Between historical revisionism and intimate memories, collective memory has been created as

a meeting point between the representations of the past shared by individuals and the newly created historical memory, differentiated from history as a science (Lavabre, 1994). As the official discourses worked hard towards erasing any mention of Yugoslavia, unless it represented the dark ages of “the Region”, and to discredit any positive memories or even reflections on the socialist Yugoslav period, memory has become reactive (Mink in Mink and Bonnard 2010, p.24). Within this counter-memory being born (Boym, 2001), understood as memory created in public spaces without the control of the state and escaping the control of the dominant discourses promoted by political elites, the phenomenon of reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2001, p.49) emerged.

Yugonostalgia was expressly dismissed as a politically irrelevant phenomenon, banal, or at its best, as a commercialized commodity that sells well. Tanja Petrović asserts that today’s revisionist and banal understanding of Yugonostalgia is actually denying individuals of any possibility to be taken seriously (Petrović, 2012, p.13). Or as we might put it, denying Yugonostalgic subjects of any political subjectivity.

Despite the fact that certain academic circles and artistic productions slowly started reappropriating the field, sparking reflections of a Yugoslav past and present, although most certainly still marginal, Yugonostalgia remained ousted from the political field. Theory dealing with the issue came down to two main currents – asking the following questions: can Yugonostalgia be a new idea for political mobilization (Buden, 2012), is it “subversive, anti-system and emancipative” (Velikonja in Perica and Gavrilović, 2011, p.92) or is it incapable of generating a political movement or programme (Horvat and Štiks, 2015)?

So, what is the political and subversive significance of Yugonostalgia, if any?

## Whose Nostalgia?

When discussing memory and nostalgia, the agents that we are deliberating are a crucial element in understanding the phenomena. On the one side, in order to leave the banalizing discourses which relate Yugonostalgia solely to the “old” generations that did not manage to adapt to the demands of the (brave) new capitalist and democratic societies, we need to look into different age ranges of the populations in question. On the other side, as Yugoslavia(s) were multiple throughout its history, memory and consequently the following nostalgic sentiments are strongly connected to the periods we are discussing – and thus generations we are focusing on.

A generation, as we understand it here, constitutes a form of collective identity and a community linked by values and aims, experiences and beliefs (Mannheim 1978 in Kuljić 2009), or as Todor Kuljić would put it, a generation is marked by “participation in the same events, real and constructed ones” (Kuljić, 2009, p.5). One such generation is the last generation of pioneers – people born in Yugoslavia between 1974 and 1982.

Starting from Maurice Halbwachs and the/his theory of collective memory, memory is always created in relation and in opposition to other memories and the position that “in reality we are never alone” (Halbwachs, 1968, p.2). In this impossibility of a “strictly individual” (Halbwachs, 1968) memory, we find a space of dialogue between intergenerational memories and public discourses, including the revisionism of political elites. Childhood memories are often explained as indirect memories, which we interiorize through the discourses of our closest environment, and of course, most significantly the discourses of our parents (Halbwachs, 1968). As most of the last pioneers themselves would claim, their memories are strongly influenced by the memories of their parents and they are well aware that their image of Yugoslavia is the one that has been mediated many times, through many filters – through their closest surroundings, through their school environments – changing textbooks and

confused (history) teachers, through revisionist political discourses and media (Popović, 2012).

So what comprises this “last generation of pioneers”? Delineating the time limits of a generation is always a methodological challenge. Here, I took as a point of reference the Yugoslav pioneers’ induction event: the last generation of adherents were born in 1982. This moment has marked the identity of the generation in their childhood, due to the importance of this event and its symbolic weight. It was marked as the start of the “ideological and political socialization” (Duda, 2015, p.110) and the ritual of maturing (Rihtman-Auguštin in Duda 2015, p.110). To become a pioneer meant to become a citizen, to become Yugoslav.

On the other side, 1974 marked the adoption of a new and the last Constitution of the socialist Yugoslavia which strengthened the decentralization and federalization processes, and also that same year, Tito was proclaimed lifelong president. Through the generational approach, I am accepting to take a generation as an autonomous social phenomenon and an independent variable, putting it ahead of the ethnic, religious or national principles (Perica in Perica and Velikonja, 2012).

The specificities of this generation may be many – from their memories of Yugoslavia being solely linked to their youngest age, thus creating more space for indirect memories and adoption and/or adaption of discourses in their closest environment, to the fact that it is a generation that travelled without moving – born in one country, growing up in another or several others; a generation which has, to varying extent, from its earliest days faced war trauma, depending on their geographical location, but also their ethnic and/or religious origins and whether they belonged to an ethnic majority or a minority in their surroundings.

These individuals constitute a generation deeply marked by the dissolution of Yugoslavia in their formative years while being exposed to everyday life in Yugoslavia for the shortest period of their lives, some of which have barely any memories to nourish.

Yet it would be a common mistake to underestimate the importance of the “rite de passage” of becoming a pioneer (Duda, 2015). As much as the message and the pioneer’s oath changed over the course of different Yugoslav periods, the fundamental values that were promoted resonated strongly in the complex of Yugoslav memories among the last pioneers – unexpectedly, brotherhood and unity were the first two associations that came to mind when thinking about Yugoslavia (Popović, 2012).

Last but not the least, this is the generation that was exposed to starting their adult and professional lives during the period of transition within newly founded ex-Yugoslav nation states. A generation that grew up with the promise of a very different life than the one it faced. A political generation born in the 1970s and 1980s, in the era of what would often be referred to as already an era of Yugoslav crises, able to reflect on their childhood yet from a critical perspective. All of them vividly remember becoming a pioneer as it was the most solemn event in their short Yugoslav childhoods. However, when asked about Yugonostalgia they strongly negate to be Yugonostalgic. Another prominent feature of their Yugonostalgic reflections reaffirms their position that a new Yugoslav state entity is not in the picture or in any possible form their wish. Yet, leaving behind the simple cultural identifications such as music, movies, linguistic proximity, and commodified Yugonostalgic parties, the last pioneers have formulated two political demands: one against the erasure of their Yugoslav identity and another against neoliberal policies and for socio-economic equality (Popović, 2012). Each of the two elements deserves further inquiry given their specificities and different political implications. Their entanglement with the global and European changing perspectives is another important element not to be undermined. The second demand, opening to the last pioneers the opportunity to reflect on leftist political ideologies, movements and parties can be noted in the recent resurgence of left-wing social movements and political parties in ex-Yugoslav countries. As the last pioneers would define it, Yugoslavia was “not a utopia, nor a tyranny” (Popović, 2012).

Reflections on Yugoslavia and Yugonostalgia within the political field are yet to follow. As previously mentioned, observations regarding the real impact and possibilities of the subversive potential of Yugonostalgia are yet to be made. Nevertheless, Yugonostalgic memory for the last pioneers defying imposed nationalist ideologies remains a resistance strategy and an important element of identity.

## Nostalgia on the Move

Failing to understand nostalgia as the embodiment of “a dialectic of modernity that should be remembered as we try to imagine a future beyond false promises of corporate neoliberalism and the globalized shopping mall” (Huysen, 2006, p.20) is prevalent. In public discourse, nostalgia is explained as an ephemeral trend, a phase in transitional trajectories which will soon pass; an inseparable element from post socialist identity of ex-Yugoslav populations; even a specific psychological trait of post-socialist societies in which citizens are in need of paternalist policies.

As nostalgia moves trans-generationally and across different ex-Yugoslav countries, through different social spaces, following a transnational turn in memory studies (Erl, 2011; Rigney, 2012, etc.), we believe further understanding and a proper conceptualization of the phenomenon can give us insight into its inherent subversiveness and thus, a clearer outlook on its political potential.

Given current developments in memory studies, research on Yugonostalgia should follow – leaving behind the traditional approaches of Maurice Halbwachs locating memory in geographically and culturally determined specific communities, and Jan Assmann, as much as Pierre Nora – all retaining understanding of mnemonic communities primarily within the borders of nation-states. However, with regard to its past, present and future, Yugonostalgia is transcending these borders. In attempts to delineate Yugonostalgic borders, we need to turn to two concepts that have been recently developed in memory studies: *transnational* and *multidirectional* memory.

Through the concept of multidirectional memory, Michael Rothberg managed to encapsulate the movement of memory through space, time and cultures, and beyond the singularity of identities (Assmann, 2014). Or, as Rothberg himself explains, “memory emerges from unexpected, multidirectional encounters – encounters between diverse pasts and a conflictual present, to be sure, but between different agents or catalysts” (Rothberg, 2010, p.9).

While in Slovenia, the last pioneers are almost unanimous about the inevitability of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, this hypothesis is much more questioned. But in both countries, they are acknowledging the existence of Yugoslavia even today – either through common cultural space; or the need for strengthened economic cooperation or, as one respondent from Bosnia-Herzegovina explained: “We can live in Yugoslavia even today, in a very different manner though, but we can satisfy this need, the social need to be with people from other republics” (Popović, 2012).

Rothberg acknowledges the productive dialogue into which memories and “all acts of memory that enter public space necessarily enter simultaneously... even if it is also at times filled with tension and even violence” (Rothberg 2014, 654). Most importantly, Rothberg reasserts that it is mnemonic communities that actually come into being “in a dialogic space” bringing “new visions of solidarity and new possibilities of coexistence” (Rothberg, 2014, p.654). The dialogue of historical revisionisms, which are all reproducing the same narratives (“Yugoslavia as prison of the people(s)” etc.), creates nationalist communities in perfect harmony with each other. Within this still unique (cultural and/or political) space shared by ex-Yugoslav countries, we can also understand the emergence of nostalgic mnemonic communities through the dialogue of nostalgia(s).

Or, if there is no Yugoslavia, it does not mean that there are no Yugoslavs. Memories move beyond borders, as much as nostalgias were forged across borders but also on the highways – looking just at one example: the carpooling Facebook

group “442” created by individuals often travelling between Belgrade and Zagreb, for either private or professional reasons. As agents of memory and nostalgia commuting across ex-Yugoslav countries, the transmission and exchange of memories among them, creates communities based on solidarity, resonating within intimate, artistic, cultural and political fields. As nostalgia travels, the stereotypical orientaling and self-orientaling images of “centuries old hatreds” are easily dispersed through simple interactions.

Without aiming to equate Yugoslavism with Yugonostalgia, the dialectics of the two concepts is exactly the space in which Rothberg sees new possibilities of coexistence and solidarity (Rothberg, 2014). Instead of being perceived as “lieux de mémoire” or “milieux de mémoire” they are, rather, “noeuds de mémoire” – exceeding attempts of territorialisation and identitarian reduction (Rothberg, 2010) and through their multidirectionality (Rothberg, 2009), Yugonostalgic memories of the last pioneers, surpass national frameworks. However, the question remains: how to perceive and understand those “noeuds de mémoire” as political elements in current ex-Yugoslav contexts?

Looking at and responding to nation-building processes in ex-Yugoslav states, Yugonostalgic memory of the last pioneers reasserts itself as anti-nationalistic – simultaneously being against those same nation-building discourses, but (often) also against supranational ones – in these cases, mostly directed against the European Union, but unanimously against a new Yugoslav state project as well. Transnationalising the political (Balibar, 2004) but leaving the transnational frameworks, poses a new challenge for understanding and conceptualizing the Yugonostalgia of the last pioneers.

Yugoslavism today, being an invisible element of everyday life, emerges through different layers. Leaving aside the socio-economic demands and reclaiming of leftist/socialist/communist ideologies, it could represent an anti-nationalist element – as one of the respondents from Slovenia would claim:

“I do not declare myself a Yugoslav, except when nationalists get on my nerves” (Popović, 2012). At the same time, Yugoslavism emerges as a supra-national layer of identity, compatible and aligned with other national or ethnic identities – one can be a Croat, Yugoslav and European simultaneously. The mixed origins of ex-Yugoslav populations should not account only to the phenomenon of mixed marriages – linguistic proximities, experiences of residence in different part of Yugoslavia, and family connections throughout the Yugoslav space still strongly influence identity formation.

Transnationalism can be understood in Aleida Assmann’s terms “beyond national borders and interests ...new forms of belonging, solidarity and cultural identification” (Assmann, 2014, p.547), or in the specific context, as Gal Kirn would define it “a common multiethnic space predicated on anti-nationalism” (Kirn, 2014, p.326). As Kirn (2014, p.327) rightly puts it: “One of the chief tasks of a critical reading of such memory politics is to recuperate the re-de-nationalized partisan so as to mobilize resources from a transnational and emancipatory past in order to intervene in the current nationalistic hegemony.”

But can this “community to come” (Kirn, 2014, p.335) or to say, immigrants of the past, still be perceived through the lenses of transnationalism?

## Surpassing Nationalism

Transnationalism remains embedded within the theoretical framework of the nation-state concept, despite the claim that it is fighting methodological nationalism. Nevertheless, it recognizes the significance of national frameworks alongside the potential of cultural production both to reinforce and to transcend them. As Yugoslavia once existed in the form of a multi-ethnic nation-state, yet without the national self-identification of Yugoslavs (as all censuses from Yugoslav times reveal that it was never a prevalent identity) isn’t it possible for Yugoslavs to exist without Yugoslavia today?

As Enzo Traverso (2009) explains: “The memory of the gulag has erased the one of the revolution, the memory of the Shoah has replaced the one of antifascism, the memory of slavery has eclipsed the one of anticolonialism; everything is taking place as the memory of the victims could not co-exist with the one of their fights, their victories and their defeats.”

As memory today seems to reach beyond victimization, Yugonostalgia’s multidirectionality and transnationalism are actively trying to overcome imposed boundaries and transgress victimizing approaches – whether from the perspective of revisionist politics, or more positive deliberations on the Yugoslav period. Understanding Yugonostalgia through its multivocal, multi-layered, multi-sited and multi-directional dynamic (De Cesari and Rigney, 2014), it challenges the idea that transnationalism is, as a concept, suited to explain the travelling that Yugonostalgia undertakes.

Why do we inquire if transnationalism does not fully correspond to the phenomenon of Yugonostalgic anti-nationalist memory? Could the introduction of a new concept, – meta-national memory – help our understanding of Yugonostalgic memory, notably that of the last pioneers?

Firstly, one needs to take into account that as much as Yugonostalgic memory crosses the borders of the newly established ex-Yugoslav states, at the same time it creates its own borders – not the ones identified by the promise of a new supranational organization or another (multi)nation state, but the ones obtained through temporal travelling, borders that have already existed. It does not connect “nations” – it already has one, in the past and in the present – represented on a meta-level. As such, it goes beyond all national identities. Referencing to transnational travelling places the concept back within the borders of the nation states.

Secondly, the agents of Yugonostalgic memories embed Yugoslav identities without Yugoslavia.

Yugonostalgic memory does not replace any national or supranational identities, yet adds another layer of imagined communities without seeking the institutionalization of that identity in the form of a state. It remains unattainable, yet alive and demanding acknowledgment, without (still) formulating a political demand that could be inserted in today’s political presents of ex-Yugoslav states. As such, the imaginary of Yugonostalgia transcends current political imaginaries.

Gal Kirn poses as the key question: “How to remember today outside of the national and totalitarian memory?” (Kirn, 2017), especially with regard to finding new ways of engaging the young and new generations in memory transfer and memory politics. Dragan Markovina (2015) questions if Yugoslavia is a name for a utopia that is (just) being born. We need to search for new concepts that would bring to the fore a more comprehensive understanding of Yugonostalgic memories of the last pioneers, the generation that is today active in ex-Yugoslav countries.

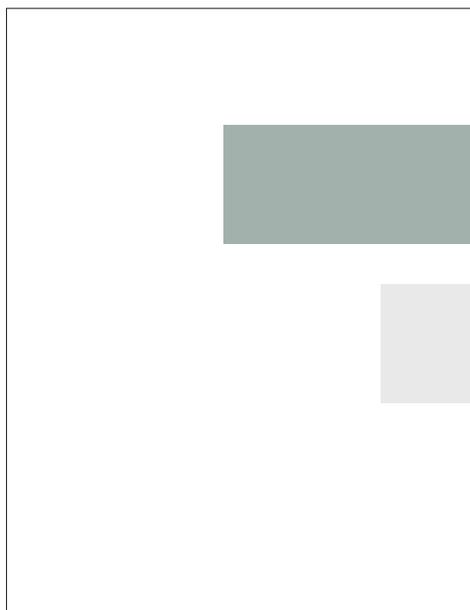
Acknowledging Yugonostalgia as a subversive and strongly political phenomenon, Yugonostalgic agents regain their political subjectivity. It would provide a par-excellence entry point for establishing continuity within political and social history of ex-Yugoslav spaces and for the purpose of reclaiming space for leftist ideologies. In bringing concepts that go beyond the tools we have today within theory to operate with the phenomenon we are facing, we would advance also the search for the expression of Yugonostalgic memory in the political field. Moreover, leaving Yugonostalgia behind the nation-state conceptualizations, we would further enhance its potential for rethinking not only the Yugoslav space but the very definitions of political space and political subjectivity today.

Understanding Yugonostalgia as a mobilizing force and a meta-national narrative, we create an opportunity to transform Yugonostalgia for the future, into Yugoslavism that acts in the present.

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# COMMUNIST ‘HERITAGE’

## Conceptual Developments and Nostalgic Potential

### Abstract

*This article analyses the challenges in perceiving the ‘heritage’ of the communist period in Bulgaria (and in Eastern Europe in general) and interpretation attempts, preservation, and valorization after 1989. Taking as starting point the double-bound meanings of heritage as ‘legacy’ and ‘patrimony’, the article takes into consideration the difficulties of relating to that which has been inherited from those times as ‘valuable’, due to the complex temporal and interpretative distance from the communist period, the split attitudes about its remembrance and forgetting, and the confusing interpretations about affiliation to this past. Additionally, a segment of this study focuses on public debates around the monumental heritage of the communist rule and the presentation of ‘communist heritage’ in museums, which are often regarded as attempts to ‘valorise’ and ‘legitimize’ the regime. In considering the communist period, this procedure is understood as a cornerstone between nostalgia and counter-nostalgia – one that continues to resonate today in public debates about the visual, material and symbolic legacy of those times.*

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the last decades of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century is an enhanced interest in heritage and its different forms, expressions, and cultural representations. In the changing and globalized contemporary context, with growing mobility and dynamic means of communication, the search and presentation of different forms of heritage can be outlined as a leading tendency in societies in different parts of the world, regardless of their political, economic and cultural differences. Having been developed parallel to and in connection with globalizing processes in the second half of the 20th century, the process of protecting and promoting heritage can also be understood as a specific counter-point against the dangers of cultural unification and the loss of cultural specificities. Corresponding with the attention it is afforded in legislative and policy documents, in the past decades heritage has increasingly been understood as a symbolic capital by different national and local communities, and as influencing the development of tourism and cultural industries in the second half of the 20th century. (Harvey, 2001; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2006; Dallen & Boyd, 2006). The rising interest in heritage and its identity-building potential is noticeable also in different studies – from the works of David Lowenthal (1998) on the “heritage crusade”, to the numerous publications of researchers in the fields of social and cultural anthropology, history, sociology of tourism, etc.

In the context of these processes, the term 'heritage' has also been exposed to changes and developments – from its understanding as a 'monument,' 'site,' and 'cultural property' in 1960s ICOMOS and UNESCO documents (Ahmad 2006);, through the distinguishing between movable and immovable heritage at the beginning of 1970s, the gradual widening of its scope with the inclusion of gardens, landscapes and natural environments in its semantic perimeter (Graeme, 2007; Taylor & Lennon, 2011); to the classification of heritage as tangible and intangible and the ensuing 2003 UNESCO Convention. The term's evolution has multifaceted dimensions, however, two major tendencies can be outlined: the interpretation of 'heritage' as belonging to humanity in general, and the emphasized attention to the inclusion of different communities in heritage identification and maintenance (Crooke, 2010). Thus, if on the one hand heritage is affirmed as a universal value and of global significance, on the other it is increasingly understood as the result of collective efforts of valorization and experience in the local environment and within the framework of concrete local and national communities. These two parallel tendencies additionally contributed to the widening of the scope of what could be understood as heritage, and for the broad variety of definitions and interpretations of what heritage involves in different countries and different cultural contexts.

In the current text,<sup>1</sup> I will draw attention to a specific challenge posed before perceptions of heritage – namely, the 'heritage' of the communist period and attempts at its interpretation, preservation and valorization over the course of almost three decades after the end of the communist period in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe in general.<sup>2</sup> Taking the double-bound meanings of heritage as 'legacy' and 'patrimony' (that is, as 'something given that has inevitably been received from the past,' or as a 'value that has to be transmitted to the future') as a starting point, the article addresses social and cultural practices of the communist period and discusses the challenges in interpreting what has been inherited from those times as 'heritage.' Special attention is given to public debates around

the monumental heritage of the communist rule and the presentation of 'communist heritage' in museums, often regarded as attempts to 'valorize' and 'legitimize' the communist regime. This procedure is understood as a cornerstone between nostalgia and counter-nostalgia about the communist period – one that continues to be reflected today in the various approaches to the visual, material and symbolic legacy of that period.

## Revisiting the Communist Period and Its Discontents

As in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the period after 1989 in Bulgaria was marked by numerous debates about the meaning and experience of the communist period. Questions such as what can be accepted and transferred as cultural traces of this period, and – with even greater significance – what should be prevented from being reproduced in new post-socialist realities; what should be erased from memory, and discarded as having nothing in common with the post-communist present. Public debates about the preservation or destruction of different forms of communist rule were very intensive and they concerned both the most visible ideological forms (such as monuments, visual representations, etc.) and representations that were an inherent part of social and cultural practices (such as celebrations, social customs, calendars of historical events, etc.). Having been particularly heated in the 1990s, these debates reoccur on different occasions even today. They mark the main trajectories in establishing a distance and an interpretation of the communist period from the standpoint of achieved political transformations, giving also important indications about the possibilities and limitations of interpreting

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1 The first version of the text appeared in the Bulgarian language, in: Vukov, N. 2015. 'Nasledstvoto' na sotsializma: teoretichni i metodologichni predizvikatelstva [The 'Heritage' of Communism: Theoretical and Methodological Challenges]. In: Psycheva, L. et al. eds. *Dni na nasledstvoto* 2013. Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo "Marin Drinov", pp.133-147.

2 The research works on the turning of different artifacts of the communist period into heritage is abundant and cannot be encompassed within a brief overview. For general references on this topic, see Caraba, 2011; Ivanov, 2009; James, 1999; Kazalarska, 2013; Verdery, 1996; Vukov, 2007; Vukov, 2009.

the communist period through the 'heritage' framework. Regardless the debates extending the duration of over two decades, since 1989, there is still palpable political and social tension around the evaluation and interpretation of realities of the communist period around the term 'heritage,' and there is opposition against attempts to preserve, exhibit and protect different material, visual and symbolic traces of those times. In fact, such attempts are often understood as efforts for the 'valorization' and 'legitimization' of the communist period and as expressions of nostalgia that need to be suppressed and opposed.

Debates concerning interpretative approaches to communist period realities, are certainly not only political and do not ensue only from present biases in the assessment of this period. Based on the interpretations of what can be considered as 'heritage' with regard to those decades, there are several substantial challenges concerning the scope and definition of the term. Are only politically framed references envisioned, and should only the representations linked to the political rule in the country and the organisation of socio-political life be understood as the 'heritage' of those times? Apparently, as long as ideology and politics were present in all spheres of the social, economic and cultural life in the communist state, the political was considered to be inseparable from almost every practice or artifact from those decades. On the other hand, is it possible that the very fact a given product was created during these decades is substantial evidence to regard it as 'heritage' of the communist period? Additionally, even if there is serious ground for basing representations that are directly linked to the ideology of the times and dedicated to its major proponents as being part of the communist regime, this is certainly not the case with the plethora of cultural artifacts for which the label 'communist heritage' would be extremely limiting and in many cases unjust. Serious challenges also emerge if 'communist heritage' is limited only to the visual and material testimonies of the recent past (including, for example, the organization of social life, institutions, memories, habits, etc.), as well as if the spectrum of this heritage also includes the development of other

fields, that is – if we can talk about the 'economic,' 'industrial,' 'environmental,' etc. 'heritage' of those times.

