

INTRODUCING

N O S

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M O V

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N T S

EDITED BY DARIO VUGER

INTRODUCING

NO STAY
MOVIE

ALGEBRA
ELEMENTS

EDITED BY DARIO UGER

Introducing Nostalgia Movements

Edited by Dario Vuger

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Preface

Introducing Nostalgia Movements is a book which – as its title suggests – aims at exposing some key features and phenomena present in contemporary culture which could be described as being driven by certain nostalgic aesthesis, or as being nostalgic in character. Moreover, one major part of this publication are the proceedings from the international interdisciplinary conference of the same name that was held in December of 2022 at the Multimedia Institute in Zagreb with a hybrid on-line and on-site program. In two conference days, along with presentations by emerging and renowned scholars on the subjects ranging from sociology, political studies, art history, philosophy, visual studies, environmental studies and more, several artist talks were held on site as well as an exhibition showcasing three distinct practices dealing with one particular part of the nostalgic aesthesis. I would like to thank the artists – Ivana Ljubičić, Teuta Gatolin, Dafne Berc and Juraj Šantorić – for giving their insights and invaluable perspectives on the phenomena. In that respect I would also like to thank professor Blaženka Perica for her engagement in the artist talks during the second day of the conference which yielded a lively, informed and in many ways priceless discussion.

During the first day of the conference two sessions were held along with an opening panel discussion. First keynote event was thus held in the form of an extended interview with professor Krešimir Purgar which opened the morning session of the conference. As a key figure in the academic field of visual studies his invaluable insights gave us solid grounding for understanding in which way nostalgia acts as a motif but also reveals itself as a symptom in contemporary art and visual culture. The last session of the day was a hybrid one, moderated on-site with the presenters from around the world participating on-line. A keynote lecture was given by Grafton Tanner, an author who almost single handedly brought nostalgia to the forefront of contemporary intellectual interests by way of investigations in popular culture in the US and beyond.

Once again, I would like to extend my gratitude to our keynote speakers, but also to all who participated in the conference, artists, students and scholars whose shared interest in nostalgia – explored in a variety of topics and practices – gave us a precious insight into the phenomena and its analytic as well as critical potentials. Their engagement in the topic provoked the idea for the development of this volume as not just a collection of proceedings but also as a sourcebook for anyone interested in a variety of ways nostalgia penetrates, permutates and preserves in contemporary art, culture and theory.

Thus, the contributions collected under the title *Introducing Nostalgia Movements* offer a certain conceptual mapping or psychogeographic snapshot of the way in which the phenomena of nostalgia shapes daily life in contemporary society, how it informs artistic practices, academic interests, political agendas and aesthetic programs or even new forms of sociality beyond the scopes of media theories, visual studies or critique of the spectacle. Taken together, all the contributions to this volume circumscribe the environments of nostalgia in contemporary society without

giving in to the somewhat pretentious task of giving us a definitive answer to the question of what is nostalgia. We are rather interested in building an environment which gives us the opportunity to pose new questions and formulate perspectives which are not influenced by efforts to visualise the already overexposed elements of certain problems.

The first section of the volume introduces us to the topic through several interviews and essays which bring forth the aesthesis and intellectual curiosity surrounding the phenomena of nostalgia. The ideogram assigned to this chapter suggests we are only “loading the tape” or feeding our interest in the topic which will be further extended in the 'play' section where two additional texts are introduced: one impressionist and sentimental in character, highlighting nostalgia as a driving force as well as a subject of mindful philosophical reflection, and the other a seminal exploration of nostalgia through the work of one of the central figures in the aesthetic thought of the 20th century.