Considerable difficulties in defining the particular meanings of 'communist heritage' ensue mainly from the impossibility of representing communism as having ceased; as long as many of its realities and representations continue to surround contemporary life. Whilst many squares and public spaces in Bulgarian towns and villages still bear traces of the construction and architectural design of the period, blocks of flats and neighbourhoods in the cities, as well as the houses built in villages during those decades offer abundant examples of what can legitimately be termed 'heritage' of the communist rule. Regardless of the social and cultural transformations over the past two decades, different visual and material traces of the 'socialist way of life' (Brunnbauer, 2009) maintains a steady presence in public spaces, everyday life and social relationships. There are numerous monuments and memorials dedicated to persons who were venerated by the regime that remain in their original sites to this very day; streets bearing the names of prominent communist figures remain unchanged; products of the communist economy and consumption, many of which can still be found in numerous Bulgarian households. Technical facilities, objects and souvenirs preserved from that period, which are kept as exhibits or as parts of family collections in attics and basements; various pieces of art and popular culture that have remained as artifacts in the houses and public building, which form a major share of the cultural fund and shared cultural memory of several generations.

All these forms and artifacts hold a customary presence in the different discussions on what the 'heritage' of communism is. However, regardless of this presence, it is a fact that public activities recorded over the past two decades have not given ground to regard the artifacts related to this period as 'heritage' – in the sense of conscious and purposeful efforts of preservation, documentation, exhibiting and valorization. On the contrary, the idea of 'heritage' is based not only on the awareness of discontinuity

and rupture with the previous period, but also on the conscious effort to overcome this rupture and transmit the traces of previous practices over time; hence, with regards to communism we can hardly find such an effort, nor necessary public validation. In the post-communist years, traces of communism (visual, material, symbolic, etc.) are often not the result of a purposeful policy of preservation and protection. Rather, they are random, stemming from established social habits and circumstances, and not as a result of an individual or collective expression of will. Moreover, even in cases when they can be an object of conscious action for the purpose of preservation and exhibition, these actions are not linked to efforts of overcoming the historical rupture through the restoration of the previous social and political context. If at all, the reconstruction of the traces of the past occurs as guided by the idea of emphasizing the impossibility to overcome the rupture that has arisen and to return to previous practices; its importance is interpreted from the viewpoint of distance and a lack of desire to return to that time – as a period of the past that is reconstructed, in order to be forgotten.

At the core of this confusing interpretation of communism as “heritage” is the ambiguous meaning of the term ‘heritage,’ i.e. ‘heritage-value’ and ‘heritage-burden.’ In Bulgarian, one term - “nasledstvo” - is used to denote both meanings, hence the distinction between the two semantic circles can be perceived relatively well using the two English terms: *heritage* – as the desired, valued and marked by prestige layers of the past, i.e. the resources of the past that are accepted and perceived as valuable; and *legacy* – as something that is given and unavoidable, something received without a choice, thus not necessarily positive and ‘valuable.’ Despite the partial overlapping of the two terms, they are of different meaning and use, *heritage* relating mostly to something that comes or belongs to us by birth or that is bequeathed by previous generations by means of origin or legal inheritance.<sup>3</sup> On the one side, this links heritage to the semantic circle of the biosocial meanings of genesis, origin and heredity (respectively, with things to inherit, inheritance), and, on the other side – with

the socio-economic meanings of property and ownership received by means of a will (*patrimony*). It is notable also that the two meanings are directly related to the process of retrieving traces from the past in the form of tradition and loading them with value attributes. In contrast to this term, the word *legacy* has mainly the meaning of gift that is received as a result of a will or as something that is outdated, old and useless. This outlines the term’s major semantic fields, namely – the link with bequeathing and lending (but not necessarily accepting) heritage, and the other – linked with a lack of pertinence and functionality in the present world, i.e. remaining primarily in the scope of the world of the past.

In light of the development in the field of humanities in the recent years, it is important to note the parallel co-habitation of the terms *heritage* and *legacy* with regards to cultural heritage and the lack of tension or opposition between them before the 1980s. An interesting example in this respect is a definition offered by David Lowenthal (1994, p.41) in which heritage denotes both terms: “*Heritage* is what we all – individually or collectively identify with. It is considered legal (although sometimes unwanted) *legacy* of every human community”. The semantic proximity and interchangeability between the two words is emphasized particularly by the fact that the first studies in the field of the anthropology of socialism by West European scholars used mainly the term *legacy* in their attempts to understand the history and practices of the communist period. The systematic use of this term with reference to the communist period and the complete absence of the term *heritage* can be observed in the works of most Western anthropologists and sociologists studying Eastern Europe and is present even in the titles of influential publications of the mid-

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3 Collins World English Dictionary outlines several meanings: 1) something inherited at birth, such as personal characteristics, status, and possessions; 2) anything that has been transmitted from the past or handed down by tradition; 3) the evidence of the past, such as historical sites, buildings, and the unspoiled natural environment, considered collectively as the inheritance of present-day society; 4) something that is reserved for a particular person or group or the outcome of an action, way of life, etc. (e.g. the sea was their heritage, the heritage of violence); 5) law – any property, esp. land, that by law has descended or may descend to an heir. (See Collins English Dictionary 2009 – [www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/heritage](http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/heritage) ).

1990s, such as the book by Janos Kovács (1994) *Transition to Capitalism? – The Communist Legacy in Eastern Europe*, or book by Zoltan Barany and Ivan Volgyes (1995) *The Legacies of Communism in Eastern Europe*. This tendency of describing the communist period through the prism of the 'legacy-burden' has remained and interesting illustrations are offered through the studies on the collapse of the health-care system in Russia as a *legacy* of communism (Cockerham, Snead & DeWaal, 2002), or the interpretation of phenomena such as blackmailing, corruption and shadowy business in Eastern Europe as a result and unavoidable legacy of that period.

Within Bulgarian public discourse this understanding of what has been inherited from communism (namely the 'legacy-burden') was prevalent in the 1990s and, to a great extent, it continues to dominate the public debates to this very day. Grounded in the idea of the unavoidable situation and weakness upon encountering what communism has left in its aftermath, this understanding emphasizes mainly that which has been inherited from that period as 'burden', as something that needs to be overcome and done away with. Hence, there were numerous debates during the first post-communist decade, which referred to initiatives promoting the abolishment of preceding ideological representations, and their replacement and functionalization in a new context. There are many and widely encompassing examples – from the enormous red-star atop the Communist Party Headquarters (stored today in the Museum of Socialist Art in Sofia) and the destroyed mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov in the centre of the Bulgarian capital; through the still current disputes around the fates of socialist monuments (of the Soviet army, communist activists, etc.) in different parts of the country; to local level conflicts about the renaming of streets or reshaping communist memorial objects after 1989. Diverse in character and targeting, these debates resulted in an entire series of sometimes predictable, but very often unexpected actions. With regards to monumental representations of the communist period, the results included the destruction of some of the existing objects, their

melting or turning into scrap, relocation from town centres of public spaces and placement in secret and unknown sites, their removal to store-houses and basements of municipalities, cultural houses and museums, substitution with other 'more legitimate representations (e.g. with monuments of national heroes), etc. (Vukov, 2008). Notwithstanding the result, however, debates around some of these actions placed explicit emphasis on the rhetoric of destruction versus preservation – destruction being understood as a symbolic marker of rupture with the previous period, whilst preservation was based on the insistence that a possible preservation of the respective object could allow its future use and function as historical testimony. Beyond doubt, many of these debates in the 1990s were politically nuanced and were led predominantly by the collision between opposite political positions. What is important, however, is that the attitude towards the visual and material traces of the communist period were largely a reflection of the will (or absence of such) for political changes and this determined a prevailing refusal to interpret what had been inherited from those times with a different interpretative lens – e.g. the meaning of *heritage* being denied to those artifacts that can hardly be attributed 'value' outside their concrete political context.

Interesting parallels for interpreting this issue are offered by other Eastern European countries where the problem of communist 'heritage' has been in the focus of public discussions and continues to be a volatile subject. Although in each of these countries the visual and material objects dating from the communist period had been subject to similar dismantling processes and ultimately removal from public view, in many of these countries (and particularly in Germany, Hungary, and Romania), referring to this period as 'heritage' (not 'legacy') resource has been palpable since the 1990s. This interest occurred mainly in the capitals and larger cities and it very soon managed to create emblematic sites related to the heritage of communism: the remains of the Wall and Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin, the museum of socialist monuments in "Szoborpark" in Budapest, the "House of the

People” in Bucharest, “Nowa Huta” in Poland, the Museum of Communism in Prague, etc. It was only later – at the beginning of the new millennium, in some of the larger towns in Eastern Europe – that certain initiatives developed for so-called museums of terror (in Budapest, Sibiu, etc.) or museums of occupation (in Riga, Tallinn, Vilnius, etc.). Indicative of these first initiatives of exhibiting communist artifacts in Eastern European countries is that they were a reflection of opening to the western world and the growing interest of western tourists in such topics. As Duncan Light (2000a, 2000b) remarks with reference to Romania, communist heritage was defined and construed in the beginning almost entirely by foreigners, whilst inside the country there had not been much of an interest in remembering the communist regime, nor was there any particular willingness in presenting this heritage to tourists. The reason was that in the first decade following political change, the heritage of that period was in collision with the post-communist identities of these countries and with their attempts to build a new ‘European’ profile. Although at the beginning of the new millennium there was a clear tendency towards exhibiting various testimonies about practices and artifacts from the communist period, this tendency was associated mainly with civic initiatives and art projects, seldom finding expression in national and regional museums’ exhibitions, in which the communist period was rarely an object of presentation and discussion.

In general, Bulgaria did not stray from this tendency, as long as the presentations of communist heritage in the museums of the country were limited to several isolated cases, such as small and temporary exhibitions. In most history museums in Bulgaria, the period of the second half of the 20th century is not represented at all and the ‘heritage’ of communist times is not an object of purposeful policies of presentation, documentation and interpretation in the contemporary context. What is different, however, in the Bulgarian case, are two things – the first one being that until recently (with the exception of the typologically particular “Museum of Socialist Art”), there are no state funded museum institutions in the country dedicated to this period, and the

several museum collections and exhibitions in towns and villages (Veliko Tarkovo, Garvan, Skrebatno, Mindya, etc.) are mainly products of private initiative (Guentcheva, 2013). State institutions generally maintain a distance and are silent on this topic, which is even more paradoxical, when one takes into account that many of their store-rooms hold abundant materials that are directly related to this period.

The second difference lies in the fact that in Bulgaria approaching the communist period as a ‘value’ (cultural-historical, economic, touristic, etc.) comes with relative delay when compared to most other countries in Eastern Europe. Although ideas of creating museums and exhibitions based on artifacts from the communist period (mostly dismantled monuments) appeared as early as the beginning of the 1990s (in Haskovo, Kazanlak, Sofia, etc.), the various public debates, political sensitivity for the topic, as well as the lack of economic resource for such projects, did not permit their realization. In contrast with almost all other countries of the former communist bloc, which managed relatively quickly to build at least small museum collections dedicated to that period, in Bulgaria the attempts aimed in such a direction did not have not reached realization and reflection on the period before 1989 has been mainly through the lens of ‘legacy-burden’. As long as representation in general (and museum representation in particular) is a way of discussing, imagining and creatively reconstructing the past (and therefore also having a palpable therapeutic effect), it can be concluded that the lack of representation, the accumulation of silences, and the systematic avoidance of the topic as being an uncomfortable one, contributes to the deepening of the traumatic effects of this past on collective memory.

Despite the noted delay, however, since the beginning of the new millennium in Bulgaria there has also occurred the gradual change in the previous perception of heritage as ‘burden’ and several attempts have been made concerning the traces inherited from the communist period as a resource of collecting and exhibiting. Illustrative examples of this interest that developed during the

second post-communist decade are two books on this topic: *I lived Socialism* and *The Inventory Book of Socialism* (Gospodinov et al. 2006; Gospodinov and Genova, 2006), which included personal memories and objects from the period. Also, the two books prompted the collection of stories and artifacts dating the communist period. With the development of new technologies, many of these testimonies turned to the internet, to discussion forums, social networks, etc., which provided venues for sharing memories and experiences from the communist period. Thus, in a peculiar way, they managed to take on the role of museums, documentary and artistic representations, and – in the form of a virtual archive – to preserve and make accessible narratives, photos, and interpretations of the communist period. The open presence of these materials in cyberspace enhances the possibility of interactive inclusion and spontaneous participation through personal commentaries and memories, and at the same time, such a ‘virtual museum’ has the advantage of offering a new possibility of maintaining communist memory and heritage of communism in Bulgaria. Another indicator of the changed and constantly changing view on the heritage of communism in the past few years is reflected in the fact that these issues have gained visibility on a university level, through courses and specializations in disciplines such as history, ethnology, cultural anthropology, etc. The growing number of courses and theses on the topic of memory regarding the communist period, the socialization of the cultural heritage of that period, and the use of this heritage as a tourist resource, are a clear marker that the past quarter of a century following political changes has created the necessary historical distance to consider the communist period not only from the perspective of it being an inherited burden, but also from the viewpoint of different research investigations and intellectual challenges.

## Paradoxes and Arguments

The analysis presented so far permits the outlining of several major paradoxes around ‘socialist past’ and its heritage. *The first paradox* concerns the confused temporal and interpretative distance

relating to the communist period. During the entire period of transition, the communist period has been systematically interpreted (both officially and among the public) in a very ambiguous way. It is simultaneously ‘past’ and ‘present,’ ‘distant’ and ‘near,’ and it continues to be referred to euphemistically (in a sort of oxymoron) as a ‘recent past.’ This ambiguity dictates both the biases around its interpretation and uses, and the ‘politics of avoidance’ in the discussions and representations of this past (Vukov, 2012). *The second paradox* is linked to the frequently cited argument about the need to forget and cancel attempts at referring to this period, with – on the other side – the claim and that only the maintenance of memory of that period can help people draw conclusions from the past, overcoming thus its traumatic potential. A *third paradox* that can be outlined is related to ownership and affiliation to this past. The experience of the communist period is shared by a wide circle of people and by several generations, and only those born in the 1980s and after do not have direct interaction with those times. At the same time, this past belongs to nobody, it is avoided and procedures of distancing are frequently applied to it; it is not recognized as truly ‘shared’ and it often dissolves in stories reflecting episodes from people’s personal biographies. There is diversity of experiences and a strong dividing potential in this past. It is rejected and stigmatized by many, but it is also gives grounds for nostalgia and people relate to it with fondness. It raises reservations due to the political and ideological context of those times, but it also stirs curiosity and some of the practices are a source of entertainment among contemporary people who have been in direct contact with it, but to which it already seems distant and alien.

Attempts to manage these paradoxes face several arguments that can still be heard in public debates nowadays. Among them is, for example, the ‘*aesthetic argument*’ that not everything created in those times was ‘ugly’ and not everything that came after 1989 was necessarily ‘beautiful.’ From such a perspective, the approach to the heritage of that period cannot be dependent on the presence or absence of aesthetic criteria, but would rather

interpret the artifacts on equal basis, as peer cultural realities of that period. Another one – the ‘*social argument*’, emphasizes the importance that different testimonies of the past have for social memory. According to this argument, they are ‘valuable’ not as artifacts *per se*, but rather as traces of memory, as raising associations and triggering remembrance, as being able – through relevant exposure and social sharing – to form new layers of memory about the past. In a somewhat similar way, the ‘*historical argument*’ places emphasis on the claim that not everything dating from the communist period can be preserved, not everything is worth destroying, and not everything can be transformed. According to this argument, every approach to the interpretation of heritage is actually a testimony dependent on the historical and cultural moment and, therefore, presents an instant snapshot of the moods, approaches and understandings of heritage for every generation that follows.

Certainly, in most of the debates about this heritage (and about heritage in general), key importance is placed on the so called ‘*pragmatic argument*’, linked with questioning the economic reasons for preserving the various artifacts of that past, followed by deliberations on whether efforts should be made at all, for documenting and exhibiting this type of heritage, which has nevertheless been so widely present. There is no doubt that among the pointed arguments, the one of utmost importance, causing most vehement reactions is the ‘*ethical argument*’ – the argument relating to the selection of topics and emphases in the presentations of communist heritage. A major question in this argument is whether it is possible to speak at all about communist heritage without mentioning the repressions and limitations to freedom during that period and, on the other side, whether representations of the period should be limited only to such traumatic topics. Emphasising again the meanings of heritage as ‘legacy-burden,’ this argument prompts the question of traumatic events of the past, the silence that surrounds them, and the dangers of their relativisation and desecration using irony and the grotesque that are frequently applied in representations of that period.

All these paradoxes and arguments show a specific state of equilibrium and tension between nostalgia and counter-nostalgia about the communist period – a situation that is symptomatic for Bulgaria, but can also be traced in other post-communist Eastern European countries. During the first post-communist decade the opposition parties were exasperated in cancelling the ideological interference into public and private lives, at the same time disclosing previously hidden information about repressions and crimes of the regime. This position was vehemently discarded by supporters of the socialist party and by a majority of the population, which felt uncomfortable with the sudden discontinuity with previous social and cultural practices and which disagreed with the negative reassessment of the decades of the communist rule. Feeling unease with the new interpretations of the years they had spent most of their lives living in, they often insisted on not ‘looking backwards’ to what was before, but rather, on dedicating public energies to solving the challenges of the post-transition period. The harsh social and economic realities of the first post-communist years further contributed to this situation, when – pressed with the financial crisis and the collapse of the social security system – a majority of the population was inclined to regard the communist period through nostalgia-coloured glasses, to use Victor Turner’s famous metaphor.

The growing distance from the communist period led to the diversification of approaches dealing with its assessment and to a different understanding of attempts made for its reconsideration. Instead of previous cases to revisit the communist rule, which were predominantly guided by attempts at its renunciation, there gradually developed the impetus of revisiting the period in order to maintain curiosity around some of its preserved traces. Even when lacking political bias and positive attitudes towards the rule prior 1989, these attempts were often accused of expressing nostalgia for the period and as inadequate for post-communist realities. This situation remains to the present day. Whilst there is a lack of critical exhibitions and reflection on the communist rule, sporadic attempts to gather some of its traces and their portrayal as historical

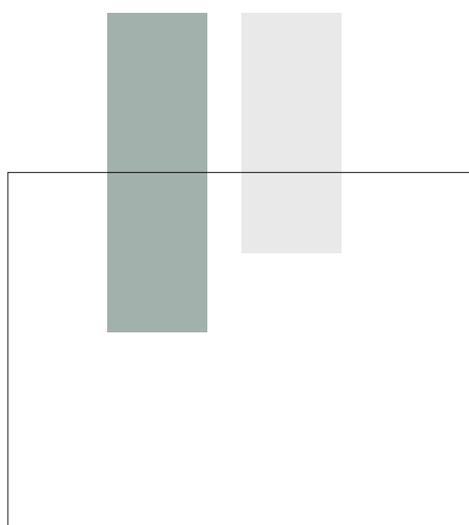
and cultural 'heritage' is regularly interpreted as guided by nostalgia and as inadequate efforts for the period's 'reconstruction.' To a large extent, this vision has proven to be instrumental in preventing the elaboration of legislative and policy documents for the protection of artifacts and visual materials inherited from communist times; it continues to be a major obstacle to the development of specialized exhibitions and reflective narratives on what exactly the communist period bequeathed to the present. Thus, despite the isolated examples of breaking this stereotype, the 'heritage' pertaining to communist rule continues to be overcome by the meanings of 'legacy' – a burden that continues to resonate three decades after 1989 and fails to find due reflection despite (and beyond) the clash between nostalgia and counter-nostalgia about the communist period.

## Conclusion

The analysis made so far allows us to outline the specificity of 'communist heritage' as compared to other procedures and practices in heritage construction and conceptualization. In contrast with most other forms of heritage, heritage of the communist period is marked by a highly intolerant context, by traumatic associations, and by political, historical and ethical detachment – expressed on a national and international, as well as local level. Similar to other forms, this 'heritage' is also marked by a temporal rupture and a dividing line 'before' and 'after'; however, unlike other forms, the political changes of 1989 did not generate the preconditions for developing a communist heritage, at least not such ensuing from the processes of valorization. The cultural layers of the communist period appeared in a new context, which strongly limited their continuation and maintenance. These layers could not immediately turn into an object of purposeful exhibiting policies, and the reasons for this are numerous: political references, a lack of clear distance from the period before the political changes of 1989, the reluctance revealed in state policies regarding this heritage, the absence of financial instruments for the development of such policies, etc. Despite episodic attempts to be attributed historical and museum values, this heritage can hardly be presented as 'desirable,'

'prestigious,' and 'representative' therefore creating both methodological difficulties in the course of its description as 'heritage,' as well as its use as a resource in (yet to be) realized tourist and local development projects.

Lastly, I would like to invoke the anthropological vision that there is no heritage without heirs and that in order to have heritage, there should be a community with the willingness and readiness to construe it and maintain it. If we cast a glance on the content and meaning of the term 'heir,' we cannot fail but notice that the heir can search for heritage, but can also receive it without expecting it; s/he can receive it without knowing what to do with it, nor having the possibility to maintain it. An heir can argue with other 'inheritors' or can try to avoid it together with them. The descendent may wish to enter the role of heir, but may also not wish for this to happen, and can postpone it – through emotional, economic or other means. Maybe this point – the expression of will on behalf of the heir with regards to heritage bequeathed upon him/her – is what could play a decisive role in future possibilities and limitations when interpreting communism through the 'heritage-value' lens, as an element of a shared past and a possibility for acquiring material, but mostly symbolic benefits.



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# NOSTALGIA AND THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF COMMUNISM IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

## Lessons from an Oral History Study of the Last Pioneers

### Abstract

*This study attempts to define what nostalgia meant for communism in 2005 in the Czech Republic. It is based on the oral history interviews conducted by students at Charles University (Prague), at a time when the Communist Party was still polling 20% of the vote. It exposes, and reflects on the discrepancy between personal and collective memories in their relationship to the communist past, torn as they were between a critical view and happy memories. A sentimental reading of the past, a “retro attitude”, had already emerged at the time; it referred to the human dimension of life under communism: solidarity, friendship, rapport between the people, as well as to affectionate reminiscences of certain everyday life products. On the other hand, shortages, surveillance and repression seemed largely forgotten. However, this article mainly shows that the concept of nostalgia has been politicized to the point that it has primarily served to disqualify people for having compromised themselves regarding the communist regime – or for having been too lenient with those who did. Nostalgia, thus, was, and remains, more about the post-communist present than about the communist past.*

This article is based on research that I undertook in 2004 and 2005 with my students at Charles University in Prague and which was published in French in a volume edited by Sandrine Kott and Martine Mespoulet in 2006 (Blaive, 2006, pp.177-190). At the time I was trying to elucidate why there was seemingly no unified collective memory of communism in the Czech Republic. Understanding why Czech memory politics were more radically breaking with the past than its neighbours and why there was no visible nostalgia for communism in the country was a difficult challenge.

As opposed to many sociologists of memory or political scientists, I came to memory studies by way of history. What I was observing in post-communist society interested me first and foremost because of what it was telling us about the communist period which I was studying. I was very critical about “transition studies” that began their analysis on 17 November 1989 (start of the Velvet Revolution) and dismissed the past as a crucial explanatory factor. Faithful to Marc Bloch (1949), I argued, and still do, that the present tells us about the past as much as the past tells us about the present.

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks go to Paul Gradwohl and Sandrine Kott for their reading and commentaries of this text. This article is published in the frame of the research project “Rulers and Ruled: Practical and Methodological Challenges in the Historicization of a Complex Relationship” supported by the Grant Academy of the Czech Republic (GAČR) number 16-26104S.

At the time I undertook this research, I had recently discovered the German school of communist studies led by Alf Lüdtkke, Thomas Lindenberger, Konrad Jarausch and many others, who envisioned life under communism not as a top down, political vision, but from a bottom up, everyday life and social perspective centred on the study of domination practices. This methodology requalifies the population as social actors taking into account their own individual agency rather than as a mass of people passively subjected to an abject totalitarian rule. I was also discovering oral history that exemplifies the individual agenda of social actors and restitutes their autonomy, even in the constricted frame of a dictatorship.

What I came to understand at a later point, with the passing of years and further research, is that it was already then that I was primarily concerned with how to historically grasp and reconstitute the relationship between rulers and ruled under a dictatorship – and specifically under the Czechoslovak communist regime from 1948 to 1989. How could we uncover and historicize this complex relationship?

I have found the post-communist present to be a precious ally in this endeavour. Current practices and narratives are important indicators of how the past was perceived; the way it is digested today (or fails to be) gives us an idea of what was important then, what is important now, and how this past is constantly renegotiated in memory. Most importantly concerning the Czech communist rule, it gives us the beginning of an explanation as to why the population was seemingly so passive and/or pacified. To cut a long story short, let us simply say that communism retained strong sources of legitimacy in Czechoslovakia, even after Stalinism, even after 1968.

What this study unquestionably showed, which somewhat baffled my students and myself at the time, was the contradiction and strong division between a population that evidently had good things to say about the Communist past and a state memory politics that was stringently anti-Communist. Even more intriguing, while expressing

a private assessment of the past that was distinctly nostalgic, the people who were interviewed mostly endorsed the anti-communist state narrative and actively claimed *not* to be nostalgic. Clearly, a form of political correctness prevented them from staking a claim to their own nostalgia. The reason why is another story, one that I undertook to explain in many other studies (See: Blaive, 2016, pp.161-189) – and it has to do with the self-definition offered by the Czech political and intellectual elites who speak of a “democratic” nation, one that would never endorse a dictatorial rule such as the one promoted by the Communist regime. “To be Czech is to be a democrat”, claimed President Masaryk in 1919, and this is an avatar that still informs Czech culture and a respectable national self-definition.

This research is useful in that it documents a stage in post-communist Czech cultural history, one in which nostalgia was still not publicly acceptable, yet was clearly present. Since then, things have changed: pushed neither by academic history nor by state memory politics but by public history and public opinion, the Czech Republic has in the meantime finally acknowledged a relationship to its communist past that is much more ambivalent (and positive) than the anti-Communist state politics would have us believe. If the word “nostalgia” never really entered the public sphere, a “retro” attitude is now the order of the day. The Czechs are finally enjoying communist kitsch in all the glory of its capitalist commodification.

As to the relationship between rulers and ruled, it remains to be explored. Now more than ever, it is clear that this relationship existed and was carefully nurtured both by the regime and by the population. Constrained as it was, it shows that no dictatorship can survive for forty years without carving for itself genuine sources of legitimacy – that we are still discovering and analysing.

In recent years, “nostalgia” – or “ostalgie” – has frequently been the topic of academic conferences. The implicit or explicit aim has often been to account for communist or neo-communist votes, particularly by East Germans and Czechs, and to take a

closer look at the ways of confrontation with the communist past that can be found in the countries liberated from the Soviet yoke in 1989. The problem is how to measure notions as vague as the “feelings” or “impressions” of a population, or how to detect what is exactly meant by “nostalgia”. This term, in fact, has been used more extensively in the Western social sciences than in the countries which are the object of their studies, and this is particularly true for the Czech Republic.<sup>2</sup> What is hiding behind the score of approximately 20% of the vote still going to the Czech and Moravian Communist Party in both local and national elections, fifteen years after the Velvet Revolution?

To understand the forms of this nostalgia, we have used the interviews conducted by my students at the Faculty of Humanities at Charles University in Prague.<sup>3</sup> The method we adopted consisted of semi-structured interviews carried out by students (who also answered the same set of research questions), usually with their parents and grandparents. After each interview, the interviewers had to write down a summary of their impressions about the way it took place, to reconstruct the unsaid they could perceive thanks to their intimate knowledge of the respondents, and to note all other elements that could pass unnoticed in a simple report. The anonymous questionnaire covered various aspects of relations to the past (See: Interview Questions in the Annex to this study).

About 120 interviews were collected. Although the study had no ambition in terms of quota sampling, it still represented a wide range of political opinions (including the Communist votes) and social classes. The sole notable exceptions were miners and workers, whose children had fewer opportunities to study at the University of Prague. Although the results are provisional and cannot be described as “representative”, they do raise interesting questions.

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2 Nostalgia is not a current theme in the Czech Republic today: it does not appear in the press and personal conversations, nor is it particularly evoked in films or literature.

3 These are the students of my course *Různé způsoby psaní dějin: Československo 1945-1968, Different ways of writing History: Czechoslovakia (1945-1968)* in the school year 2004-2005. I thank them for their contribution.

The approach is more narrative than analytical, and leaves ample room for the respondent's answers, so much so that they are, as will become evident, often contradictory. This characteristic is mentioned in advance because it seems to emphasize the absence of collective work about the past in Czech society. (See: Mayer, 2003).

## 1. The Difficulties of Collective Memory

### 1.1. Unwillingness to Speak about the Past

People do not want to talk about the political past of their country, not even with the members of their own family. As could be expected, this applies above all to former Communists or sympathizers of the regime. Today's Communist voters are equally reserved and sometimes it is difficult to get them to open up. Proven former Communists denied being members of the Party at the time of the interview.<sup>4</sup>

The most caricatural interview went like this: the interviewee refused to give any personal data, even his initials and the family connection with the interviewer. Then he replied that he could see “nothing” positive in the former regime, had expected “nothing” from the change and was surprised by nothing but the “high degree of corruption of the new regime”; that he felt no nostalgia “at all”, knew “no one” who was nostalgic; that he was “not interested” in the policies of management of the past, “not interested” in his own potential dossier in the State Security (StB); that he was “unconcerned” whether the archives should be opened or not; that he “would recommend” a national debate, but “it will not happen anyway”; that children “should learn history”, but, on the other hand, he believed that teaching was “of poor quality”; that he had joined the KSČ [Czech Communist Party] at the time because it was “the only way to change things”, then left it in December 1989; that he voted for the “left parties, probably liberal [in the Anglo-Saxon sense], if such exist, but they don't”; has not changed his electoral preferences since 1990; that he “doesn't know”

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4 Blanka M. (51) former laboratory assistant, now clerk.

whether we should talk to communists, adding “yes, certainly”; he explained communist votes by the “fear for basic welfare provisions”, and said, apropos the appeal by President Klaus, “Mr. Klaus doesn’t interest me”.<sup>5</sup>

However, it is not only former Communists who are reluctant to talk about the past and make contradictory statements: the topic is equally avoided by those who were fundamentally hostile to the regime, but never made a step towards the open political opposition. Some students have reported that their own mothers refused to be interviewed by them, on the grounds that talking about the past “annoyed” them or even without offering any explanation<sup>6</sup>; one of them could only be persuaded to talk when the recorder was turned off; a grandmother who usually wouldn’t miss an occasion to rail against the Communists suddenly became very laconic.<sup>8</sup> The interviews were generally very short, the answers being as curt as possible; respondents made no effort to prolong the conversation. As one female student responded to the question *What is it that you did not expect and that came as a surprise, in the positive or negative sense*: “What surprised me was their great desire to keep silent, to draw a thick line over the past.”<sup>9</sup>

As regards the policy of “dealing with the past”, replies to the question about the need for a national debate and teaching about the communist era in history courses largely differ; they also demonstrate that the interviewed persons do not apply the same logic at the personal and collective levels.

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5 This person is most probably the father of a female student, who feared his anonymity would be compromised by revealing any personal data.

6 Jan C. (21), student.

7 See, for instance, the report by Zdena F., 21, student: “The interviewee [her mother] didn’t want to answer until I promised to put the recorder off. She appeared nervous and impatient during the interview. She got annoyed several times while talking about the communist era. Although she did not avoid the questions and answered sincerely, one could feel that she wanted to make it as quick as possible.”

8 Zora K. (77) former director of production, now retired.

9 Petra S. (22) student.

Those who see the public policy of the management of the past as very insufficient, who rail against the persistent presence of Communists in public life, who are scandalized by the scarcity of legal proceedings against former dignitaries and who absolutely refuse the idea of national reconciliation, are not necessarily advocating a more intensive national debate nor do they want their children and grandchildren to be taught about the communist regime at school. Some reply by shrugging their shoulders, like this grandmother: “I really don’t know if we need a national debate. The past can’t be repaired. Anyway, I don’t want it to. To begin something so futile, to waste time like that...”; and about teaching it at school: “I don’t know what to think. It makes no sense to return to the communist regime now that it’s over. It’s pointless to talk about it now. They should be glad it’s behind us.”<sup>10</sup>

It seems that a particularly distinct memory of the communist past leads to the attitude that this period should not be included in history, a discipline endowed with a scientific status. This applies both to the “painful” memories, as we can see here, and to the positive ones, as I had the opportunity to observe in the past while interviewing former apparatchiks of the Communist Regime. (See: Blaive, 2005) It might be that the interviewees refuse any interpretation which is more nuanced than theirs. In other words, as Maurice Halbwachs (1950, p.53) had put it, “the force of memory”<sup>11</sup> comes up against the writing of history.

### 1.3. Should we Talk to Communists?

Divergent logics between the private and collective levels of relating to the past are also manifest in replies to the question, *Should we at present talk to the Communists? Do you approve of the attitude of Václav Havel, who left the assembly hall on 17 November, when Miroslav Grebeníček took*

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10 Božena S. (70) former accountant, now retired.

11 For our present purpose, “the force of memory” often amounts to a generational phenomenon: the grandparents actually experienced the Stalinist terror. However, some persons have utterly unpleasant personal memories of more recent periods (after the 1950s), in other words the period of “normalization” and therefore belong to this category.

*the floor?*<sup>12</sup> The respondents seem to be quite divided; nearly half of them replied that we should talk with the Communists because we live in a democracy and they are representing a certain part of the population; some of them do not hide their contempt for former president Havel's gesture ("We should talk to them. I don't agree with Havel, he is a slobbering clown [*kašpárek uslintanej*])."<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, many of them express their approval and understanding of Havel's attitude and justify it by his personal experience. So we should talk to Communists while approving of those who refuse to talk to them. Here we have an interesting example of a dialectical approach to the past in the Czech Republic: "Since this party is represented in the Parliament, we should talk to them. I agree with Havel [who refuses to talk to them], it's his personal attitude."<sup>14</sup> The opinion of the young generation is no more clear-cut: "I don't know if we should talk to the Communists; I would ban that party; I agree with Václav Havel, but, on the other hand, this party exists and receives 20% of the vote, so I believe we should establish connections with them, since their exclusion would only bring them more votes."<sup>15</sup>

All these persons believe it is possible to justify this "cross-eyed" attitude based on circumstances: we should talk to the Communists in principle, but we are against talking to them in practice – or inversely. It is interesting that among those who "don't speak to them" are not only former "anti-Communists", but also people who are ambivalent about the pre-1989 regime, although they support a national debate on communism: I'd recommend a debate, but I wouldn't like to take part in it; I don't know anything about it. It doesn't concern me too much. It's like

in the film *We should help each other* [people are not just "bad", they help each other in need, one-way collaboration does not exist]. The regime has changed, but the judges are the same. I believe they take care...", and then: "No, we shouldn't talk to Communists."<sup>16</sup>

## 2. Does Nostalgia Exist?

### 2.1. What was Better "Before"

Answers about nostalgia are equally disparate. Nearly half of the interviewed persons (including some who claim to be definitely anti-communist) admit certain regrets, mostly for egalitarianism and the social values of the communist era: "We were almost all in the same situation, people were not envious of others: they had the same things in their homes, same furniture, same food, etc."<sup>17</sup>, "Security. Secure jobs, social security... security in old age. The system of an 'assured future' was more reliable"<sup>18</sup>; "I liked the certainty of welfare benefits for workers and the stability of jobs"<sup>19</sup>; "Human relations in the community were better, there was no envy among people, the system provided more social security."<sup>20</sup>

Life without worries, enough free time for friends and family are also the objects of regret: "People had more time for themselves, for their families, for their friends and hobbies. Nowadays everyone rushes to their work, it's kind of fashionable."<sup>21</sup> Mutual solidarity is also highly valued: "We were all equal, people were closer to each other, they helped each other more";<sup>22</sup> "I don't feel any nostalgia. However, I think that human relations were better under the former regime, and precisely because of the regime

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12 It should be noted here that a widespread media campaign, led mainly by artists and intellectuals like Petr Placák or Petr Cibulka, on the theme "We do not speak to the Communists", has been around from the year 2000; however, there were some antecedents at the end of the 1990s.

13 Anna H. (79) former saleswoman, now retired.

14 Jaroslav T. (43) former computer programmer, today graphic designer.

15 Lenka K. (21) student.

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16 Vladimír S. (50) former designer, now manager.

17 Květa E. (66) former textile worker, now retired.

18 Vladimír C. (76) former painter and graphic artist, now retired.

19 Stanislav M. (70) former locksmith, now retired.

20 Marie C., former clerk, now retired.

21 František K. (52) technician in an electrical plant.

22 Lida Š. (59) saleswoman.

itself – people gathered together since they had nothing else to do to pass the time (neighbour relations in country houses, diverse circles), they were united, among other things, by the spiritual opposition to the regime”<sup>23</sup>; etc.

On the other hand, the egotism and selfishness, the quest for wealth and power, corruption and questionable economic and political practices (“I couldn’t believe that the economy would be in the hands of such bums. Those on the top are stealing as much as those who were there before them”<sup>24</sup>; “The influx of unskilled people into positions of power, completely unsatisfying political scene, politicians who are nothing but profiteers, the nation divided in two parts: entrepreneurs against the rest of the nation, and all entrepreneurs are thieves and inversely”<sup>25</sup>) – all these phenomena are pointed out as the harmful and unexpected effects of the transition.

However, this does not exclude almost unanimous dissatisfaction with the policy of dealing with the past (*Are you satisfied with this policy?*, question no. 7). The answers are unambiguous: “No, I am not satisfied with it. Our revolution was nothing but a rotation of privileged positions and abuse of people’s trust”<sup>26</sup>; “No, these measures did not completely resolve the situation; even today there are former representatives of KSČ in high places”<sup>27</sup>; “No, the high representatives of the communist regime should have been brought to justice; the strong influence Communists still have in our society bears witness to the mismanagement of our past”<sup>28</sup>; “No, absolutely not. The law of lustration: too late and insufficient; the judicial proceedings against

the members of former *nomenklatura*: delayed and badly done. They should be condemned and imprisoned!”<sup>29</sup>; “No, I am not satisfied; wherever you look, there are Bolsheviks. The lists of agents are ordinary kitchen towels because many people were erased from them in time. We would be very surprised if we saw the full list! It drives me nuts to see that the elites of the former regime are left unpunished.”<sup>30</sup>

## 2.2. Nostalgia for the Future and the Generation Issue

An important generational difference in perception is also disclosed. In our questionnaire – it is uncertain to what extent our sample is representative of the whole population – part of the generation of *parents* (today aged between 40 and 60, therefore born between 1945 and 1965, under the first phase of the communist rule) seem to have had difficulties in coping with the transition, at least from a moral perspective. The most bitter comments come from this group, not necessarily because its members feel like losers on the economic level (they still have jobs and a roof over their heads, their children are successful, they are integrated), but because they had the most utopian expectations of what democracy should provide.

Their answers to the question, What did you expect that did not happen? - were as follows: “A more consequent and fair justice system”<sup>31</sup>; “Good compensation for work well done”<sup>32</sup>; “More care for our environment”<sup>33</sup>; “Political culture – a higher level of it – certainly. More reliability and more culture from those who commit themselves to politics, less political scandals”<sup>34</sup>; “I believed that

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23 Eva K. (48) former dressmaker, now chief of staff.

24 Hana V., former IT employee, now accountant.

25 Jaroslav T. (43) former computer programmer, now graphic designer.

26 Petr Z. (59) former electrician, now salesman of electric materials.

27 Jan S. (58) former research engineer, now director of a personnel unit.

28 Václav K. (42) maintenance worker.

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29 Vladimír C. (76) former painter and graphic artist, now retired.

30 Přemysl V. (44) former technician, now unemployed.

31 Zora K. (51) former corporate photographer, now art photographer.

32 Hana V., former IT employee, now accountant.

33 Jaroslav T. (43) former computer programmer, now graphic designer.

34 Marie C. (45) previously researcher in psychology at the Academy of Sciences, now market research author.

we would get rid of communism for good. That the guilty party would be punished and that all of us would have equal chances. That professional competence would be rewarded, that we would be liberated from fear... We expected many things; it was an unbelievable state of mind.”<sup>35</sup>

Replies to the question, *What has surprised you, in either a positive or negative sense?* – are even more “negative”: “A complete collapse of culture”<sup>36</sup>; “I had not expected that the Czechs would be transformed into such a nation of consumers”<sup>37</sup>; “The degradation of human relations, disappearance of culture”<sup>38</sup>; “I didn’t expect such a rush after money and vulgarity. Nor such ‘monetization’ of human relations”<sup>39</sup>; “I had not expected that the culpable would go free on exaggerated humanitarian grounds, and even be transformed into victims, and I was also astonished by a general shift of culture towards a society of consumption, and its consequences such as less interest in having children. I didn’t expect that in the end everything would be reinstated under a different name”<sup>40</sup>; “People are not able to take responsibility for their own life”<sup>41</sup>; “I didn’t expect the brutal and definitive politics of moral authorities and intellectuals. Of course, I did not believe that the ethos of the Velvet Revolution would persist. But I did believe that they would remain a parliamentary party that needn’t feel shame for the way they talk in the Parliament. And I didn’t expect the genuine, communist jokes to disappear.”<sup>42</sup> However, some of them welcome the freedom of speech and movement, rapid adaptation of people to change and improvement in the standard of living.

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35 Miloslav F. (51) former clerk now high school teacher.

36 Zora K., former corporate photographer, now art photographer.

37 Bohumil N. (64) former soldier, now retired.

38 Karel K. (56) craftsman.

39 Marie C., former researcher in psychology at the Academy of Sciences, now market research author.

40 Jaroslava Z. (57) former purchasing assistant, now specialized purchasing assistant.

41 Marcela K. (43) former clerk, now manager.

42 Michal T. (42) computer scientist.

Grandparents above all hoped for freedom of speech and the opportunity to travel. The generation of parents – or, in any case, the parents of these students – wished for a more just society, where crime would not pay, where people would be more polite and respectful, where politicians would be honest and competent, in short, a happier society than the one under communism. It is certain that they were disappointed in this respect, although they did not translate their disappointment into social action: since Czech society is generally not inclined to demonstrations, strikes or social activism, it is difficult to delineate such a diffuse dissatisfaction otherwise but by the study of narratives.

### 2.3. Nostalgia, Regret or Melancholy

But what is truly interesting to note is that the question *Do you feel nostalgia?* raised more ambiguous answers than the question *What do you consider as positive in the former regime?* This shows that the word “nostalgia” is still largely taboo. Vladimír S., for example, offers a contradictory reply: “No [I don’t feel nostalgic]. I do miss holidays organized by the ROH [national trade union centre, the only authorized union under communism], it was cheaper by half”<sup>43</sup>, while Helena J. hastens to justify herself: “Hm... at the time we could afford a weekend house in the country [*chata*]. It’s unimaginable now. But I don’t feel nostalgic; for me it’s rather a way to compare the situations.”<sup>44</sup>

The persons cited above – who thought something in the communist period was worth regretting – responded quite differently to a direct question about nostalgia. Květa E., for example: “I feel no nostalgia at all. I was very happy when the Communists were thrown out. I believed that they would be replaced by better people, but unfortunately this was not the case.”<sup>45</sup> Or František K.: “I only feel nostalgic for my youth; otherwise, no.”<sup>46</sup> Or Přemysl V.: “No,

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43 Vladimír S. (50) former designer, now manager.

44 Helena J. (72) former saleswoman

45 Květa E. (66) former textile worker, now retired.

46 František K. (52) technician in an electrical plant.

definitely not!"<sup>47</sup>. Or Marie C.: "I don't know; I am not nostalgic, nor are our friends."<sup>48</sup> Or Vladěna J.: "No, not even that. Maybe for the social life – now everyone must take responsibilities in many areas; it wasn't necessary before." Vladěna J. also answered the next question (whether she was nostalgic for her youth or for socialism): "I think that people miss their youth more... people helped each other much more then; there was more solidarity among them; they laughed together... now it's every man for himself... Many people were happy to have a guaranteed job and a place to live in, from which nobody could throw them out."<sup>49</sup> Or Vladimir C.: "Generally, no one... and if they do, it's only to a very small degree."<sup>50</sup> The interviewer, Vladimir's grandson, added in brackets: "He feels more nostalgic than he wants to admit."

One of the rare respondents in their thirties openly admits he is nostalgic: "Yes, I do feel nostalgia. It was quieter, the social atmosphere was quieter. Today people are crazed by the outpour of evening news; the suffocation in the past had its advantages. The life of ordinary people has deteriorated."<sup>51</sup> The interviewer, the sister of the respondent, added a commentary: "My brother forced me to credit the previous system with cheaper ice-cream; the fact that there was not much choice in the shops suited him; he didn't have to think too much."<sup>52</sup>

Altogether, not more than a quarter of the respondents openly admitted they were nostalgic, which is, according to logic, often correlated with the communist vote. A good half of them, as we have seen, claimed they did not feel nostalgia, but described with verve all that was better "before".

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47 Přemysl V. (44) former technician, now unemployed.

48 Marie C., former clerk, now retired.

49 Vladěna J. (48) former clerk in an international moving company, now in charge of logistics (import-export) for a Czech subsidiary of a German company.

50 Vladimir C. (76) former painter and graphic artist, now retired.

51 Petr Z. (59) former electrician, now salesman of electric materials.

52 Zuzana Z. (25) student.

The rest, including former communists or "grey zones", denied any nostalgia. If three quarters of the population evoked, readily and with warmth, what they thought had been "better" under communism, but resolutely refused to use the term "nostalgia", we can justifiably conclude that at present it is not socially acceptable to admit that the communist system enjoyed some support. In other words, the fact that communism had found a social base in the population is still largely taboo.<sup>53</sup>

Is it that our sample is too small to provide any explanation, or do these persons have too vague an understanding of their own past? Perhaps the answer resides in our interpretation of the term "nostalgia". According to the Larousse dictionary<sup>54</sup>, nostalgia is: (1) *a state of listlessness and languor caused by the obsessive longing for the native land, the place where one has long lived*; (2) *the sentimental yearning for something past or something that was not experienced; an unsatisfied desire*. This definition is supported by two quotations: "This nostalgia generated by a broken habit" (Balzac) and "Nostalgia is the desire for something else" (Saint-Exupéry).

There is no doubt that during the communist regime the majority of the Czech population was in favour of a return to democracy. For at least the first ten years they even expected an imminent fall of the regime. (Cf. Blaive, 2002, pp.176-202) Therefore, some feel now that nostalgia cannot be interpreted as a desire to return to the Communist past. On the other hand, the notions of "listlessness", "languor", "sentimental yearning", "broken habit" and the "desire for something else" seem perfectly able to account for the procrastination of a society that has undergone a serious disturbance of its way of life since 1989. In this sense, the "yearnings" are certainly the expression of dissatisfactions with the present. Material conditions and the standard of

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53 It is worth recalling here that in 1993 the Czech Parliament passed a law on the "illegality" and "criminality" of the communist regime and its institutions: to confess "nostalgia" would thus mean to retrospectively support an illegal and criminal system... (Cf. Blaive, 2004, pp.111-128)

54 <http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/nostalgie/55033>.

living are certainly major explicative factors for the difficult adaptation to the present time.

However, they are not the only ones. We have to add the need to assume one's responsibility instead of following orders, to decide for oneself, not to give way to indolence, which – albeit comfortable – certainly does not increase self-esteem; and above all, to build from all this a new habit, a new behaviour. In this regard, as our interviews clearly show, the massive political and economic corruption that has plagued the country since 1989 is a major moral handicap. The feeling of the citizens that democracy has been partly taken away from them is an additional obstacle that the building of a collective memory of Communism in the Czech Republic must overcome.

### 3. The Issue of the Communist Vote

There is also the issue of vote, the communist vote in particular, and the very high abstention in the elections. This study so far has been carried out on a very modest scale and must limit itself to the observation that a number of these “disappointed” adults vote communist today, or would vote communist if they took the trouble to participate in the elections, which they no longer do since they are totally disgusted with politics: “I don't vote anymore, but if I did, it would be only for the Communists”<sup>55</sup> – even though they were not necessarily Communists in the past and did not have great sympathy for the previous regime. They were bitter before the 1989 Revolution, and they are no less bitter today. They are also among the least willing to talk about the past. Even the generation of grandparents, who endured the years of Stalinism, is more inclined to talk about the past than those who in their youth were struck by the “normalization”, the period of “returning to normal” after the demise of the Prague Spring in 1968.

We find the same division at the electoral level. In general, both the generation of “children” (twenty

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55 Zdeněk H. (47) former maintenance worker, now a clerk in an agricultural cooperative.

to thirty years old now, born between 1975 and 1985) and the generation of grandparents (over sixty) have stable or relatively stable electoral behaviour (young people clearly voting for ODS, the conservative party of the current president), whereas the generation of “parents” has crossed the political spectrum in all directions since 1989: “At first I voted for the left, but their concept of the welfare state deeply disappointed me, so now I vote for the right.”<sup>56</sup> Moreover, this generation often ends up not voting at all: “I don't vote anymore, it's the same clique”<sup>57</sup>; “At first I voted with enthusiasm, pleasure and hope. Now we cannot vote for anyone. I've given enough. I also had the opportunity to see what was happening behind the scene in the City Council of Prague 3 and I was completely disgusted. It's like that everywhere... we'll never get rid of this corruption.”<sup>58</sup>

In the electoral analyses it is also often taken for granted that it is the people who had a bad time during the transition to democracy (the “losers”) who vote communist; but these interviews show that many people support the Communists without any apparent reason (they are doing well, their children are doing well, they have work, they make a good living, they do not appear to be “losers” in any way). If this form of disenchantment can be described as a challenge, we should not attribute it to the living conditions of these people since 1990, but to the lack of moral standards of the new society: although people recognize its contribution at the material level, they are disappointed by its moral aspects, which they consider to be questionable.<sup>59</sup>

Finally, we could not establish a clear relation between membership to the Party before 1989 and the communist vote today: some of the

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56 Přemysl V. (44) former technician, now unemployed.

57 Irena V. (43) saleswoman.

58 Zora K. (51) former corporate photographer, now art photographer.

59 So far, electoral analyses have not devoted much attention to the link between the way people talk about the past and their current disappointment and demands. (Cf. Perrotino, 2001, pp.159-180; Cf. Perrotino, 2000a, pp.85-100; Cf. Perrotino, 2000b, pp.43-67.

respondents who were members do not vote for the Communists now, whereas some who were not members do. We must remember that the Czechoslovak Communist Party<sup>60</sup> had 1.7 million members in 1989 when the regime collapsed, that it still claims about 200,000 members in the Czech Republic, and that in the 2002 elections it was allocated mandates in the Lower House of Parliament based on the vote of 882,653 (a total of 18.51%).

The case of Vladimír S. illustrates the complexity of individual attitudes towards past and present Communists. To the question, *Have you been a member of the party?*—he responded:

I was a Party candidate for almost one year. From 1987 I never thought about it, I don't know. I was 35 years old at the time, and that was it, I was a candidate. I might not have been. I didn't draw any personal benefit from it. They didn't offer it to everybody. At that time I thought it was normal. Almost nobody refused membership when it was offered.

His “candidacy”, a probationary period before the final entry into the party (“candidates”, considered as almost certain future members, were included in the party's statistics of membership), ended with the Revolution and he began to vote for various right-wing parties, but he was never satisfied. To the question *Should we talk to the Communists?* – *he replied*: “No, there shouldn't be any talking to them”; to the last question concerning the proposition of the president Klaus to draw a thick line over the past, he replied: “It's a realistic vision for our time. We should not talk to them, but the fact is that they represent one fifth of the population,

which is not negligible... We cannot cast aside one fifth of the population. It's a huge number of voters.”<sup>61</sup>

At the end of this sequence of internal contradictions, his daughter, the student who conducted the interview, noted:

I didn't know about his candidacy for the party membership. He confessed it to my mother only after the Revolution because he knew she would be firmly against it. He did not want to talk about the relations between the old and new elites. He was aware that some of his opinions were controversial. He somewhat censored it. He changed his opinions several times and it is not quite clear what he really thinks.<sup>62</sup>

In the same family, during these interviews, the grandmother broke an uneasy silence and revealed to her children and grandchildren, with a delay of nearly fifteen years, that the name of their grandfather, who had died four years earlier, figured on the list of collaborators of the secret police, published by Petr Cibulka in 1991 – of course, the degree of his involvement remained a mystery.

## Conclusion

There is no collective memory of Communism in the Czech Republic because people still need time to work through their individual pasts. They have still not incorporated their personal histories into the collective “national” discourse and think of them as separate from the country's collective destiny.<sup>63</sup>

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61 Vladimír S. (50) former designer, now manager.

62 Petra S. (22) student.

63 To avoid ambiguity that may arise from the twofold national component of Czechoslovakia: though living in common with the other half of the country, both the Czechs and the Slovaks took into account only their own nation in their cultural self-definition. Before 1989 there were in Czechoslovakia two distinct nations, two distinct societies, the Czech and the Slovak, and the notion of “Czechoslovak nation” only persisted in some outmoded Masarykians, who lived mostly in exile.

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60 The adjective “Czechoslovak” is misleading because it concerned, in fact, only the Czech Lands. Slovakia had its own communist party, the Slovak Communist Party (KSS) whose numbers were negligible compared to those of the KSC.

Today's young people do not know much about the communist history of their country. They have learnt about it through their parents' stories – often mere allusions. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to talk about a “personalized collective memory”, where everyone could proclaim, “Under communism, it was like that and not otherwise”, and where everyone would be right, so long as an official memory has not been established by a more determined socialization, for example through history textbooks (the actual practice, as is also shown by our interviews, is that teachers usually get around that meagre part of the history curriculum that does deal with the communist past).

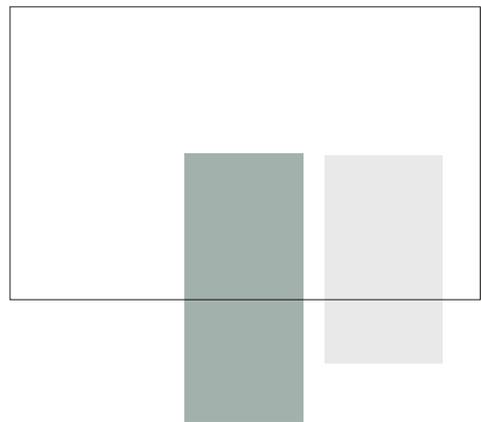
For a collective memory to emerge it is essential to have both an overall vision and details of what really happened under the communist regime. It would be particularly important to elucidate the nature of the relationship between the regime and the population, the extent of the active and passive collaboration, the appropriateness of the social contract in the period of “normalization” (the non-involvement of the citizens in the political sphere in exchange for a guaranteed standard of living). In simpler terms, historians, particularly social historians, must exist, must be authorized to do their work and they must do it.

Of course, sometimes the link between the social demand for historical research, archival practices and political choices is not direct. It is not, however, a coincidence that the Czech Republic is a country with the most extensive legislation on anti-communism, even though it had proportionally the strongest communist party in Central Europe; that it has adopted an extremely rapid, extensive and vague law on rehabilitations, although it had the least number of declared opponents to the regime; that, unlike the former GDR, Poland and Slovakia (Hungary being somewhat apart), it still has no institute of national memory; and finally, that it is the only country in the region to have maintained a communist party, which is not ashamed of its name, but makes good use of it, thus becoming the party with the biggest membership. (Cf. Blaive, 2004).

Assuming that there is significant social demand for a return to the past, the question is why has it not resulted in concrete actions on the political scene. Either this demand is not as strong as it seems, or it demonstrates that in this area democratic mechanisms do not work. Unfortunately, our interviews prevent us from making a real contribution on this point because they show both a desire to keep silent (which is rather typical of a lack of social demand) and a great dissatisfaction with our policy of managing the past and with the workings of democracy.

For all that, the link between memory and national identity seems to be the key to this reluctance to dwell on the communist past. To return to this past would inevitably require the examination not only of the level of support the regime enjoyed among the population, but also of the war and immediate post-war period. At least one of the founding myths of national identity linked to the first Republic, which grants an intrinsically democratic character to the Czech culture, would thus be weakened.

Therefore, we should commit ourselves to a general re-evaluation of the overall Czechoslovak and Czech history since 1918, through social and cultural historical studies – the only ones capable of explaining that changes in the political regime cannot by themselves create this absolute rupture fantasized about by dogmatists of more than one hue.



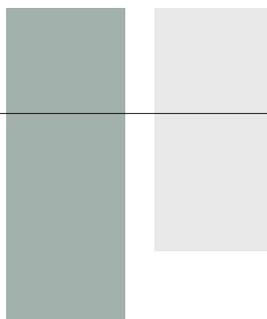
# Annex

## Interview Questions

1. Age, sex, educational attainment, relationship with the interviewer, residence (city, village, small town etc.), current profession, profession under communism.
2. What do you consider to be positive about the previous regime?
3. What did you expect that did not happen since 1989?
4. What is it that you did not expect and that came as a surprise, in a positive or negative sense?
5. Do you sometimes feel a certain nostalgia for the former regime?
6. If the answer is positive, do you feel nostalgic about your youth or rather nostalgia for socialism?
7. Are you satisfied with the results of our policy of managing our communist past?
8. Do you want to know if you have a file in the archives of StB (political police of the communist regime)?
9. Do you approve of the opening of the StB archives to the public? Do you think this had a good or bad impact on our society?
10. Would you recommend a more intensive historical debate on our past, or are you rather indifferent?
11. To what extent should our children learn the history of the communist regime?
12. If you were a member of the Communist Party under the totalitarian regime [*za totality*, a common expression for the communist regime], what do you think today about this membership?
13. When (year and month), why and under what circumstances did your membership terminate?
14. Which political parties do you vote for or could vote for today?
15. Have your electoral preferences changed since 1990?
16. Should we talk to the Communists today? Do you agree with the attitude of Vaclav Havel, who left the assembly hall on 17 November 2004 [on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the Revolution] when Miroslav Grebeniček [deputy and the first secretary of the Czech and Moravian Communist Party] took the floor?
17. Why, in your opinion, does the Czech electorate continue to give 20% of its votes to the Communists?
18. What do you think of the appeal for reconciliation with our past, launched by president Klaus on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the Velvet Revolution?

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# REMEMBERING CHILDHOOD IN THE MUSEUM

## Notes on Post-Communist Nostalgia

### Abstract

*The paper will focus on the way childhood is represented in a number of museums of communism in Central and Eastern Europe established after 1989. Based on an analysis of both verbal and visual narratives of communist childhood in these museums, the paper will seek to establish the place of nostalgia in the complex, and oftentimes ambivalent, mix of feelings, emotions and reactions triggered by the museum experience. The analysis draws on the ...entries of visitors in museum guest books.*

Nostalgia has become a catchphrase in the studies of post-communist memory and remembrance, referring to a large array of memory discourses and practices. The “fabric” of nostalgia – its places, interactions, agents, institutions, objects, rituals, politics, codes, gestures, temporalities, media (Angé & Berliner, 2014, p.2) – have been explored in a growing body of academic literature, sometimes referred to as a research field in its own right – “anthropology of nostalgia” (Angé & Berliner, 2014) or “sociology of nostalgia” (Davis, 1979). Doubts and reservations about the analytical merits of nostalgia as a conceptual category, however, have been going hand in hand with the recent increase in the uses

of the term: it has been associated with memory and forgetting, linked to political contestations and consumer practices, and interpreted as a cultural style and as a psychological mechanism, to name but a few. Nostalgia, as Kathleen Stewart wrote, is “a cultural practice, not a given content; its forms, meanings, and effects shift with the context” (Stewart, 1988, p.227).

In this paper, I will seek to establish the place of nostalgia in the complex, and oftentimes ambivalent mix of feelings, emotions and reactions, triggered by the museum experience, by focusing on the museums of communism in Central and Eastern Europe established after 1989.<sup>1</sup> The focal point of my interest, when researching these museums, was not nostalgia *per se*, but the relationship between history and memory in the museum. This relationship is revealed, on the one hand, through the (re)presentation of the past in the museum – the construction and staging of the museum narrative, and, on the other hand, through the work of memory in the museum – the reception and acting out of

<sup>1</sup> The present article is a revised and shortened version of an earlier publication: Kazalarska, S. 2009. History vs. memory in the museum: Visual and verbal representations of a communist childhood. In: Fassmann, Müller-Funk, H. and W. Uhl, H. eds. *Kulturen der Differenz – Transformationsprozesse in Zentraleuropa nach 1989: Transdisziplinäre Perspektiven.*, Vienna: Vienna University Press, pp.245-256. The article draws on data collected through fieldwork conducted for my Ph.D. thesis under the title “History vs. Memory in the Museum. The Museumification of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989”. The thesis was successfully defended in 2011 at the History and Theory of Culture Department of “St. Kliment Ohridski” University of Sofia and published as a book in Bulgarian in 2013 (Kazalarska, 2013).

the constructed and staged narrative by museum visitors. In the present paper, I will focus on the construction and reception of one particular theme in the museum – childhood under communism – drawing primarily on fieldwork conducted in a selected number of museums and exhibitions: the GDR Museum in Berlin, the Museum of Communism in Prague, the Documentation Center of GDR's Everyday Culture in Eisenhüttenstadt, and the "Inventory Storehouse of Socialism" (2006) exhibition in Sofia.

Even though post-communist nostalgia was not part of my analytical toolbox, when studying the way visitors reacted to a particular museum experience, I often came across comments in the museum guest books that appeared to be very much nostalgia-driven. Nostalgia is normally avoided as a self-description, as Maria Todorova remarks in the introduction to *Post-Communist Nostalgia* (2010); it is more an ascriptive term. Such comments nevertheless offer valuable insight into the workings of nostalgia, as well as an opportunity to probe the different theoretical approaches to nostalgia.

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The musealization of communism has happened a lot faster than that of any previous historical period (Kazalarska, 2013). The first museums and memorials of communism established in the early 1990s most commonly followed the symbolic topography of communist terror – buildings formerly used as headquarters of the secret services, political prisons and camps, border check-points, anti-nuclear shelters, military sites, etc. Another type of museum gradually emerged, to some extent as a reaction to the predominance of "demonizing" the representation of communism. These museums focused on the everyday experiences of "ordinary people" and musealized the period through the prism of everyday life, material and popular culture. Such an approach appears very much in accordance with the revisionist, and even more so, with the post-revisionist paradigm in the

historiography of communism,<sup>2</sup> associated with the "shift in the broader historical profession from social history to theory-informed cultural and intellectual history" (Fitzpatrick, 2007, p.87). Museums that incorporate such theoretical underpinnings in their strategy for historicizing and representing the communist period are frequently accused of the normalization, banalization, and even infantilization of communism, based on the assumption that the very act of focusing on the everyday has a "normalizing" effect.

This strategy, however, has a numerous ambiguous implications, as recently illustrated in Bulgaria. The temporary exhibition "The Afternoon of an Ideology" (2016) at the Sofia City Art Gallery was curated by two "non-professionals" invited by the gallery: Georgi Gospodinov, a writer, and Georgi Lozanov, a media expert. It offered an interpretation of "everyday life under communism" through selected artworks from the gallery's storage. As the curators asserted at the opening, it is an interpretation that oscillates between two clashing, yet not mutually exclusive hypotheses: on the one hand, the quotidian is a private sphere that is relatively autonomous of ideology as it preserves; it is the repository of the bodies (Lozanov and Gospodinov, 2016, p.20); on the other hand, ideology is so pervasive that it infiltrates even the everyday, devouring it and thus producing a deficit of everydayness. In addition to wrestling with the "burden" of representing the everyday as a site of both ideological permeation and resistance (Bach, 2015, p.137), the exhibition puts forward yet another, third version, which claims that "everyday life did not fall into any value-determined networks; it dismantled them, which was exactly what made it valuable for the subjects of communism" (Ibid., p.18). Ultimately, as the curators poignantly acknowledge, "everyday life is no more than a place/time where you can just briefly escape from what you do not accept. But

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2 The so-called revisionist paradigm in Soviet history, exemplified and strongly influenced by the works of Sheila Fitzpatrick, emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in the context of the Cold War and challenged the then dominant totalitarian model scholarship. "Post-revisionists" such as Stephen Kotkin, Jochen Hellbeck, Alexei Yurchak and others in turn called the revisionist arguments in question in the 1990s. For more on the paradigm shift in Soviet historiography, see: Fitzpatrick 2007, 2008.

it's not a mode of ceasing to belong to it" (Ibid., p. 23). The simultaneous ubiquity and elusiveness of "the everyday" both as a concept and as an object of study, in spite of its long theoretical history accumulated throughout the 20th century, still engages the attention of scholars in the social sciences and humanities, even more so in the field of Soviet and communist studies (Cunningham, 2013, p.292).

The strategy of musealizing communism through its everyday life is (or rather was) applied in a full-fledged form in the GDR Museum in Berlin – a privately funded museum that opened in 2006 and quickly achieved a high rate of popularity among tourists.<sup>3</sup> In 2010, interestingly, the museum doubled its exhibition space and added new themes to its permanent exhibition – themes not explicitly related to the everyday but to the political and economic history of the GDR, such as the structure of the state, voting, the army, state security, interrogation, prison, ideology, economy, environment, etc. My analysis here, however, predates the museum's extension and sticks to the original profile of the institution.

The GDR Museum in Berlin reproduces an entire residential district of prefabricated blocks of flats on the scale 1:20. The windows of the blocks are designed as drawers so that visitors can open them and explore their contents. Interactivity, the leading principle of the museum, also serves as its advertising slogan: "A Hands-On Experience of History" (*Geschichte zum Anfassen*). The museum's interior design resembles the German board game "Do Not Get Angry, Buddy" (*Mensch ärgere dich nicht*) or, as some visitors remark, a doll show (*Puppenausstellung*). On entering this space, the visitor is automatically cast in the role of a pawn who moves from square to square and follows the game's instructions – "open here", "look there", "touch that", "start up the Trabi", etc. Through the museum's intentional and conscious use of the

format of the game, the visitor has no choice but to play along. A similar effect, even if not deliberately sought after by the museum-makers, is observed in other museums of everyday life under communism as well – the very encounter with the objects from one's childhood "infantilizes" the visitor in the very literal sense. "I felt like a kid again. I had this toy, too" – a visitor wrote in the guestbook of the Documentation Center of GDR's Everyday Culture in Eisenhüttenstadt, housed in the building of a former nursery.

In fact, the topic of childhood has a special place in the museum's representations of communism. The reference to childhood is not fortuitous, Jonathan Bach argues, it is "a major trope in the GDR museums, where objects are presented mostly as innocent carriers of personal memory" (Bach, 2014, p.129). Indeed, in the public imagination, childhood items, similarly to everyday objects, appear marked by their presumed "innocence", i.e. by their seemingly apolitical character and ideological autonomy. This, of course, is a rather incendiary suggestion, since "children, being the youngest and weakest members of society, were the easiest to supervise and punish, customarily without any explanation" (Lozanov and Gospodinov, 2016, p.37). Furthermore, both childhood and everyday life render visible in the most conspicuous way the dividing lines between "before" and "after", between the East and the West sides of the former Iron Curtain. Objects functioning as signs/symbols? of a communist childhood, such as the plain children's clothes, the unattractive toys, the austere school uniforms, the Young Pioneers' red ties, and other youth political paraphernalia, seem to possess the necessary dramatic and illustrative potential to visualize the communist past for those who did not live through it, and to awaken nostalgic (or not) feelings in those who did. As has been acknowledged, childhood in general is prone to being exoticized as when "childhood moments are situated rather far away in time from the present adulthood, then their remembrance might become a truly exotic journey and the objects that populated that world of the beginning might function as

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3 The museum has attracted more than 4,439,000 visitors since its opening on 14 July 2016. It has been nominated twice for the European Museum of the Year Award – in 2008 and in 2012. (See: DDR Museum, 2016)

mystery-bearing relics, as triggers of cultural curiosity and surprise” (Popescu, 2013, p.9).

Even if not a central theme, childhood under communism is inevitably featured as a highlight in the museum texts, given the specific place the “care” for the young had in the ideology of the communist state. The narrative about childhood in the museum of communism is most often constructed through a limited number of stereotypes, both verbal and visual. In most contemporary museums, however, it is the visual representations that dominate, while verbal ones are subordinated, since the “museum gaze” largely acts upon visual stimuli. The images that most commonly depict “communist childhood” in the museum include the “typical” nursery and kindergarten along with the “typical” toys and games, the “typical” classroom with its “typical” textbooks, notebooks, uniforms, the “typical” children’s room, as well as objects related to the Young Pioneers’ organization, the sports training, work brigades, summer camps, meetings, youth festivals, etc. The texts that accompany these images in most museums are quite concise and place great emphasis on the infiltration of ideology into all aspects of everyday life: “Terror overshadowed daily life”, as the leaflet in the House of Terror in Budapest bluntly puts it. The main thread running through the museum narrative is the ideological shaping of the “new socialist man”, which starts at birth:

The East German SED party placed its hopes in the young. Their fate was fixed the day they were born. Collective potty breaks were the first step into social education. They became Young Pioneers in first grade and members of the Free German Youth at 14. Summer camp, flag parades, collecting recyclables, were all part of the socialist education. (An interpretative panel in the GDR Museum in Berlin)

The blackboard in the Museum of Communism in Prague, neatly handwritten in Russian, provides an example of a subtler suggestion of this type. The text itself is relatively innocuous (“A pioneer is holding a flag. A kolkhoz woman is digging with a spade. A boat is sailing in the lake...”) compared

to what the visitor reads in the notebook of Robert Kramer, a second-grader, born in 1976, displayed in the GDR Museum in Berlin: facts and figures about the so-called “Russian miracle”, stories about the “close friendship between GDR and the USSR”, as well as a handy list of slogans for the May Day celebrations.

Very few of the museums deviate from the stereotypical story of childhood and youth under communism as being totally controlled and ideologized “from above”. Even stories about the minor acts of resistance against the regime seem to corroborate this stereotype. The GDR Museum in Berlin would thus tell its visitors that in the 1960s “hair got longer and skirts got shorter”; in response, the police cut off locks of hair and sentenced the culprits to hard labor in the open mines. In the 1980s, Punks played “wild” music in basements, dressed up in leather jackets with the ‘anarchy’ sign printed on the back. The corresponding display case illustrates this with an “installation” of empty beer bottles, a bottle opener, a spray can, graffiti drawings, and a Punk-styled doll. The regime reacted to this “form of disrespect” by persecuting and arresting the offenders – the visitor would then see locks of colored hair and damaged cassette tapes behind bars.

Whereas the visual images portraying communism in the museum are more or less identical, the museum texts that accompany them differ significantly in their writing style, degree of historicity, objectivity, and emotionality. The GDR Museum in Berlin appears to be intended for a younger audience – it advertises itself as a “paradise for kids” and uses short, simple sentences in an entertaining narrative format, offering ready-made conclusions. “This educational system produced successful athletes, good soldiers, diligent engineers, and qualified scientists. Critical thinking, however, was not popular.” – one reads in the guidebook (Rückel, 2006, p.28). The Documentation Center of GDR’s Everyday Culture in Eisenhüttenstadt relies on factual statements and avoids value-based judgments. In fact, apart from the labels that identify the artifacts, the museum does not

provide the visitor with interpretations of what has been put on display and why. Most radical in their judgmental character and most noncompliant with professional ethics in historiography are the texts in the Museum of Communism in Prague, where fact and interpretation are so strongly intertwined that the interpretation of the facts distorts the facts beyond recognition. Whereas most museums rely on impersonal speech forms, implying a certain degree of objectivity, the "Inventory Book of Socialism", an illustrated book accompanying the "Inventory Storehouse of Socialism" (2006) exhibition in Sofia, uses narrative in the first person singular and openly asserts the subjective position of its authors, complemented by personal memories, reflections and ironic comments. For example, the section on children's games and toys concludes with the following (obviously rhetorical) question: "Interestingly, why did no one play the game of shock-workers back then?!" (Gospodinov and Genova, 2006a, p.19).

Examining how a particular museum constructs a narrative on communism is just one part of the story; the other part is looking at the way museum visitors interpret this narrative after acting it out in the space of the museum. It is here that the constructed and staged historical narrative and the visitor's individual memories intersect, at least for those whose life experience was formed in this period and who have a living memory of it. It is also here that the museum as a text, subject to reading and interpretation, intersects with the museum as a ritual space in which this reading happens. Besides being a semiotic space, the museum is above all a corporeal and social space – a physical space where visitors observe the behavior prescribed by the museum and interact with others: visitors, companions, museum docents, tour guides. I tried to find the points of intersection of these two processes by examining the comments left by the visitors in the museum guestbooks; as an immediate and spontaneous reaction to the museum experience, these comments indicate the extent to which the private historical experience is being "normalized" by the allegedly normative historical narrative presented in the museum.

Unsurprisingly, the dominant reaction of visitors to museums focusing on everyday life under communism appears to be informed by a longing for the recent past, which often happens to be a longing for one's childhood and youth – an observation which has been repeatedly underscored by researchers of post-communist nostalgia (e.g. Nadkarni and Shevchenko, 2004, p.510), its major implication being the construction of nostalgic memory as non-political (Ibid., p.511). The guestbook of the GDR Museum in Berlin abounds in phrases that favor the universality of childhood experience: "A wonderful journey back to the time of my childhood", "Thank you for the childhood memories", and so on. Similar visitor reactions are observed in other museums in other countries – for example, in the "The Inventory Storehouse of Socialism" (2006) exhibition in the Red House Center for Culture and Debate in Sofia:

Whatever the memories from childhood, they are always nice, sweet and true!

This exhibition really makes you go back in time. I am a 21-year-old, and although I was too young when the soc-regime was overthrown, I have really warm, even if childish, memories. About 'Uncle Militiaman', the 'Teddy Bear' toothpaste, and many other things.

The exhibition followed an attempt to make a visual inventory of socialist everyday objects that resulted in a book – *The Inventory Book of Socialism* (Gospodinov and Genova, 2006a). As its authors acknowledge, the book project itself started with "an ironic/nostalgic question" about the shelf life of the products of yesterday's light industry as part of "our unconscious common memory of the taste of sotsz" (Gospodinov and Genova, 2006b, p.9), i.e. a question rooted in "reflective" rather than in "restorative" nostalgia, if we were to borrow Svetlana Boym's terms (Boym, 2001). Critical reflexivity did indeed override any other considerations underlying both the book and the exhibition:

(...) the stock-taking of socialism's grassroots material culture will try to demonstrate the way objects related to lofty ideology, what place

material belongings have in the symbolic chains of socialism, in what way the ‘banality of evil’ not only materializes itself in political murders, death camps and crucial moral choices, but also trickles down the crevices of hackneyed everyday life and its visual clichés. (Gospodinov and Genova, 2006b, p.11)

Despite the markedly critical stance of the exhibition’s authors, certain visitors were inclined to interpret the undertaking in the vein of restorative nostalgia:

This book fits in the trend of a nostalgia and sympathy for the socialist way of life that has been going on for the last couple of years. It started off with a nostalgia for the popular music, culture, way of life and vacations from those times, and it ended up with the sweet memories of lemon slice candies, it even came to the point of singing out loud the children’s song about Cheburashka and the crocodile Gena<sup>4</sup>, a rap version of ‘We are at every kilometer’<sup>5</sup> and ‘Childhood of mine, real and magical’<sup>6</sup>.

As evidenced by the written comments in the exhibition’s guestbook, many visitors interpreted the everyday objects of communism as object-testimonials of a past that is as much positive as it is negative, in other words – “normal”:

I like the idea ... Because this is a real part of the past, which we don’t need to praise, but we don’t need to disparage either. It is just the past. It is real, everyday life, in which people grew up, loved each other, died ... In which they LIVED. And there isn’t a reason in the world why we shouldn’t get to know the objects from their everyday life. Because that was the everyday life of my grandparents, my parents, and myself.

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4 A popular children’s song from the Soviet animated film “Gena the Crocodile” (1969).

5 A popular song from the Bulgarian TV film series “At Every Kilometer” from the late 1960s and early 1970s.

6 A popular children’s song from the Bulgarian TV film series “An Unexpected Vacation” (1981).

It is not a nostalgic shock, not a heart-melting feeling; these are pieces of someone’s life, some of which are symbols, others – wounds.

At the same time, the guestbook testifies to the ardent resistance on the part of other visitors to what they perceived as the “normalization” of the narrative on communism:

The exhibition does not give a complete picture of the recent past. They should have included a photo of the camps in Belene, Sunny Beach, and elsewhere. As well as some facts about the 28,000 people executed without a trial and verdict (and these are only the ones documented!). The communist rule did have some positive achievements, but it was a period of tyranny and economic absurdity. That’s why it collapsed.

Anyone who didn’t live in those times would not understand a thing from this exhibition because most artifacts neither reveal nor show what ‘real socialism’ was like (...). This exhibition can only tickle nostalgic memories.

An object that serves as a starting point for similar “normalizing” readings by the visitors is a photo of the “collective potty breaks” in GDR nurseries, interpreted by the GDR Museum in Berlin as one of the first socialization steps in the children’s “communist” upbringing. According to the thesis of the West German criminologist Christian Pfeiffer, the “collectivist” upbringing and education of the children in GDR is to be blamed for the spread of radical right extremism and for the high crime rate in the former East Germany in the late 1990s. The museum quotes Pfeiffer’s thesis and leaves the discussion open by inviting its visitors to share their opinions on the following question: “Were children better taken care of in the East?”. The visitors (mostly East Germans) who responded to the question in a small notebook specifically provided for the purpose, often reacted sharply to this suggestion – we might have sat together on potties in the nursery, nevertheless we (and our children, too) have still grown up to become “normal” people:

It's nice to think back on the times in which one grew up. I had a happy childhood and adolescence, and it seems wonderful that not all of it will be forgotten. Regardless of the infamous 'potty benches' we have become intelligent people.

In addition to the comments on the presumed superiority of the children's "communist" upbringing and education, some visitors perceived the everyday objects on display as embodying the industrial and social achievements of the country during socialism, and for that reason as grounds for taking pride in the recent past – a reaction pointing at the notion of socialism as a modern project. Such comments at the same time imply a strong, even if not explicitly articulated, critique of the post-communist situation:

The GDR had many good sides as well, and it wasn't all bad, as they want to portray it to us today. We have many good memories about those times, and I am proud to be a "son of the GDR" and to have experienced that.

Similar reactions were provoked by the "Inventory Storehouse of Socialism" exhibition in Sofia:

It is a pity that today's kids grow up with products labeled only in Latin letters, labels and prices. I ask myself why it was not possible to preserve at least half of our local production, and why, today, instead of bread with butter and jam, school kids get burgers from McDonald's and pizza for breakfast? We should respect our own production; it's the only way to respect ourselves.

Such reactions are complemented by comments testifying to another type of normalization of the museum discourse – the aestheticization and exoticization of everyday life under communism. After seeing "The Inventory Storehouse of Socialism" in Sofia, an 8-year-old girl wrote in the guestbook: "There were many nice things in the old times, very

funny lexicons<sup>7</sup> and other stuff". It is not uncommon that visitors to these museums write that they had "great time" and that the museum was "so cool". Apparently, the principles of the New Museology, according to which the museum experience should be playful and interactive, might work against the ethical considerations in the representation of the communist past.

As the comments in the museum guestbooks show, the museum does not fully succeed in controlling and disciplining its audience. Ultimately, the museum institution is not the agency that "normalizes" the narrative on communism, rather it is the visitors who do this by their subjective reading and interpretation of the museum text (in a very broad sense), notwithstanding the ideological premises underlying the museum display. This generates tension between the museum text and the museum's "readers", and in this tension between intention and reception – i.e. between history and memory – one finds both the "real" and the "magical" ingredients of "communist childhood".

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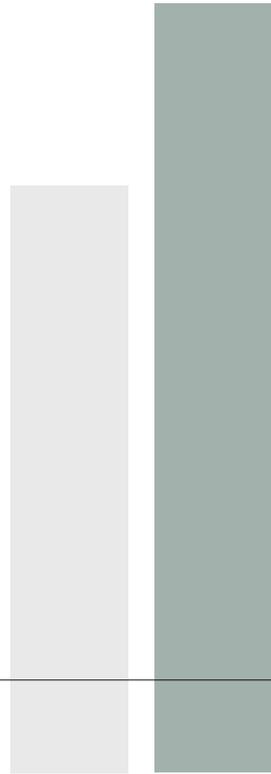
Post-communist nostalgia, undoubtedly, is a phenomenon that haunts most of Central and Eastern Europe, in various forms and to various degrees. The content of post-communist nostalgia, as Maria Todorova succinctly summarized it, thus includes "elements of disappointment, social exhaustion, economic recategorization, generational fatigue, and the quest for dignity, but also an activist critique of the present using the past as a mirror and irony alongside a purely consumerist aesthetics" (Todorova, 2010, p.7). Even if studies of nostalgia are considered to be paradigmatically "Eastern European" (Ange and Berliner, 2014, p.1), nostalgia is not a phenomenon confined to the former communist world; what's more, it has been widely acknowledged as a symptom of modernity at large – it is conceived as "a result of a new

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7 A 'lexicon' is a personal journal or scrapbook with a questionnaire which is to be filled out by one's classmates and friends, very popular among Bulgarian children and teenagers in the 1970s and 80s.

understanding of time and space” (Boym, 2001, p.11), an effect of modern historical consciousness.

The wide range of emotions and reactions unlocked by a visit to the museum of communism focusing on the everyday, discussed above, seem to cover the full spectrum of theoretical musings over post-communist nostalgia that interpret it as a critique of the present, as an act of memory, as a political emotion, as a consumption practice, as a reaction to the “deficit of future”, and what not. Being fully aware of the fact that a museum can never fully control its audiences, I would nevertheless speculate that “nostalgic” reactions are also a sign of the museum’s incapacity, as a specific media, to stage a much more complex, multifaceted, multilayered and polyphonic story of communism. That is for now, at least.



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## WALKING HERITAGE

# Performance as Method of Transmitting a Confiscated Memory and Identity

### Abstract

*This paper explores the dynamic relationship between embodied (ritual) and material (museum) performatives – as doing memory practices – by focusing on the Days of “AVNOJ”<sup>1</sup> public ceremony, which was initiated on 29 November 2008 with the re-opening of the Museum of the Second “AVNOJ” Session (hereafter, the “AVNOJ” Museum). Ever since, on 29 November<sup>2</sup> approximately 5000 visitors, dressed as partisans or pioneers, walk through the museum, singing and applauding, greeting not only each other, but the ‘display’ as well, with various partisan slogans and gestures. Strategically speaking, the “AVNOJ” Museum is not attempting to convert these performances into documents, but rather to create a fruitful situation of engagement in which barriers between “them”, who are*

*performing something about heritage in (front of) the museum, and “us”, is abolished. Serving as a stage for doing something within the heritage (field), the “AVNOJ” Museum provides an additional critical platform for understanding Yugoslav history, not deriving solely from museum items, but scenarios as well. The Days of “AVNOJ” ritual-like performance, as an episteme – knowing how – opens the space for broadening our understanding and awareness, surprisingly not solely regarding the historical event – 29 November 1943 – but also forms of its ritualisation. These ceremonial forms, as celebratory-political-rituals, have also a history, which for the stated “mnemonic community” – that “re-walks” other Yugoslav public holidays as well (25 May, 4 July, 7 July, etc.) – has obviously not yet run its course.*

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1 “AVNOJ” (an abbreviation for the Anti-fascist Council of the People’s Liberation of Yugoslavia) was the supreme political body of the Yugoslav anti-fascist resistance movement in World War II. Its second session held in 1943 in Jajce (a city in Bosnia and Herzegovina) proclaimed, among other decisions, the abolition of the previous Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the establishment of Yugoslavia on federative principle.

2 November 29 was celebrated as Republic Day in socialist Yugoslavia.

*By looking closely at the history of these “pilgrimages” – taking place in and organized by the “AVNOJ” Museum – the aim of the present study is to examine two museological issues: ritualized collective museum visits in the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav contexts, and metamuseum*

curatorial principles of the renewal of the “AVNOJ” Museum, with special focus on the mediality – forms of communion – of the Days of “AVNOJ” ceremony as exhibitable performance. Particular emphasis will be placed on aspects of bodily performativity as memory act, with reference and drawing parallel to Austin’s (1955) celebrated lectures on speech act theory and Taylor’s (2006, p.68) elaborated “question” of the relationship between performance and performance studies, and history and history studies.

Finally, by situating myself within the rehearsed Days of “AVNOJ” performance, I will argue that “performing Yugoslavism”, repeatedly, in an outdated “sensory curriculum”<sup>3</sup> in the present, enacts a “confiscated memory and identity” (Ugrešić, 1996, pp.26-39), offering evidence of past behaviors, but also affirming a sense of community.

3 With the phrase “sensory curriculum” I am referring to the Kirshenblatt’s notion of the “museum as a school for the senses” (See: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2000).

## The Stage and the Script of the “AVNOJ” Museum: Ritualized Collective Museum Visits in Yugoslavia

*The museum should provide its visitors with a faithful picture of the conditions in which the burgeoning federation of Yugoslav peoples appeared. Furthermore, the museum should substantiate a place in which our visitors, especially young people, can inhale Yugoslav patriotism.*<sup>1</sup> Rodoljub Čolaković (The Secretary of “AVNOJ”)

As Čolaković pointed out at the opening, the “AVNOJ” Museum is a historical site, i.e. it is situated in the building where the idea of socialist Yugoslavia was born. As a result, it is faced with the task of musealizing the historic date 29 November 1943 and, what is more important, it has to serve as a stage and ‘identity factory’ in which a sense of community should be created and performed. Ritualized activities were not merely seen as an additional museum tool that can generate and constitute a new audience, but rather the very concept of the “AVNOJ” Museum was underpinned by the logic of creating a ritual space.

1 The speech of Rodoljub Čolaković on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the “AVNOJ” Museum (November 29, 1953).

The “birthday” (29/11/1943) appeared on the Yugoslav coat of arms and was celebrated as Republic Day until the breakup of Yugoslavia.<sup>2</sup> On the tenth anniversary of the historic meeting (29 November 1953) and on the occasion of the opening of the “AVNOJ” Museum, a political assembly was held in the museum – an inaugural meeting of the Federal Executive Council, when Moša Pijade gave the speech titled “The development of the new Yugoslavia on the basis of the historic decisions of the Second AVNOJ Session” (Bešlić, 1958, p.76). Conferences were included in the so called ‘exhibition corpus’ (Jagdhuhn, 2016, p.108) and treated “as a part of cultural production” (Myers, 2006, pp.505-536). The fact that visitors were entering a time-capsule<sup>3</sup>, an ‘in situ’ museum, was deemed by the conceptual architects of the museum, the highest priority and the basis upon which the museum’s philosophy should be developed. The rift between two sources of knowledge and memory: archives (documents, maps, texts, photos) and repertoire (gestures, orality, dance, singing), was challenged.

2 The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (the federation of the republics of Serbia and Montenegro 1992-2006) maintained the holiday until 2002.

3 The basic idea regarding the museum concept was to keep, and when necessary, re-create, i.e. build replicas, of the interior design, as close a copy to the original as possible and as it appeared in 1943 at the historic meeting. Taking into account that the “NOB” Museums alongside their commemorative function were also serving as historical museums, the part of the permanent exhibition consisted of 177 photos, arranged by Emil Vičić, and later, in the 1970s, the audio and video records of “AVNOJ” councilors were added. (See: Jagdhuhn, 2016)

Visitors, not objects, were the focal point. Rather than being collection-driven, the story-driven museum set into motion its primary task of creating a memorable experience.

The “AVNOJ” Museum belonged to the category of so called memorial and historical museums – a hybrid conceptual structure from Yugoslav times that shared the title of People’s Liberation Struggle Museums (hereafter, “NOB” Museums). These museums flourished in the 1950s, shortly after the establishment of the Committee for Marking Important Dates and Sites. By establishing and building “NOB” Museums – viewed in a broader perspective as part of a larger enterprise of building monuments, busts, sculptures, etc. – the “landscape of belonging” on the national and general Yugoslav level was demonstrated. The typological combination of the memorial and historical museum meant the overlap of two institutional functions: on the one hand – collecting and exhibiting historical data, and on the other – accommodating the commemoration of historical dates. Therefore, the collection and communication of material and intangible heritage was supposed to create a ‘living museum’ that communicates with the broadest spectrum of society. Consequently, Yugoslav “NOB” Museums organized not only exhibitions, but also youth meetings, summer schools and camps, theater performances, etc. It is important to note that it is precisely this type of memorial museum – which not only educates but also rears – appeared in response to a specific need following World War II which, according to Williams (2007, p.8), revealed “an increasing desire to add both a moral framework to the narration of terrible historical events and more in-depth contextual explanations to commemorative acts”.

The aim of the post-WWII memorial museums in Yugoslavia was to create behaviors, tastes, and not “merely” a historical consciousness. In effect, through the act of spatializing the political session, every year on 29 November the “AVNOJ” Museum opened up the possibility of debate and not simply storing memory (Jagdhuhn, 2016, p.108). Visitors were, therefore, truly becoming witnesses of the

processes of historical developments orchestrated by the state. The issue of how to place a visitor inside the museum (exhibition) and to discover the potential of ‘museum eventness’ was the main focus of Yugoslav theorists and practitioners working within the framework of “NOB” Museums. Seen as a place of social interaction, the “AVNOJ” Museum changed its conceptual focus from vitrine to an awareness of the corporeal experience conditioned by the spatial and temporal dimensions of ‘museum reality’. The mission of the museum was to guide the ‘unorganized visitor’<sup>4</sup>, encourage and train the audience to *use* the museum medium. Following the above mentioned curatorial vision, the idea of collectivism, ideologically and museologically, was a key element of the Yugoslav heritage industry. In the 1970s the “AVNOJ” Museum became a place where interviews with witnesses of time were recorded, movies were filmed, the photographic laboratory became part of the museum complex and the so called “Small Gallery” for temporary events/exhibitions was built. The idea was to – conceptually and functionally – expand the framework of what the museum had to offer, open the door behind-the-scenes, i.e. engage visitors in the “production” of memory. Visitors were instructed to abandon their passive role of spectator and become a constitutive element of the museum’s educational apparatus. In contrast with the bourgeois idea of the museum as a place of contemplation, the educational methods of “NOB” Museums were supposed to be accessible to everyone. To make this vision come true, museums entered into a partnership with schools, the Yugoslav People’s Army, factories and tourist organizations. Counting on the power of “the transformation of the visitor”<sup>5</sup> museum visits become mandatory for all working people. Museums were promoted as tourist destinations. Hence, historical education was imposed as an interesting form of leisure. This policy resulted in constructing the necessary

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4 The expression “unorganized visitor” is borrowed from Simina Bădică’s (2013) doctoral thesis *The Bases of Soviet Museology* in which she refers to the term used by Galkina (1957, p.245). See also Bădică, Simina (2013, p.166).

5 Trying to define the “socialist museum visit” Bădică (2013, p.169) wrote: “A visit to a socialist museum is not just a visit, museum professionals insist; a museum visit is transformative for the socialist citizen”.

infrastructure – hotels, motels, cultural centers, in each small city and even in villages across the country.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, small towns such as Jajce, became important tourist centers with an enviable number of visitors reaching a quarter million annually. Accordingly, the choice of museum programs increased over time: one hour guided tours were extended to several hours, the duration of seminars from one day, to several days, etc. The historic mediation of museums morphed into a wide range of offers outside museums (cycling historical routes, scouting routes that included significant historical sites, interstate youth meetings), within them (workshops, festivals, movie screenings, theater, performances, film screenings, meetings with war witnesses, photographic laboratories) and specially designed ceremonies around commemorative days (school recitals, multimedia art events, scientific and political conferences).

The Association of WWII Veterans (the abbreviation being “SUBNOR”) wholeheartedly augmented the increase in the number of museum visitors by organizing so-called socialist pilgrimages, in the form of “revolution routes”, “partisan marches”, etc. Re-walking history (historical events) meant practising the duty of memory. The socialist pilgrimage as mnemonic device insured collective experience and patriotic feelings. The roots of “brotherhood and unity” – embodied ways of coming together – were supposed to draw a portrait of Yugoslavia. The landscape became the historical stage.

Once Yugoslav museums disappeared, their *work* – and by *work* I do not mean their collections, but rather the memories they “imposed” – remained preserved, coded and safeguarded by the people. After the breakup of Yugoslavia, the concept of the museum “visitor as witness”, which was invented in socialist museums (Bădică, 2013, pp.173-177), turned into a new category: museum visitors as “mediators of memory”<sup>7</sup>. With the power of

performative embodiment, assemblies in/for/by museums, now, in changed socio-political circumstances, attempt(ed) to fight for a “prohibited Yugoslav past” (Ugrešić, 2002).

## The Days of “AVNOJ”: Uprooted Heritage as Exhibitible Performance

### Co-Formative Histories of Rituals and Objects in a Metamuseum

During the Bosnian war (1992-1995), the “AVNOJ” Museum was abandoned, its rich collection destroyed and consequently the institution – as politically illegitimate – abolished. Yugoslavia and its symbols turned into ruins. World War II monuments and museums, as pillars of Yugoslav identity, had to disappear, and to make space for “picturing” new memorial, national landscapes. Everything that did not fit into the new political framework ended up at the “landfill of history” (Ugrešić, 2012). One can conclude that it is precisely from this place of “collective amnesia” that the need for a renewed ritual – a mass gathering in (former “NOB”-) museums – as a kind of resistance to the act of “heritocide” (Sjekavica, 2012, pp.57-75) was to occur.

When archives, libraries and museums disappear, embodied culture gains importance. Intangible heritage will outlive the state and its petrified symbols. Individual memories, mental maps – as sounds, feelings, poems, stories, all kinds of unconscious associations – cannot be dismantled overnight. “Architects and choreographers” of collective memory in Yugoslavia, the actors of the Association of WWII Veterans (hereafter, “SUBNOR”) wanted to remain active after the breakup of Yugoslavia. As a former Yugoslav governmental body in charge of the policies of memorialization, “SUBNOR” was dismembered in the 1990s and restored in the form of non-governmental associations in Yugoslav successor states. By opposing the

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6 A detailed list of memorial museums in Yugoslavia was published as a travel guide. (See: Jokić, 1986)

7 Referring to Latour’s notion of “mediators” (Latour, 2000, pp.10-21), Nikolić explains the role of the participants of the Days of

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“AVNOJ” event through their willingness to travel to another country and bring with them a variety of memorial emblems. (See: Nikolić, 2013, p.24)

politics of forgetting – the massive destruction of “NOB” monuments and museums, during and right after the war – a group of people mobilized by “SUBNOR” and other anti-fascist associations from all Yugoslav successor states, often individually and in informal groups, organized a series of ritualized visits to WWII museums (memorial museums of the People’s Liberation Struggle) and through this act “turned them into – by using Hannah Arendt’s (1958) famous notion – places of appearance” (Nikolić, 2012, p.226). Their gatherings, bodily enactments, were documented by media reports, thus becoming visible to a broader spectrum of the public. The production of images implied creating a “call for the right to appear as Yugoslavs”, the embodiment of solidarity, demonstration of common memories. It is important to mention that these assemblies in museums were (and still are) performed during the so-called “transition period”, when official media and politicians worked with all their might on the demonization of socialist culture. Restored within the new contexts, these new “socialist pilgrimages” grew into a phenomenon that has yet to receive due scientific attention. Arguably, they have been partially ignored because they seem to be an “elusive” object of knowledge. The inability to define these gatherings stems from the paradoxical conditions in which they take place. When it comes to WWII commemoration events, regional anti-fascist associations do not co-operate in the sense that they create one representative body. There is no common urge to join in the fight against nationally motivated revisionists waves. In accordance with this, the commemoration of common partisan and anti-fascist struggles of WWII is played out by each group for itself, separately<sup>8</sup>, in museums and places that once were museums. Even though they use Yugoslav symbols – making them seemingly subversive in the new political circumstances – their gatherings, simultaneously celebrate the life and death of Yugoslavia. How, then, are we to understand the results of these gatherings, whose core lies in the repetition of the script about the

past in order to bind groups together, if they are simultaneously trying to appropriate the very right for solidarity in the struggle against the devastation of places of memory? Secondly, an important issue arises on the question of historical mediation: “Whose memories, traditions and claims to history disappear if performance practices lack the staying power to transmit vital knowledge” (Taylor, 2003, p.5)?

State and private media describe such “fragile” gatherings that are inconsistent in terms of the message that they proclaim, using only one word – “entering into the very definition of the people” (Butler, 2015, p.20) – and that is: Yugonostalgia. Enes Milak, who during the 2000’s thought and acted towards the reconstruction of the “AVNOJ” Museum, realized that this cultural performance, which revives old *scripts* and *roles*, can be used as a means to, in his words: “reduce national frictions in the region of ex-Yugoslavia”<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, by gathering intellectual and financial resources, he decided to invite precisely those people who had already began to revive the so called “partisan marches” to help in the reconstruction<sup>10</sup> of the “AVNOJ” Museum. Knowing that this group acted without a script and was willing to bring already revived rituals into the “AVNOJ” Museum, Milak decided to re-create the script according to which the ceremony of the celebration of 29 November would be performed in the “AVNOJ” Museum, just like in the past, and in which each Yugoslav successor state would take part by sending its delegation.

Fighting for the revival of the museum that was left without three quarters of its collection, the Committee for the restoration of the “AVNOJ” Museum was carrying out the principle of not only rebuilding the museum as it was in Yugoslavia, but also attempting to discover the mechanisms of knowledge production behind the museum’s

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8 After the breakup of Yugoslavia, SUBNOR split; each Yugoslav successor state has its own SUBNOR organisation, except that in Bosnia and Herzegovina there are two SUBNOR organizations, one that operates on the territory of the Federation and the other in Republika Srpska.

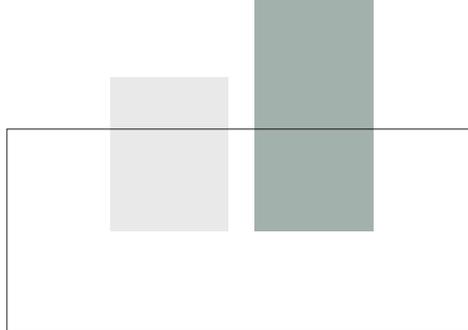
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9 From an email interview, I personally conducted with Enes Milak on 21 September 2012.

10 For details about the process and results of the restoration of the Museum of the Second Session of “AVNOJ” see the text “Museum (Re)public” (Jagdhuhn, 2016, pp.105-119).

eventness. The restored “AVNOJ” Museum as *metamuseum*<sup>11</sup> – museum within the museum – found its anchor in rituals, not objects. The scripts for performing museum rituals were taken from two sources: historical records, i.e. testimonies about the historic 1943 session, and the state ceremony script regarding Republic Day events in the “AVNOJ” Museum (1953-1990).

The renewed “AVNOJ” Museum opened its doors to the public in 2008 with a ritual like ceremony: the Days of “AVNOJ”, consisting of the following units: a commemorative act (the memorial laying of wreaths at the Fountain of Youth in commemoration of the town’s liberators), the “Solemn Academy”<sup>12</sup> in the museum, the educational program (visiting lectures, conferences, exhibitions) and entertainment programs (concerts in front of the museum and/or in the cultural center in Jajce). Thus, the “AVNOJ” Museum didn’t only reproduce its display and exhibition settings in a way that simulated how it looked in the Yugoslav period, but it also did so in the tradition of birthday celebrations – which meant the revival of the social choreography of the collective museum visit – something both museum workers and visitors wanted to continue doing. Therefore, “performing museology” (Kirschenblatt, 2000) as a curatorial strategy – aiming to make the museum medium transparent – is completed. By institutionalizing the celebration of the Yugoslav birthday began the brave venture to musealize intangible heritage – to treat performances as exhibitable sources of knowledge. On the other hand, by conceptualizing the permanent display from copies (of copies) or replicas (of replicas) – due to the fact that the museum, even in Yugoslav



times, lacked original objects – the performativity of material museum sources was revealed i.e. the question of the *roles* of museum objects was highlighted. Instead of the authenticity of originals, the “AVNOJ” Museum, then and today, transparently and unreservedly play(ed) the card of authentic experience that only an *in situ* museum as a *stage* for objects and rituals can offer.

What makes this double *heimatlos*<sup>13</sup> museum still a museum? What sort of knowledge is generated by the Days of “AVNOJ” as mnemonic device? What kind of knowledge is revealed by the museum’s performance of the Days of “AVNOJ” and the “AVNOJ” Museum as ‘metamuseum’ that could not be recognized, conveyed, or simply read out of historical documents lying in the museum showcases? “What tensions might performance behaviors show that might not be recognized in texts and documents?” (Taylor, 2003, p.XVIII).

In order to get answers to these questions it is necessary to solve the puzzle behind the scenario according to which the event takes place. In the following lines, I quote the script of the “Solemn Academy” held in the “AVNOJ” Museum as part of the ceremony on 29 November 2013:

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11 I use the term *metamuseum* in order to mark a shift in the functioning of the renewed “AVNOJ” Museum, which offers to its visitors not only the representation of the historical event 29 November 1943, but also – by applying the self-reflexive method – reveals the history of the musealisation and the ritualization of the historical event (Second “AVNOJ” Session), i.e. the history of the institutionalization of the “AVNOJ” Museum.

12 The script according to which the “Solemn Ceremony” will be held each year in the museum was conceptualized by Dijana Duzić (senior expert for information and protocol in the Jajce municipality). The role of the moderator in performing this script is very important. He or she have a chance to add something to the original blueprint; to re-write the script each year. As an actor, the moderator improvises on a set of thematic patterns.

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13 The term *Heimat* is a German word that denotes the relationship of a human being toward a certain spatial social unit. Allegedly, the word has no English equivalent. Simply put, *Heimat* could be translated as a “place of belonging” in a very broad sense. According to the definition of the term *Heimat* I mentioned, *heimatlos* would mean a broken relationship between individuals and its space of belonging. Applying this definition to the museum institution, the mentioned broken link between the community and the place of its identification, would be reflected in the discrepancy between the museum collection and the political constraints which museum-makers after the fall of communism (here precisely after Yugoslavia fell apart) are faced with. I use the word *heimatlos* museum in order to underline the epistemological break which “NOB” museums, and here particularly the “AVNOJ” Museum, have been exposed to. They lost their maker – the state, and the context and values they were built to display and keep.

### The Scenario "Solemn Ceremony" 2013

*The Host (for this occasion - Dževdet Tuzlić): "Memories have more sense the more we share them with a larger number of actors of the time which we are recalling or of the important events which marked that time. These days the esteemed philosopher and humanist Bernard Henry Levi, as a part of the commemoration of 70 years of ZAVNOBIH in Sarajevo, on receiving the title of honourable citizen of Sarajevo, said how this is the time when, paraphrasing him, fewer and fewer think about the partisans and the time when they laid the foundations of freedom. In the name of freedom and anti-fascism, one such historical act, the founding of the freedom of one state, took place in Jajce, exactly 70 years ago. Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed guests, respected and dear friends, heartfelt greetings and welcome to the manifestation "The Days of AVNOJ 2013".*

*- Hymn / brass band / "The Internationale"*

*Host: The second session of the AVNOJ (Anti-Fascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia) was held on 29th November 1943 here in Jajce, more exactly in the present-day Museum of the Second session of AVNOJ. This date has earned a special place in the history of antifascism. The second session of AVNOJ is an event which belongs to the historical tradition of Jajce, as well as of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region. Only by the preservation of the memory of key historical events on every inch of the earth's surface, the pledge is a clear historical perspective on a time which will be handed down by the coming generations and through which learning about the system of values and lessons of the past will be a special signpost for the perception of history which is written today, that which the victors will not write but rather historians and experts whose results will affect everyone regardless of world view, political persuasion, nation, religious orientation or skin colour. Today, 70 years later, gathered in Jajce, at the place where history was written by the holy struggle of the fighters of the People Liberation Struggle, at the place where the foundations of a new, common state of all the peoples and nationalities were laid, this jubilant gathering is a message and confirmation of the desire and conviction to make apparent the values which should be upheld, and the events which marked the history of this region. In the name of the hosts and organisers of this commemoration of the jubilant anniversary of second session of AVNOJ, I call up Josip Baotić, the president of the Society of the Anti-Fascist Fighters of the People's Liberation War of Bosnia and Herzegovina to give you his address.*

*- The address of Dr Professor Josip Baotić*

*Host: The building of the museum of the Second Session of AVNOJ in Jajce is declared a national cultural monument. The municipality of Jajce consciously upholding the historical significance through the support to the museum. The Society for the protection of cultural-historical and national values of Jajce, the Committee for the restoration of the Museum of the Second session of AVNOJ, the Association of antifascist fighters of NOR (People's Liberation War) of Jajce and other affiliated associations and state institutions, has restored the building which has especially delighted many followers of the historical past and significance of AVNOJ, who often visit the*

*museum and examine at the source the valuable remaining legacy from the days of AVNOJ and the tradition to which the documents and exhibits bear witness. It is well known that the permanent museum exhibition was damaged during the aggressions against Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992. All the work until now invested in the restoration have opened the door to support and help from concerned associations from the states which came into being on the space of the former Yugoslavia to help in the maintenance of the renovated museum exhibits, and so which contributes to enriching them. I call the mayor, Mr Edina Hozana, to address us in the name of the host city – the municipality of Jajce.*

*- The speech of the mayor of the municipality, Edin Hozan*

*Host: The Museum of the Second Session of AVNOJ in Jajce was founded in 1953 with the intention of preserving the collective memory of the contribution made by the people of South Eastern Europe to the victory over fascism; in Yugoslavia it was a significant cultural institution and tourist attraction of Jajce and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Everything points at this continuing, and the number of visitors to Jajce grows ever more each year, and a very big credit for this must be given to the Museum of AVNOJ. Jajce is a city in which states were born, in which kings held court, Great Empires fought over it. As the gate between the East and the West, and Bosnia and Herzegovina in its entirety, one can be proud of the historical past and historical treasure which remains in the city. For a long time all these historical facts should have been enumerated. Today's gathering is dedicated to the 29th November 1943. The books say that because of its central position in the division of the countries, connecting the free territory, the decision was made for Jajce – the Supreme Command decided: The Second Session of AVNOJ will be held in Jajce. Everyday life played itself out in the city. In the centre, there was a bunker in which to take shelter in air raids...; In the city was the Headquarters of the Supreme Command of the People's liberation army...; because of this danger of possible air raids it was decided that the session should last for only one night; the town was blacked out and only in the hall of the building, where today stands the Museum of the Second Session of AVNOJ, burnt dimmed light. The hall was adorned with the flags of Yugoslavia, America, England and the Soviet Union. At the foot of the table for the presidency was the first sketch of the new coat of arms of Yugoslavia. The painter Đorđe Andrejević-Kun had decorated the hall in vibrant colours and painted portraits of Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill. There were together 142 delegates in the hall. The doors had been thrown wide open to all citizens. Not far from and surrounding the building were put heavy anti-aircraft artillery in the case of an air raid. The town was blacked out at exactly 7.15 pm after which the hall was shut. Shutters were pulled down over the windows and in the interior burnt gentle lights which could not catch the attention of a possible air raid on the city. The Second Session of AVNOJ began about 7.20 pm with the hymn "Hey Sloveni" performed by the theatre choir of the People's liberation. The working part of the session was directed by the presidency made up from: Dr Vojislav Kecmanović, Dr Ivan Milutinović, Dr Sreten Zujović, Dr Josip Vidmar, Dr Pavle Gregorić, Dr Zlatan Sremec,*

Dr Sulejman Filipović and a Christian Orthodox priest from Krupnja Vlada Zečević. The Second Session of AVNOJ was opened by Dr Ivan Ribar as the president elected at the first AVNOJ session in Bihać, in 1942. The day before the session in Jajce, the 28th November was struck by disaster for Dr Ribar, the president of AVNOJ. His son, Ivo Lola Ribar, a member of the Supreme Command and the president of SKOJ (Young Communist League of Yugoslavia), was killed on the field of Glamoč. Only several weeks before Ribar's second oldest son Jurica had died in a fight with Chetniks in Kolašin. The newly elected marshal of Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito gave Dr Ribar the sad news immediately at the end of the session. In this way the former 'Falcon's House' entered into history, since the once German military barracks was in less than three weeks renovated and prepared for the session. Today it is the building of the museum which preserves the memory of one great historical event. Delegations of all the represented nations from all parts of Yugoslavia had come to this session in Jajce. Today with us in Jajce are the representatives of the SUBNOR (Veterans' Associations of Yugoslavia) of the Republic of Macedonia. I call Blagoje Zašova, the president of the Commission for the International cooperation of the Alliance of Fighters of Macedonia.

- The address of Blagoje Zašova

Host: Dr Ivan Ribar, Boris Kidrič and Dr Josip Vidmar had arrived from Slovenia. Straight away this delegation proposed that Josip Broz Tito should be awarded the title „The Marshall of Yugoslavia“. We greet the delegation of SUBNOR from the Republic of Slovenia which is led by Tit Turnšek, the president.

- The address of Tit Turnšek

Host: The delegation from Croatia was led by Dr Vladimir Bakarić, and in its footsteps have come smaller units from the XII Proletarian Brigade. With us today is the delegation of SUBNOR of the Republic of Croatia led by Jovan Vejnović. General Vinko Šunjara will address you:

- The address of Vinko Šunjara

Host: The greatest difficulties in getting here in 1943 were encountered by the delegates from Montenegro who had to travel 300 kms by foot, armed and under constant danger. It's not like that today. With us is the delegation of SUBNOR of the Republic of Montenegro led by prof. Dr. Ljubomir Sekulić, its president.

- The address of prof. Dr. Ljubomir Sekulić

Host: Hadži-Mehmed Mujkić on the podium at the session of AVNOJ, exactly 70 years earlier, spoke as the councillor from Bosnia. In the delegation were also Avdo Humo, Duro Pucar and Rodoljub Čolaković. The councillor Moša Pijade led the delegation of Serbia at the Second Session of AVNOJ. Today Slavko Mrkić, a member of the Central Committee of the Society for the Truth and NOR (The People's Liberation War) and Yugoslavia, will address you.

- The address of Slavko Mrkić

Host: At about 9 pm Josip Broz Tito stepped onto the podium. His address began with the words: „The creation of the antifascist committee of the people's liberation of Yugoslavia is precisely one of the greatest achievements of our nation's emancipatory struggle to this moment. The foundations have

been laid on which to build a new, just order in the countries of Yugoslavia, the foundations for a really true democratic, people's government" ...frequently interrupted by cheers, applause and shouts, Tito finished the address: "the fight of our nation and the great successes which have been achieved on the battle field with the help of the glorious people's liberation army and the youth movement of Yugoslavia have created for us a great sympathy from the whole advanced world, have created every motivation for our people to realise its goals – freedom, a truly democratic federal Yugoslavia." After Tito's hour long address from the podium Boris Kidrič, Pero Krstajić, Marko Vujačić, Dr Sulejman Filipović, Novak Mastilović, Luka Stević, Franc Ljubej, Vice Buljan, Rodoljub Čolaković and many others took their turns. In total 44 councillors gave their addresses from the podium. At exactly 11.45 pm Dr Ivan Ribar read to the delegates the resolutions of the Second Session of AVNOJ. These were the final minutes of the 29th November. The reading began before midnight, and so it was that the date of the historical decisions was 29th November 1943. That night, 70 years ago, the councillors of the Second Session of AVNOJ made their resolutions: the statebuilding decisions of AVNOJ reverberated through the whole country. For the wider groups mobilised in the people's liberation movement they were a new stimulus of added effort for the successful completion of the liberation war. The resolutions met with favourable approval in the allied and entirety of the democratic public of the world, as well as with the governments of the forces of the anti-Hitler coalition. The Second Session of AVNOJ was finished at 5 am with the folk dance 'Kolo'. Also with the song will we continue. I request a round of applause for our guests from Slovenia. I invite you to a concert of choral music at which will perform the mixed chamber choir „Carinthia Cantat“ from Slovenia (Gradec) and the Trža partisan singing choir „PINKO TOMAŽIČ“. Come back again next year.

- The performance of the „Carinthia Cantat“ from Slovenia (Gradec); the performance of the partisan singing choir „PINKO TOMAŽIČ“

Host: Valued friends, that was everything for this occasion. Bon Voyage to our dear guests. Thank you everyone once more for honouring today's celebration with your presence at which together we have evoked the memories of the Second Session of AVNOJ. A heartfelt farewell in the name of the hosts and organisers. My name is Dževdet Tuzlić and I wish you a pleasant stay in Jajce.

The central event – “Solemn Ceremony” – as it is read from the script cited above, is designed so that the parts of the famous historical scenario of the 1943 session is supplemented with a story about the fate of the “AVNOJ” Museum after the breakup of Yugoslavia. This is the method that was used as the dramaturgic setting of the celebration on 29 November at the museum during the Yugoslav period, when representatives of the political and academic elite were speaking from the historical “AVNOJ” speaker’s desk, trying to translate the significance of the historical date “29/11/1943” into the contemporary social context.

lectern or to participate in the music program. This is a unique opportunity when visitors can walk into the historic coulisse of the “AVNOJ” Museum’s stage and sit in Tito’s famous chair. Shouting, slogans, selfies, songs, and all possible forms of communication that are otherwise undesirable in conventional museum settings, are on this special date desirable and permissible. Costumed for this occasion, mostly in pioneer or partisan uniforms (something they were not instructed to do by the museum), parttakers of the celebration on 29 November demonstrate that they are equal instigators of the event conceived by the museum.

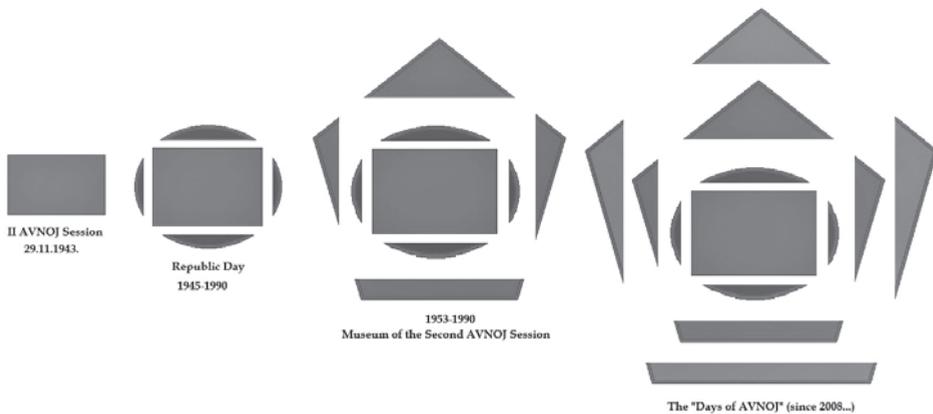


Diagram by Nataša Jagdhuhn

„How does performance transmit knowledge about the past in ways that allows us to understand and use it?” (Taylor, 2006, p.68).

As an episteme, the performance of the Days of “AVNOJ” found its purpose in the transmission of knowledge about a historical event (the Second “AVNOJ” Session) and its ritualization as memory practice. By taking part in the ceremony on 29 November the visitor has the opportunity to re-discover and use the medium of the “AVNOJ” Museum – “the relationship of what it *does* to what it is *about*” (Kirschenblatt 2000). Although this is a theater-like situation, the museum visitors are not silent eyewitnesses who applaud as they would in a classical theater situation. On the contrary, they are given the opportunity to supplement the ceremony program with their own speeches from the historical

“In order to create authenticity, many brought with them ‘emotionally loaded’ items, such as emblems of the Slovenian partisans or flags of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia” (Nikolić, 2013, pp.22-24). They do not consider the museum as just a stage, but as part of the performance.

“Seeing and being seen, embodied and performative interaction” (Christidou and Diamantopoulou, 2016, p.12-32) between the museum object or the architecture and the museum visitor, as well as between the visitors themselves, results in applause in front of the museum, singing and dancing partisan folk songs at the entrance of the museum, greeting museum items, especially the famous bust of Tito with the partisan salute: the fist on the forehead. Like in some sort of documentary theatre, they “perform both as themselves and as the actual



Photograph by Nataša Jagdhuhn

personages they represent” (Martin, 2010, p.19). Their right to appear as Yugoslavs after Yugoslavia, seems only possible in such a museum whose prior “regime of truth” (Foucault, 1980, p.131) is re-staged. The Days of “AVNOJ” performance enables an epistemological space of simultaneously displayed and performed *histories* enacted by the museum audience. Tangible and intangible sources of knowledge interact and merge into “memory acts as performative cultural practices and quotations” (Hobuß, 2011, p.3).

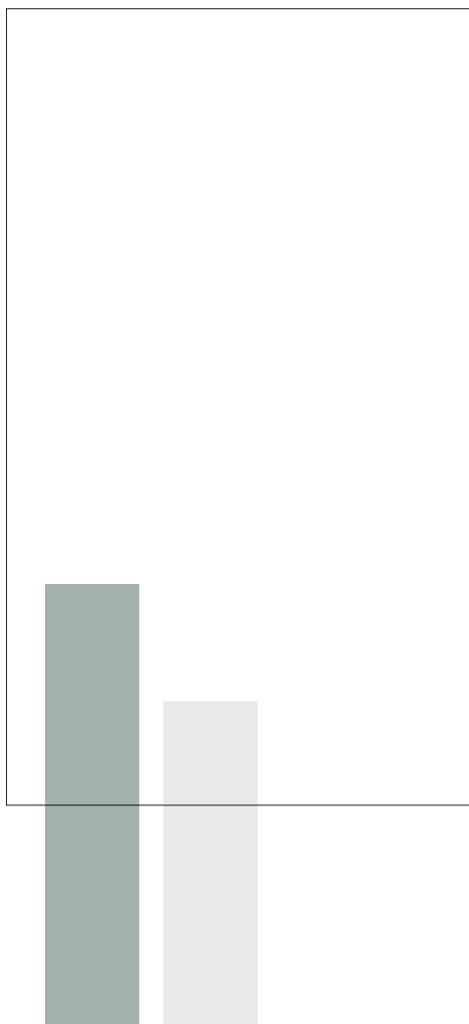
Many of those “actors” were visitors of the “AVNOJ” Museum in both countries: Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Museum visits once simply ‘done’, are now performed. In this way, the collective visit to the museum as “twice behaved behaviour” (Schechner, 1985), becomes publically displayed as the performance – the Days of “AVNOJ”.

Keeping in mind, that there is no historical consensus in the region of South East Europe concerning Yugoslav heritage, and especially World War Two heritage, we are called upon to question whether there is any other way to convey the idea of *uprooted* heritage than for it to be performed.

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## THE MUSEUM AS MEDIATOR OF MEMORY

### Dealing With Nostalgia at the Museum of Yugoslav History

#### Abstract

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*The Museum of Yugoslav History (MYH) was formed by merging the Memorial Centre “Josip Broz Tito” and the Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Nations and Ethnic Minorities in 1996 and is situated on the grounds of the official residence of lifelong president of Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito. Within its premises is the House of Flowers where Tito is buried. Even though the MYH has been in existence since 1996, it was still perceived within community as a Memorial Centre dedicated to Tito and has been dealing with identity issues concerning the discrepancy between the name of the institution and its content/collection thus investing great effort towards developing (new and) different audiences.*

*This paper will focus on three events dealing with nostalgia, memory and remembrance at the Museum of Yugoslav History that preceded the conference “Nostalgia on the Move”. The aim is to offer insight into the process of institutional self-reflection regarding the Museum’s position in*

*the community and relationship with its audience, their memories and commemorating practices performed at this specific site (MYH). Special attention has been devoted to the celebration of the Day of Youth and the significance of relay batons as artifact of importance for memory and remembrance in the Yugoslav framework.*

*The process is presented from a critical perspective, at the same time considering the challenges the Museum has been facing in its dealings with ethical and conceptual issues. This process led not only to our changing our audience approach, but also resulted in a more balanced and open program policy that takes into account visitors’ points of view, opinions and feelings. Moreover, it helped museum experts focus their attention to still living (Yugoslav) heritage and allowed them to redefine the Museum’s concept that broadened the scope of research and existing collecting policies, thus including phenomena (such as nostalgia) that occurred following the demise of the Yugoslav state.*

## Introduction

The Museum of Yugoslav History (MYH, hereafter)<sup>1</sup> is one of the key *sites of Yugoslav memory*.<sup>2</sup> Its premises include the House of Flowers where Josip Broz Tito was buried. The MYH attracts many visitors and curious tourists but also numerous admirers of Tito who still commemorate dates that were venerated and celebrated in Socialist Yugoslavia (particularly the dates of Tito's birth and death).

My interest in this phenomenon began when I was appointed curator of the relay baton collection in 2010. The batons are the most recognizable symbol of the practice of giving gifts to Josip Broz Tito. Relay races began in 1945 and were held in honor of his birthday. Every year, the baton was



Relay race through Yugoslavia, 1962  
From the MYH collection

1 The Museum of Yugoslav History preserves, researches and interprets the cultural heritage of Yugoslavia. The museum complex comprises 3 venues that used to be part of the Memorial Centre Josip Broz Tito (the Museum "May 25", the "House of Flowers" and the "Old Museum"). The largest part of the collection consists of gifts that Tito received from statements, prominent citizens and the peoples of Yugoslavia.

2 Sites of memory – its origin lies in the works of Maurice Halbwachs. It was only applied later by French culturalist Pierre Nora. Sites of memory/remembrance are to be understood metaphorically – they are not confined to physical places, but include personalities, events, and buildings. Such places of memory exist in the production and reproduction of social groups sharing remembrance. They are "long living points of crystallization of collective memory and identity".

handed off between participants in a relay across Yugoslavia, finally being handed over to Tito on May 25 (his birthday). Receiving, carrying and handing off the baton was a form of establishing symbolic communication between the leader and his people. In 1957, Tito's baton became the *Youth Baton* and Tito's birthday, May 25, was declared a new/Yugoslav holiday, also known as the *Day of Youth*. The ritual of carrying the baton ended with the central event – mass games held at the Yugoslav People's Army Stadium in Belgrade.

The baton collection is one of the most challenging at the Museum since it is the largest (20,000 pieces in total), but least evaluated (researched). It is the most peculiar of all MYH's collections, because the baton is at once the most characteristic and most controversial object connected with Yugoslavia and its lifelong president Josip Broz Tito. For many people (especially visitors of this Museum) the baton has remained a metaphor for Yugoslavism to this very day. For others, it is one of the most recognizable and most effective instruments in building Tito's personality cult. The traits, symbolism and significance of the baton distinguish it from numerous other gifts that Tito received throughout his life from various organizations, groups of workers, associations and individuals.<sup>3</sup> The *Day of Youth* in Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was but one expression among several forms of *secular religion*, and the batons that are part of the MYH's collection are an element of one of the most important political rituals in (socialist) Yugoslavia.

More than three decades after Tito's death and two decades after the breakup of Yugoslavia, the celebration (i.e. spontaneous "revival" of the *Day of Youth* tradition) is still very much alive. Even though it is no longer organized on a state level, it continues

3 The overall collection was created by merging the collections of the Memorial Centre Josip Broz Tito and the Museum of the Revolution. The complexity of Yugoslav heritage and its historization within MYH is problematized in the exhibition, *The Storeroom Opens*, which is a part of work on the permanent exhibition, questioning the existing collections in the context of the Museum of Yugoslavia and deals with identity issues concerning the discrepancy between form and content, (i.e. the name of the institution in relation to its contents, the collection).



Celebration of the Day of Youth, the Yugoslav National Army Stadium (YNA), May 25, 1962  
From the MYH collection

to be nurtured among individual memory-keepers and their associations.

When I first witnessed the celebration of the *Day of Youth* six years ago, I was surprised by the fact that every year, on this day – May 25 – people were still visiting the *House of Flowers*, were leaving their batons on Tito's grave and organizing events in front of the MYH. For a couple of years Tito's grandson Joška Broz participated in these events, figuring as Tito's legitimate heir, thus promoting his own political party. The program his party organized on the plateau in front of the Museum included a combination of political speeches, musical and theatrical performances (performances of folklore associations etc.). He even received relay batons from participants of this event, before the participants of this manifestation would place them on Tito's grave consequently shedding a completely new and different light on the event.

At the same time, I was also aware of there being different opinions and feelings coming from within the Museum regarding the phenomenon of nostalgia

and more specifically Yugonostalgia, including how they should be dealt with. Museum curators as well as the rest of the museum team were extremely divided in their opinions on this issue. Although this topic became the subject of many serious researches and studies by sociologists, anthropologists, historians, and within the field of cultural and political studies etc. (Boym, 2001; Kuljić, 2006; Velikonja, 2008; etc.), it was not recognized and present in the Museum research and program activities. There were a couple of reasons for that. One of them can be observed in the shortage of museum staff;<sup>4</sup> however, at that time there was also a tendency within the Museum to distance itself from this event,<sup>5</sup> and some of the reasons for this were, to a certain extent, understandable. Even though the MYH has been in existence since 1996, it was still perceived within community as a Memorial Centre dedicated to Tito (the previous

4 Until 2010 there were only 4 curators at the museum that were responsible for almost all aspects of museum work.

5 Some of the museum employees thought that the museum should make a clear dissociation from 'Yugo-nostalgic' and 'Tito-stalgic' visitors who visit the Museum on May 4 (the day of Tito's death) and May 25 (the day of Tito's birth).



Newly-arrived batons on Tito's grave, May 25, 2011  
From the MYH archive

institution wherefrom it inherited its facilities and overall collection). Thus, the MYH invested great effort towards further improvement and lessening the gap created between the Museum and its name and concept, therefore also paving the way for (new and) different audiences. Finally, this was also a way to dissociate from the political speeches of Joška Broz and his instrumentalisation of the *Day of Youth* for the promotion of his own political party.

Additionally, criticism directed towards the MYH predominantly concerning the ethical aspects of this approach, maintained its own legitimacy. For example, one of the arguments was that the participants of this event, although incorporated in annual statistics of museum visit, were completely disregarded when it came to program materials published on the Museum's official web site and that, even though the Museum organized certain events (mostly art performances), they were too elitist and totally inappropriate for the community gathering at the Museum on that day. (Adić, 2013)

Even if lacking in general consent on whether we should be keeping the newly-arrived batons brought by certain participants in this event, I thought that it was important to keep this type of artifact and document the process itself (by taking

photographs of the celebration in front of the "May 25" Museum and in the House of Flowers). Soon, with the help of my colleagues (anthropologists) we turned to empirical research of the visitors and their practices with regard to the *Day of Youth*. The aim was to keep record of ongoing transformations of this former holiday, and at the same time re-establish the relationship with our visitors, to question and improve our programs. A long term research project that followed provided a framework for the continuous research and deliberation of this phenomenon, as well as the organization of debates, exhibitions, conferences, etc.

## I Roundtable: May 25 and the Museum of Yugoslav History Today<sup>6</sup> [The Amphitheater in front of the "May 25" Museum]

This was the first public debate on the topic that aimed to problematize the position of the Museum and its relationship to the audience/visitors linked to this particular date. The roundtable was organized

<sup>6</sup> The roundtable May 25 and the Museum of Yugoslav History Today was held on 25th May 2013. The moderator was Marija Đorgović with participants, which included: Ljiljana Gavrilović (PhD), Ana Sladojević (PhD), Višnja Kisić (MA), Vesna Adić (MA).

on the afternoon of May 25, 2013 after the end of the main celebration, but there were still a lot of visitors present. We, the participants of the round table, were sitting outside, close to the amphitheater, so the visitors also had the opportunity to join in the discussion, which was especially important because it connected people who usually do not interrelate and made the debate more informal and spontaneous.

The main question was: should the MYH participate in this “celebration” and in what way (by organizing special programs, events, etc.). The conclusions of the roundtable summed up and ascertained key issues around the topic.

- The roundtable stressed and reminded that we cannot forget that the MYH is concurrently *a museum and a site of memory*.
- That there is a difference between visitors and audience(s). The people who come on May 25 are not part of the museum audience, and they do not frequent the Museum of Yugoslav History, but come to Tito’s grave; these individuals have been ‘inherited’ from the previous institution that, to be more to the point, did not have an actual audience; it had visitors – tourists and, so to speak, *pilgrims* (Tito’s admirers; people who come to pay homage to him).
- The people who come to the MYH each May 25 do not have a problem with (their) identity. The MYH has a problem with its identity.
- It was also mentioned that the Museum cannot reach the level of authenticity supported by the narratives that appear in a non-institutional context and are created by people who come to the MYH.
- Opinions were divided on the issue of MYH participation. Some of the speakers and participants thought that the Museum should prepare special programs/activities/events annually, specifically on this date, but there was also the notion that the Museum should not interfere or do anything to preserve the

*authenticity of the ceremony itself* (for the researchers); most particularly that it should not send any “wrong” messages to the public by recognizing or supporting this event. The fact remained, however, that even by doing nothing, the Museum was nevertheless doing something.

In summary, the problematic and ambiguous relationship of the MYH towards the May 25 date and its current form of unofficial (popular) celebration, stems from unresolved conceptual and identity problems of the MYH itself. It is also a reflection of the unresolved and conflictual relationship of the overall society in regard to the socialist period and Yugoslavia. It appeared that it would have been much more helpful if we had questioned how the Museum should define itself and its relationship with various communities.

What is particularly important about this round table is that it gave legitimacy to a different approach to this topic. It became obvious how important it is for us, as a museum, to reflect on this phenomenon, how deeply we are involved in this process, and that we cannot simply ignore this situation, but have to deal with it. It definitely opened a niche for further research and dealings with this topic, with the aim of creating a long-term research strategy, as well as programs, events and exhibitions referring to this specific date.

## II Program: The Present of the Past<sup>7</sup> [The “May 25” Museum]

Encouraged by this roundtable, the following year we suggested the *Present of the Past* program based on reflections and experiences gained through research of this date over the course of years. It had been designed so that it fully respected the visitors and their need to mutually communicate on that day and share their memories, but also to

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<sup>7</sup> The program was planned for May 25, 2014, but was never realized due to a state of emergency being declared due to floods. However, some of its elements would be incorporated in the future exhibition in the House of Flowers.

allow the Museum to review this date in a way that is consistent with our strategic goals, museological standards and professional ethics. The purpose of the *Present of the Past* program had been to test certain research and interpretative methods, and to create conditions for the further study of modern ways of commemorating May 25.

One of the goals of the program had been, among other things, to review whether and how the usual iconography and structure of the visitors, as well as their standard trajectory (from the plateau in front of the “May 25” Museum to the House of Flowers) changed depending on program contents and “interventions” on part of the Museum. Were we able to meet the needs of MYH visitors and at the same time attract a different audience that is not motivated by this date emotionally or through personal memories, by means of a careful

combination of participatory and interactive, as well as other types of programs?

A few examples are in order as illustration:

- **Your Memories** was supposed to offer visitors the opportunity to communicate their memories of Tito and Yugoslavia on this specific date, positioning the Museum as a place for collecting and preserving those memories, which we considered an indispensable source of knowledge for future research and program concepts.
- **Open Storage** is a segment showcasing everyday activities of curators including cataloguing and analyzing objects; it is an opportunity for visitors to discover how the batons are interpreted in the context of museums and cultural heritage; visitors are also allowed to touch certain batons and share their memories.



*Open Storage* showcasing everyday activities of curators including cataloguing and analyzing batons  
From the MYH archive

- **A video installation** in the central hall on the first floor of the "May 25" Museum aimed to combine archival footage of people carrying batons and mass games during the 1960s, as well as footage showing May 25 celebrations today, with special emphasis on Kumrovec and Belgrade. The idea was to show these two different temporal moments (past and present) 'in real time' using live broadcasts of people entering and visiting the Museum at that specific moment, so that everyone could see this ritual in a new and different political, social and cultural context.

### III

## Exhibition: *Figures of Memory*

[The House of Flowers]

Concurrently with research of the *Day of Youth*, within the Museum there emerged discussions concerning the *House of Flowers*: should this building be a part of the MYH and what content is deemed appropriate for it?

The House of Flowers is the most visited museum building of the MYH complex. It is known as Tito's mausoleum,<sup>8</sup> but it was not actually built for that purpose. It was built in 1975, as a winter garden, in the close vicinity to Josip Broz Tito's official residence.<sup>9</sup> It is there that Broz spent the last three years of his life. Tito's funeral, held on May 8 in the House of Flowers<sup>10</sup> was one of the biggest state funerals of the 20th century, which is why, among other things, this place is particularly intriguing for tourists and Tito's admirers as well. In 1982, the House of Flowers became the central part of the "Josip Broz Tito" Memorial Centre's vast grounds and its status as part of the Museum of Yugoslav History has remained the same.

As Tito's mausoleum, this space (House of Flowers) requires a thoughtful and carefully considered display. Certain contents, intended for other exhibition spaces, cannot be set-up here (out of respect for the persons buried there). Due to this, making an exhibition and choosing adequate content for the House of Flowers is always a big challenge for the MYH team.

With regard to visitors' expectations<sup>11</sup>, the most preferable content would include information on Tito himself, his biography, and the presentation of his personal belongings or the 'gifts' he received during the course of his rule. In reality, however, the attempt to make an exhibition based on Tito's biography failed. Problems occurred concerning conceptual and presentational aspects, as well as the exhibition's rhetoric. Namely, this exhibition was in preparation for a long time and included an interdisciplinary team of external historians and museum curators<sup>12</sup>, but due to previously mentioned reasons the project was never fully realized. Some of the materials gathered for that exhibition were published (Marković, 2015) and, as it turned out, this was a more convenient form of their presentation.

For the purpose of offering visitors certain new content in the House of Flowers (the previous exhibition in this building lasted 7 years) the Museum decided to abandon the idea of a permanent exhibition and keep changing exhibitions on an annual basis. At first the safest option (from the perspective of the average House of Flowers visitor) was chosen: the exhibition *Up Close and Personal with Tito*,<sup>13</sup> set up in 2014, provided a glimpse into Tito's private life in order to show what kind of a person Josip Broz Tito was in his everyday life and how his activities as a

8 Tito's wife, Jovanka Broz was buried in the House of Flowers in 2013.

9 A fountain, surrounded by flowers, used to stand at the centre of the building, while the rooms along the sides were used for work and relaxation.

10 It was attended by highest-ranking delegations, 80 state delegations and 60 delegations of political parties.

11 Over the last few years the MYH has been conducting empirical research of museum audiences and their expectations and wishes regarding museum contents.

12 The MYH curatorial team included Veselinka Kastratović Ristić and Ana Panić, as well as external associates, historians Predrag Marković (PhD) and Vladimir Petrović (PhD).

13 Exhibition curators included museum associates Momo Cvijović and Veselinka Kastratović Ristić.



Batons given by various individuals and groups (pioneers, youth, workers, members of different leagues and associations etc.) and triptych juxtaposing images of the Day of Youth celebration in three different contexts at the exhibition Figures of Memory, 2015  
From the MYH archive

statesman influenced his leisure time.<sup>14</sup> The success of this exhibition is supported by the number of visitors, the comments of tourist guides, and by the fact that the Trip Advisor travel website awarded the MYH its certificate of excellence. However, the main issue arising from this was that, for certain reasons, the Museum was not critical in its approach and that this space continued to figure as a memorial center addressing visitors of the former institution (i.e. The Josip Broz Memorial Centre).

The year 2015 marked the 35th anniversary of the death of Josip Broz Tito and the 70th anniversary of the first relay race. MYH curators suggested the following programs for the occasions: an exhibition about the baton collection and the Day of Youth, and an exhibition on the written messages from the House of Flowers Condolence and Memorial Books. These ideas were merged into a joint concept and exhibition to be set up in the House of Flowers. This turned out to be a great challenge and perfect opportunity to connect these artifacts (memorial

books and batons) and related commemorative practices performed on May 4 and May 25, thus testing all proposed methods and approaches, which would be brought to their materialization in the House of Flowers.<sup>15</sup>

## The Content of the Exhibition

The exhibition spans the period before and after Tito's death, from 1945 to 2014, and includes a segment dedicated to his funeral and consists of three entities.

The first segment is dedicated to the period from 1945 to 1980 (when Tito was the president of Yugoslavia), and it focuses on the batons sent to Josip Broz to mark the May 25 date. The display showcases around 200 batons given by various individuals and groups whose identity is clearly visible in the design of the baton: pioneers, youth, members of different leagues and associations, peasants, people living in various towns and villages,

<sup>14</sup> The visitors could see decorations and other honours awarded to Tito, his personal items, formal dress, uniforms, souvenirs from his travels and some of the gifts he received, both from other statesmen and the people throughout Yugoslavia.

<sup>15</sup> Exhibition curators included Vesna Mikelić, Radovan Cukić and Marija Đorgović

workers employed at different companies, veterans and military servicemen.<sup>16</sup> Certain elements of *The Past of the Present* program were also incorporated into the display. For example, the video installation juxtaposing images of the Day of Youth celebration in three different contexts.<sup>17</sup> The segment *Open Storage* was also very interesting for visitors, so it became a regular activity in this object (organized once a week).

The central area of the building where Tito is buried is dedicated to his funeral in 1980 and the years immediately after his death. It consists of around two hundred photos and *condolence book* entries made by heads of state, ambassadors, presidents and citizens.<sup>18</sup> Numerous telegrams, letters and condolence notes kept pouring in from all over the world at the news of the death of Josip Broz Tito. Statesmen, kings, members of the diplomatic corps, representatives of political parties, public institutions, celebrities, Yugoslav workers, young people and citizens at large paid their respects to



Memorial Room where notes/messages were written  
From the MYH archive

16 The persons and organizations in question were participants in this authentic practice of envisioning, designing and manufacturing numerous batons.

17 It was a combination of the archive footage of people carrying batons and mass games during 1960s, as well as the footage showing May 25 celebrations today in Kumrovec (Tito's birth town) and Belgrade (the House of Flowers where Tito's grave is). The idea was to use the live broadcast of people entering and visiting the House of Flowers, but we had to abandon it due to technical problems, which reflected on its communicative potential.

18 These books were opened in towns and places throughout Yugoslavia, in Yugoslav embassies and consulates, Yugoslav clubs, associations, cultural centers and schools worldwide. The first of many condolence books was opened in the National Assembly of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in Belgrade.

Josip Broz by signing *condolence books*.

The third entity, referring to the period after Tito's death, features an interactive multimedia presentation of the notes and messages left by individuals and social groups.<sup>19</sup> In this part of the exhibition, there is also the *Memorial Room* where notes/and messages were written. It was set up in 1982 when the Memorial Centre "Josip Broz Tito" was founded, and it was intended for foreign delegations. It consists of the original furniture and items that Tito used, referring to the period when Tito lived there.<sup>20</sup> The custom of signing the *memorial book* has survived to this day.

Besides these written messages, a very important part of the exhibition is its timeline, which offers the necessary historical context of the mentioned period. In the room which demonstrates the time after Tito's death, this chronology is supported by a graph showing the approximate number of visitors (in the House of flowers), and connecting it with a particular political and historical context.<sup>21</sup>

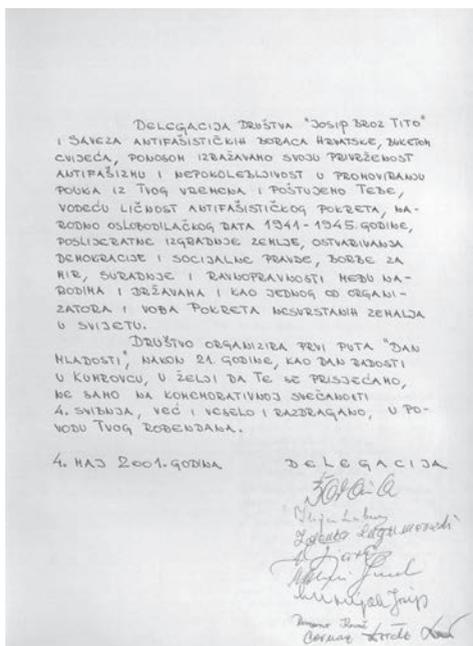
## The Concept and Exhibition Design

The concept of the exhibition is based on the theoretical framework of Maurice Halbwachs (1950) and Jan Assman (2005) and their understanding of the terms *memory* and *remembrance*, as well as the introduction of the term *figures of memory* (Assman,

19 They originate primarily from the *memorial books*, kept from 1982 to the present. *Guest books* containing notes left by citizens, groups of workers, associations and young people from all over the world and the former Yugoslavia, namely, today's neighbouring countries, and are also an important part of this section of the display.

20 The notes were written at Broz's desk (which became a part of the Memorial Room after his death).

21 During the period when the largest number of people came to the House of Flowers – since 1982, when the Memorial Centre *Josip Broz Tito* was founded, until the 1990s – electronic people counters were used to keep count of visits. In the 1990s, during the breakup of the country, the number of visits significantly decreased, rising again after the Museum of Yugoslav History was established in 1996 and especially after 2000 (since when the number of visitors has been rising progressively).



Entries made in the *memorial books* and *guest books* from the MYH collection

2005, p.44).<sup>22</sup> The exhibition was conceived with the aim of *making visible (showing)* the mechanisms of collective memory and offering an innovative way of interpreting the museum collections, archival materials and documentary videos, at the same time linking them to the present moment.

By interpreting rituals from the era of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which have survived to this day, as well as the role of the written word, objects and facilities belonging to the Museum of Yugoslav History today, the exhibition explores the way different social groups create and maintain the memory of Yugoslavia and Tito.

The materialization of memories regarding Josip Broz and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia began with signing the *condolence book*, opened in May 1980 on the occasion of Tito's funeral, and

continued through entries made in *memorial books* and *guest books*.<sup>23</sup> The enduring tradition of leaving messages together with the changing nature of these messages, highlight their importance in the process of creating and maintaining collective memory, as well as the perception of Tito and Yugoslavia. The practice of addressing Tito posthumously is perceived as an extension of a practice that was widespread throughout his life in the form of messages addressed to him personally as inscriptions on gifts kept at the Museum of Yugoslav History today. The most explicit examples are batons - types of gifts whose most important feature is the message itself.

The exhibition is in fact a set design (in which museum visitors, as well as museum curators and other museum staff also "play their role" as an integral part of the set-up) with a very reduced but clear and established concept and visual identity that looks more like some site-specific art installation than a classical museum display. The exhibition was designed to suggest and provoke, even evoke a sense of wonder, and not indoctrinate. It is less informative and more performative. The conceptual approach of *work in progress* (already an endemic phenomenon in artistic and curatorial practice, however not as widespread in museum practice), was chosen with a purpose. It refers to its dynamic (not static) processual character reflected in *re-creating the exhibition space* (House of Flowers) by visitors, the main conveyors of memory and active participants in its reproduction, and is represented by:

- the ritual circulation through the House of Flowers, which has been taking place for more than three decades, and is visually conveyed by huge photographs depicting people in procession / lines of people all over the interior or people standing at Tito's funeral in front of the House of Flowers;
- the ongoing tradition of leaving messages, visible

<sup>22</sup> Jan Assman (2005) defines *figures of memory* as "culturally formed, societally binding *images of memory*" – a term used already by Halbwachs. Assman prefers the term "figure", because it means not only iconographic shaping, but narrative, as well – implying figures of speech. "Figures of memory" have a specific relationship to time and space as well as a particular social group.

<sup>23</sup> This exhibition also worked towards gathering all those materials for their digitization, thus making them available for future research and use. Condolence books, memory books and guest books are recognized as a valuable source of research on this topic/phenomenon maybe for the first time, which led to their systematization, digitization and finally presentation within exhibition *Figures of Memory*.



"Ritual" circulation through the House of Flowers , 1980  
From the MYH archive



The "ritual" circulation through the House of Flowers reenacted over the decades, 2015  
From the MYH archive

through “live performances” in the Memorial Room (which is an integral part of the exhibition), and by means of entries made in the *memorial books* and *guest books*; as well as (ongoing tradition of) leaving batons on Tito’s grave on May 25;

- the social interaction between visitors (community) on this site, especially on certain dates (May 4 and May 25).

## Challenges of the Exhibition and its Reception

This theme and conceptual approach confused many, so reactions from the very beginning were diverse. Not only did visitors expect something completely different, but the reception of the exhibition among the Museum’s professionals also varied. Some of my colleagues still disapprove of this kind of approach and as for tourist guides and some of the visitors, they were extremely unsatisfied. I dare say some of them were in shock, constantly asking about Tito’s personal belongings and gifts. This reaction was exaggerated by the fact that due to many circumstances at the moment of opening, this was the only exhibition on offer in the whole museum complex, although it was conceptualized for the one facility in congruence with the exhibitions in other venues within the museum.

However, this exhibition was/is important for several reasons:

- The exhibition raises the question: *What is the function of the House of Flowers today*. Innovation lies in the interpretation and perception of the space and the fact that it offers another approach that focuses on the current moment.
- The House of Flowers itself is in the *process of musealization*. The focus is removed from Tito’s person to the House of Flowers building itself and the commemorative practices related to this site.
- By juxtaposing two commemorative practices that take place on this specific heritage site – one

related to the celebration of Tito’s birthday (Day of Youth), and the other to Tito’s death (May 4), those rituals, reenacted over the decades, can now be seen in a new political, social and cultural context.

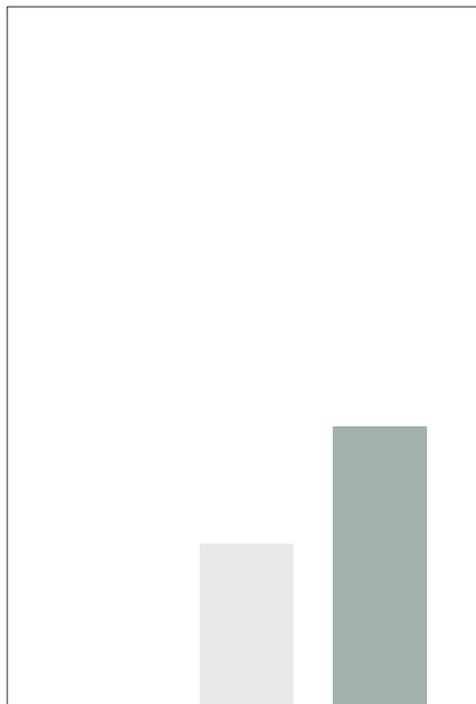
- It introduces the museum visitor as constitutive element in the process of remembrance. What we wanted to show was that visitors play an active role in the production of memory. We tried to look at the House of Flowers as mediator of that memory.

## Instead of a Conclusion

The last activity involved the research of expressions and meanings behind Yugoslavia’s “living heritage”(UNESCO, 2016) in the form of the conference *Nostalgia on the move*. The idea behind the conference was to create a space for discussion on the topics of memory, remembrance and nostalgia with a wider community of experts in the field. It was obvious that the problems and dilemmas we were facing within the museum – concerning questions how to approach these issues, whether and how to include audiences into the dialogue and provoke them to take part in questioning, as well as thinking about the meaning of the commemorating practices – was not significant for the isolated case of one museum, but symptomatic for a much wider set of questions involving the ways societies remember and relate to their contested and somewhat neglected recent histories. The conference was thus an opportunity to create conditions for a broader, but at the same time focused debate about the importance of researching the phenomenon similar to the Day of Youth celebrations in comparative perspective and from the standpoints of different disciplines.

This long process of research and institutional self-reflection that was in many different ways inclusive and open to the audience and professional community resulted in a different museological approach and influenced also the new museum

concept,<sup>24</sup> which acknowledges that topics of memory and nostalgia should be an compulsory part of our future researches and programs in order to gain better understanding of the Yugoslav experience, Yugoslavia and it's (still living) heritage.



24 In 2016 the Museum of Yugoslav History became the Museum of Yugoslavia. The initiative to change the name results from the aim to change and re-focus research scope and musealization towards an array of different phenomena that signify Yugoslav heritage and the Yugoslav experience; phenomena that have been already recognised in current museum practice. Areas of research are still concentrated around the periods of the existence of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and Socialist Yugoslavia – state frameworks of all Yugoslav peoples in the twentieth century, which (in different ways) tried to create a Yugoslav identity. Attention has now also moved to the evolution of ideas of Yugoslavia, from the first organised events in mid-nineteenth century until their crystallization in 1918, as well as the social, cultural and identity formations that remain after the political disappearance of Yugoslavia.

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## ON NOSTALGIA AND RELATED MATTERS

### **What is the official narrative about the communist period in contemporary Russia?**

Officially, there is no official narrative on this theme. Unofficially, the communist period was supposed to have been great and glorious – as any other part of the great and glorious history of this great and glorious country.

As one journalist recently remarked: If in 1917, the Great Russian Revolution destroyed the Great Russian Empire, wasn't there something wrong with either the Empire or the Revolution?

### **What narratives are chosen by official institutions when remembering the communist period? And what are the forbidden or neglected ones?**

There is the Big Soviet Narrative created by the regime to justify itself, which is still very powerful. Its power comes from ideological sources, such as texts by Marx, Lenin or Stalin, but also from numerous works of art created during the seventy years of Soviet rule by the best Soviet authors, artists, musicians, filmmakers, actors, journalists, etc. Justifying the Soviet system and lifestyle was the main condition for them to remain in the profession and not be crushed by the regime.

On the other hand, there is a morally and politically engaged narrative condemning the Soviet regime as the one based on terror and violence, invoking the Gulag, etc. Obviously, the two narratives are incompatible. However, many institutions manage to offer visitors a mixture of the two, and, somehow, to get away with it.

Some museums offer narratives presenting unofficial or underground culture that existed in

Soviet times. Others just tell stories embedded in Soviet reality. There are also museums declaring an apolitical attitude and dealing with the Soviet past in the same way an ethnologist would deal with the culture of an exotic tribe.

### **How did the attitude towards the communist period change in the past decades (Gorbachev, Yeltsin, Putin rule)?**

It changed dramatically.

Gorbachev was a peacemaker and always tried to make the transition as smooth as possible, to reconcile the 'capitalist' and 'socialist' values. (This is how Francis Fukuyama came up with his 'End of History' mantra: having heard Gorbachev say in an interview that the essence of socialism was competition, he told his friend, 'This is the end of history'.) Nevertheless, Gorbachev abolished censorship, which made possible the publication of Solzhenitsyn and, generally, revision of the Soviet regime.

Yeltsin was a resolute reformer. His rule was Russia's 'golden age of liberalism' both in the economic and in the social and cultural sphere. In the 1990s, all sorts of alternative narratives in interpreting Soviet history started to develop. What he did not do, though – just because he was busy doing other things – he did not dismantle the old Stalinist cultural machine, a ready-made instrument of propaganda – the system of cultural institutions that kept reproducing the Big Soviet Narrative.

When the political backlash occurred with the advent of Putin, it was easy to declare: look, we know how

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\* The interview was conducted on 22 February 2017 by Mirjana Slavković, MY Curator / Edition Editor

you suffered in the 1990s under the liberal regime, we will rescue you; we will take you back to the blessed times of Soviet rule. The new government could say that and switch Soviet films on TV – the Big Soviet Narrative was there waiting for those for whom the changes were too radical, too rapid, who were ready to become nostalgic about the past. It was easy then to explain that Soviet Russia was not a deviation, it was a continuation of the Russian Empire because the main thing about both was that the country was great and glorious. So be it great and glorious now.

This is all about the transition from one identity to another. If we knew what sort of country we want to create, than we would be able to say what the difference is between this country and Soviet Russia. We thought we knew in what direction we were going in the 1990s, but we don't know that now, not any more.

**There are many researches that speak about the presence of nostalgia for the USSR. Do you think nostalgia could have emancipatory potential offering the capacity to question today's reality or is it, rather, a passive sentiment?**

I am certain that triggering all this nostalgia has been a clever political game. Some people have been only happy to get involved in that game, though. I don't believe in the 'emancipatory potential' of nostalgia. There is nothing wrong about nostalgia if it stays within the boundaries of private life; we can all be nostalgic about something from time to time. But this is a different sort of nostalgia; it becomes an instigated political process with a clear purpose. The ultimate goal, on the politicians' part, is to re-introduce the authoritarian style of governance. They are playing a dirty and dangerous game there.

**Are there any specific social groups that are keen on nostalgia? Are there any that are negative towards it?**

As I said, those to whom the changes have been too radical, or, to use Elvin Toffler's expression, those affected by the 'shock of the future' would willingly engage in a politically orientated nostalgia. One can understand that but one should not build the future of one's country based on this sentiment.

**In your opinion what would be the adequate way to deal with the heritage of communism?**

This is a difficult question indeed. The answer will be different depending on the historical distance. Much depends on the generation, and sometimes ten or twenty years make all the difference. What I do believe is we should not sweep communist heritage under the carpet. We must know it and keep discussing it whatever it takes – in the same way that we must remember slavery, serfdom and all other manifestations of injustice and violence of the past. Heritage is not only about wisdom and beauty.

There is also the question of how to confront the Big Soviet Narrative today. I think that, as its power has been created largely by artists, the new and opposing narratives should also be developed in collaboration with contemporary creative professionals. This is what museums must be doing now: looking for new partnerships for the interpretation of the Soviet (or Communist) past.

**How should museums approach the clash of nostalgic memories and official discourses relating to the recent past?**

I do not see nostalgia – at least in the forms that it takes in contemporary Russia – as a spontaneous sentiment. It has been provoked and shaped by certain political forces thus aiming to achieve their goals. Therefore, supporting this trend, museums would revert to the role of political instrument – quite similar to what they had been in Soviet times. That does not mean, however, that museums cannot appeal to what may be called genuine nostalgia – a natural human sentiment triggered by pleasant memories and having no political implications.

**Could you give us a brief history of the State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia?**

The State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia – until 1998 the Museum of the Revolution – is one of the world’s largest museums of modern history. The museum is located in a manor house in the heart of Moscow on Tverskaya Street, which is an architectural monument of late 18th century Russian Classicism. From 1831 to 1917 this building housed the famous Moscow English Club – a gathering spot for Moscow’s nobility who shaped public opinion at that time. On different occasions the visitors of the club included famous Russian writers and artists, such as Alexander Pushkin, Ivan Krylov and Leo Tolstoy. Certain interiors from that period have been fully preserved to the present days and the famous stone lions at the gates have become the hallmark of the Museum. The permanent exhibition of the Museum includes modern audio visual facilities, disclosing the events and phenomena that determined the fate of the Russian state and society over the last 150 years: reforms, revolutions, wars, advances in science and culture, different social processes, etc. Rare documents, paintings, drawings and decorative art objects, banners, weapons, awards and many other items illustrating the key moments of recent Russian history, are displayed in the exhibition halls. The personal belongings of famous statesmen and public figures, scientists, astronauts, writers and actors are of particular interest. Among them are the possessions of Nikita Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the CPSU, Yuri Gagarin’s army overcoat, the military uniform of Soviet Marshal K. Rokossovsky, various items from the working cabinets of the Soviet politicians Yakov Sverdlov and Grigory “Sergo” Ordzhonikidze. The display also includes unique gifts given to Soviet leaders:

Joseph Stalin, Leonid Brezhnev and Mikhail Gorbachev. Additionally, the exhibition halls display paintings by famous Russian artists such as Boris Kustodiev, Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, Ivan Aivazovsky and many others.

**What is the official narrative of the communist period in contemporary Russia?**

That is a really very complicated question, and it is hard to answer in a few words.

**What narratives are chosen by official institutions when remembering the communist period and, which are forbidden or ignored?**

I can speak only on behalf of the Museum of Contemporary History of Russia. From our point of view, the display of any historical epoch, including the Soviet period of Russian history, should be based on the most open and objective approach: we inform our visitors not only on the glorious and heroic pages of our history – such as the victory over Nazism in World War II, the first human space flight of Yuri Gagarin, achievements in science, art, etc. – but also on the tragic episodes: Russian history in the 20th century, such as the Civil War, terror, political repressions during Stalin’s days, etc.

**How has the attitude towards the communist period changed in the past decades (Gorbachev, Yeltsin, Putin rule)?**

From the beginning of the Perestroika and until the end of Boris Yeltsin’s reign, a common tendency was the demonization of the Soviet Union and its history, especially the period of Josef Stalin’s

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\* The interview was conducted on 23 February 2017 by Mirjana Slavković, MY Curator / Edition Editor

reign. Contents that “exposed” Soviet myths were extremely popular although, in fact, it was often not the case of exposing propaganda clichés of the Soviet period, but about replacing the evaluations regarding certain events with exactly the opposite.

At the beginning of the 21st century, an interest in the country’s past is being revived in Russia. In general, more positive evaluations of the Soviet period of Russian history prevail in society. Moreover, the growth of Stalin’s popularity is observed as a reaction to the previous period.

In the last decade, two tendencies remain – the preservation of a generally positive attitude regarding the Soviet past among many Russians and the desire of the majority of scientists to carry out research dealing with the events and phenomena of the past objectively, regardless of the political situation.

**There are many researches that speak about the presence of nostalgia for the USSR. Do you think nostalgia could have emancipatory potential offering the capacity to question today’s reality or is it a rather passive sentiment?**

I agree that nostalgia for the Soviet Union existing in Russian society today is, in a way, a kind of social declaration, an expression of a certain social ideal, rather than being a real manifestation of political demands and intentions. The period of post-Soviet transformation can generally be considered complete. The Russian Federation today is an established state and society, with its problems and achievements, and not a remnant of the Soviet Union living exclusively on memories of the past.

**Are there any specific social groups that show an affinity towards nostalgia? Are there any that are negative towards it?**

In Russian society, the positive and negative attitude of the Soviet past is equally distributed, so it is difficult to single out any social groups on

this basis. In general, we can say that a negative attitude towards the USSR is more common among pro-Western intellectuals living in large cities, while most of the population of Russia living in small and medium-sized towns and villages share, to varying degrees, nostalgic feelings towards the Soviet Union.

**In your opinion what would be the adequate way to deal with the heritage of communism?**

It is my belief that Soviet and communist heritage in Russia does not require any special treatment: it is just one of the episodes in the thousand years of Russian history. Today, Russian society needs to reach consensus on the key issues of our past and I hope that history will become a unifying, rather than a factor of separation.

**How should museums approach the clash of nostalgic memories and official discourses regarding the recent past?**

Each museum chooses its own, unique way of showing a particular historical epoch.

In general, it should be said that it was the State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia that became the first museum to reflect, through its permanent exhibition, such a complex and contradictory period as the last thirty years of Russian history – from the Perestroika to our days.

Our approach is based on the presentation of key events and phenomena of this era through authentic exhibits and historical documents presented in combination with modern multimedia. All of this submerges the visitor into the atmosphere of the historical epoch and allows him to draw conclusions independently.

**Mitja Velikonja** is a Professor of Cultural Studies and head of Center for Cultural and Religious Studies at University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Main areas of his research include Central-European and Balkan political ideologies, subcultures and urban cultures, collective memory and post-socialist nostalgia. His last monographs in English language are *Rock, n' Retro – New Yugoslavism in Contemporary Slovenian Music* (Ljubljana, 2013), *Titostalgia – A Study of Nostalgia for Josip Broz* (Ljubljana, 2008; <http://mediawatch.mirovni-institut.si/eng/mw20.html>), *Eurosis – A Critique of the New Eurocentrism* (Ljubljana, 2005; <http://mediawatch.mirovni-institut.si/eng/mw17.htm>) and *Religious Separation and Political Intolerance in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (TAMU Press; 2003). He is co-author of the book in Serbian *Celestial Yugoslavia: Interaction of Political Mythologies and Popular Culture* (Belgrade, 2012) and the co-editor of the book *Post-Yugoslavia – New Cultural and Political Perspectives* (Palgrave, 2014). For his achievements he received four national and one international award. He was a full-time visiting professor at Jagiellonian University in Krakow (2002 and 2003), Columbia University in New York (2009 and 2014), University of Rijeka (2015), a Fulbright visiting researcher at Rosemont College in Philadelphia (2004/2005) and research fellow at the Netherlands Institute of Advanced Studies in Wassenaar (2012).

**Tanja Petrović** is a linguist and an anthropologist. She graduated and obtained her MA degree in Belgrade, and her doctorate in Ljubljana, where she works today as a senior research associate at the Institute of Culture and Memory Studies ZRC SAZU. Her research interests lie in the area of contact and intersection of linguistic, social and cultural phenomena on the territory of former Yugoslavia. She is the author of several monographies, including books *Juropa: jugoslovensko nasleđe i politike budućnosti u post-jugoslovenskim društvima* (Fabrika knjiga, Belgrade, 2012) and numerous articles about memory of socialism and its cultural and political meanings.

**Branislav Dimitrijević** is Professor of History and Theory of Art at the School for Art and Design in Belgrade. As a writer, researcher and curator he mainly explores visual art, popular culture and film of the socialist Yugoslavia, and regularly writes on contemporary cultural and political issues for Udruženje građana Peščanik (Available at: <http://pescanik.net/author/branislav-dimitrijevic/>) His books include *On Normality: Art in Serbia 1989-2001* (MOCA, Belgrade, 2005) and *Against Art – Goran Đorđević, Copies, 1989-1985* (MOCA, Belgrade, 2014). His curatorial projects include *No Network* (Atomic bunker, Konjic, BH, 2011) and *Good Life* (Geozavod, Belgrade, 2012). Dimitrijević holds an MA degree in History and Theory of Art from the University of Kent (UK), and in 2012 has received his PhD in Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies from the University of Arts in Belgrade for his thesis on the emergence of consumer culture in socialist Yugoslavia. For selected texts and biography see: <https://independent.academia.edu/BranislavDimitrijevic>

**Milica Popović** is a PhD student in Comparative Political Sociology at Sciences Po, under the mentorship of professor Jacques Rupnik, and in Balkan Studies at the University of Ljubljana, under mentorship of professor Mitja Velikonja. She obtained her master's degree in political science at the University Paris 2 Pantheon-Assas in Paris and a bachelor degree at the Faculty of Law in Belgrade. The focus of her research is within memory studies and issues of (Yugo)nostalgia and (post)Yugoslav societies. Milica is currently a teaching assistant at the Paris School of International Affairs in Paris and she regularly publishes articles on the Balkans for different journals. Milica also works as a freelance consultant and expert in higher education and the education field, leading her own research and consulting agency "Nomade".

**Muriel Blaive** is a socio-political historian of postwar, communist, and post-communist Central Europe, in particular of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic. She graduated from the Institut d'études politiques in Paris and wrote her PhD in history at EHESS in Paris. She is currently Advisor to the Director for Research and Methodology at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (Prague). She published the articles „Komárno, the Flagship of Symbolic Politics at the Slovak-Hungarian Border“, *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest*, Vol. 44, 4/2013, p. 93-121 (with Libora Oates-Indruchova) and „Discussing the Merits of Microhistory as a Comparative Tool: The Cases of České Velenice and Komárno“, *East Central Europe*, Vol. 40, n°1-2, 2013, p. 74-96. She also co-edited the volume *Clashes in European Memory: The Case of the Communist Repression and the Holocaust* (New York, Transaction Publishers, 2011, with Christian Gerbel and Thomas Lindenberger.)

**Nikolai Vukov** has PhD in anthropology (2002, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences) and PhD in history (2005, CentralEuropean University). He is Associate Professor at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies, at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, teaching as a visiting professor at the Universities of Sofia and Plovdiv. Nikolai Vukov has held visiting and research fellowships at the *Maison des sciences de l'homme* – Paris, the Center for Advanced Studies in Sofia, *Wissenschaftskolleg* – Berlin, and Department for Southeast European History, Graz. He has published extensively on monuments and museum representations in Eastern Europe after 1945, communist rule and post-communist transition, history, memory and commemorations of the dead after the two World Wars in Bulgaria. He is author of the book *Witnesses of Stone: Monuments and Architectures of the Red Bulgaria, 1944-1989*. Ponchiroli Editori, 2011.

**Svetla Kazalarska** is currently an Assistant Professor at the Ethnology of Socialism and Postsocialism department of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum. She attained her PhD in Cultural Anthropology from the “St. Kliment Ohridski” University of Sofia in 2011. Her dissertation, dealing with the difficult relations between memory and history at the newly established museums on communism in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989, has been published in Bulgarian in 2013. She has held research fellowships at *Kunsthau*s Dresden, at the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM) in Vienna, at the Centre for Advanced Study (CAS) in Sofia, and others. Her research interests spread across several fields: critical museology, memory studies, postsocialist urban anthropology, visual studies, new media and virtual cultures.

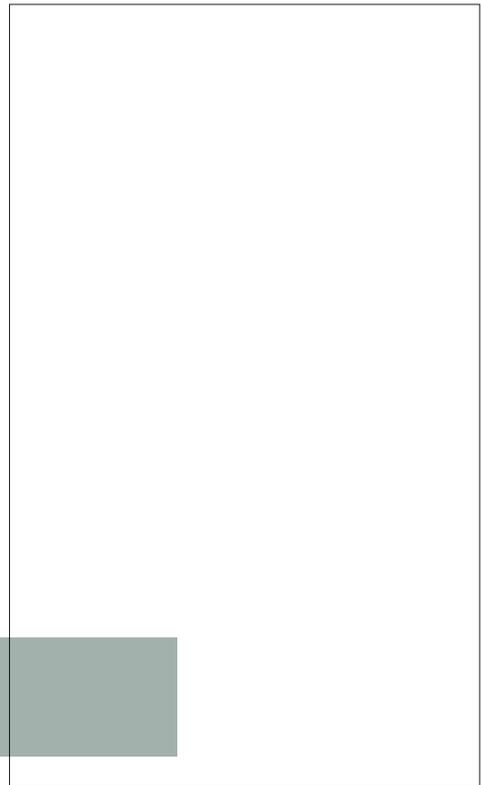
**Nataša Jagdhuhn** studied visual art and art education in Belgrade, Vienna and Ljubljana, from 2003 to 2008. In 2013 she completed a Master of Art in Context from the Berlin University of the Arts. Since 2015 she has been a research associate and doctoral candidate at the *Europäisches Kolleg* Jena.

**Marija Đorgović** is a curator of the relay baton collection and coordinator for international cooperation at the Museum of Yugoslavia in Belgrade. The focus of her professional interest is within critical museology, memory studies and audience development. She is the author and coauthor of numerous (mostly site-specific) projects in the Museum of Yugoslavia such as *The Storeroom Opens* (2016), the first phase of the permanent exhibition, which problematizes the complexity of Yugoslav heritage and its historization within MYH; *(Re)cognition – May 25 Museum* (2016), questioning the historical, artistic, and symbolic aspects of the first purpose-built museum in Belgrade; *Figures of Memory* (2015), which deals with mechanisms of collective memory of Tito and Yugoslavia; The

*Grand Illusion* (2014), based only on one object and its interpretation; *Women's corner* (2010), about women's emancipation in the socialist period; *Bikeculture - Cycling through the History of New Belgrade* (2013–2015), which in an innovative way deals with the heritage of New Belgrade, and so on. Currently, she is working on the group international project *Heroes We Love* (2014–2017) by organizing the international conference *Nostalgia on the Move* – a retrospective of actual researches and debates on memory and nostalgia and a part of a long-term process of research and reconsideration of this topic in the Museum of Yugoslav History.

**Mikhail Gnedovsky** currently works as Chief Analyst in the Moscow Centre for Museum Development. He is a member of the International Committee on Ethics in ICOM and of the Board of The Russian National Committee of ICOM. In 2003–2015, he was Director at the Cultural Policy Institute, a Moscow-based NGO engaged in the promotion of innovative agendas in the cultural field. In 1998–2002, he worked as Director for the Arts and Culture Programme at the Open Society Institute (Soros Foundation) in Russia. He has been involved in research and capacity-building projects, as well as in the development of strategies focused around issues related to the creative industries, arts and business collaboration, social implications of the arts, and the role of cultural heritage in the regional economy. He has worked internationally as an expert on various cultural projects, including the programmes of the Council of Europe and European Commission. In 2002–2014, he was a member of the Judging Panel of the European Museum of the Year Award (EMYA). In 2009–2011, he was Chair of the Board of Trustees of the European Museum Forum (EMF), and he has remained on the EMF Board since that time.

**Nikita Anikin, PhD**, is a Historical Sciences Candidate (2009), Assistant Professor at the Department of Ethnology, Faculty of History, Lomonosov Moscow State University and Academic Secretary of the State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia. He has been positioned at the Faculty of History at Lomonosov Moscow State University since 2011. Dr. Anikin graduated in 2006 at the department of Ethnology (the Historical Faculty of Moscow State University) earning a diploma with honors. In 2009 Anikin defended the dissertation “Problems of Ethnic Identification of the Gagauz of Moldova”, at the Faculty of History of Lomonosov Moscow State University. He is scientific advisor – Doctor of History (Professor G. E. Markov). Nikita Anikin's scientific interests include: ethnic identity, historical memory, interethnic relations and conflicts, and ethno-political processes in the post-Soviet space.





## Nostalgia on the Move

### Publisher

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### For the Publisher

Neda Knežević

### Editors-in-Chief

Mirjana Slavković, Marija Đorgović

### Authors

Mitja Velikonja, Tanja Petrović, Branislav Dimitrijević,  
Milica Popović, Muriel Blaive, Nikolai Vukov, Svetla I.  
Kazalarska, Nataša Jagdhuhn, Marija Đorgović

### Language Editor and Proofreading

Emilia Epštajn

### Translators

Natalija Majsova, Slavica Miletić, Neda Radulović  
Viswanatha

### Graphic Design

Goran Pandža

### Assistant Project Coordinator

Dušan Jevtić

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