We would then proceed to “pause”, reflect and examine the ways in which nostalgia is grasped academically, how it appears as an implicit or explicit motif in popular culture and art of the 20th century and thus bring us to the largest section of this volume. There we are going to “rewind” and turn from our global circumscribing of nostalgia towards the more particular studies which might at first appear local in character. However, exploring these topics will help us reveal the variety of ways in which nostalgia invades our culture as a whole and thus also suggest the ways in which we ourselves can practise recognizing nostalgic effects and symptoms in our own immediate or virtual surroundings. It so happens that the geo-political situation – historic and contemporary – in Croatia, former state of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia proves to be an important area for the study of nostalgia in more than just local context. Political structures, economic models, artistic and cultural production

of one bygone era continues to live not only in our memories but also in archives – personal and collective – which are subject to digitalization, virtualization and visualisation in the digital world, reshaping our knowledge of the past while at the same time implementing these pasts to be a part of our living present.

Fast forwarding to the present times, the final section explores the concrete artistic practices that build on the psychogeographic foundations we were able only to sketch out in the previous section. This chapter only adds to our conceptual mapping not only by showcasing the works of artists who participated in the conference exhibition but also by adding several others note-worthy contributions, one exhibition catalogue, an interview and a short sketching of one ephemeral attempt to “hack” nostalgia as a conclusion to the whole volume.

In the end, we hit “record” in order to recapitulate, list out and briefly outline the contributions to this volume, mention all the authors and artists, collect the bibliography and suggest the literature which could in the opinion of the editor be beneficial not only for future researchers of nostalgia but anyone interested in rethinking contemporary culture from the standpoint of methodologies suggested in this book. *Introducing Nostalgia Movements* is conceptually composed as a workbook, and its intentions are modest, environmental in character – as the title “Introducing...” suggests – and in no way definitive for the subject. The composition suggests how one should proceed in grasping any contemporary phenomena while the contents of the book show the variety of expressions available to fill in such a composition. Through such an engagement with this collection of intellectual and artistic artefacts one might discover (and continue discovering) nostalgia as a true metaphor of our time.

The publisher(s) and the editor would like to – once again – express gratitude to all authors who contributed to making this volume a reality. Their texts, artwork, insights and invaluable suggestions helped shape the book into something beyond a simple conference proceeding, thus opening the volume towards a wider audience and a higher purpose by offering its pages towards genuine and immediate engagement with the life-world. Finally, a sincere thanks goes to everyone for their patience in the process of publication of this book as well as for their belief in the project which is far from being finished.



STOP/EJECT TAPE

Dario Vuger

Introduction: On the Nostalgic Turn in Contemporary Culture

Krusty the Clown: – *Who here likes nostalgia?*

(all cheer)

Homer Simpson: – *Everything's perfect about the past,
except how it led to the present.*

(*The Simpsons*, S23E08, 2011)

The phenomenon of nostalgia has – in recent years – become a central motif of popular culture and an integral part of everyday life in contemporary society. From music and film to art and design, at every turn, we are confronted with experiences that cannot be reduced to the present moment or mere longing for the past. On the contrary, contemporary nostalgia is a far more complex phenomenon – effectively irreducible to the sum of its parts – and its exploration reveals new motives and phases of the social spectacle in which the montage of picturesque pasts, present anxieties, and expectations of the future create synthetic ensembles that evoke an eerie sense of longing and/or familiarity, surpassing and erasing the boundaries of real possibilities of experience.

By circumscribing the dimensions of the *nostalgic turn* in contemporary culture, a field opens for a discussion on the art(ificiality) of the world in confrontation with refractions of virtual reality as one of its most radical contemporary augmentations. It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that a few years ago, the American media theorist Grafton Tanner confidently stated that nostalgia should be considered the defining emotion of our time (see interview in this book). To illustrate the extent of this *turn*, it is necessary to consider and somehow map the phenomenon of nostalgia within the critical discourse of contemporary media theory, indicating its potentials and limitations as an object of analysis through phenomenological *environmentalization*. Insights for this reflection would be derived from the immediate, everyday experience of the world as it appears to us through daily interactions with(in) popular culture, the media, social networks, materializations in the environment, and virtualizations in the environs of VR, AR but also through the advances of generative AI.

From that point of view, we are safe in assuming that today – as one of our immediate observations – a substantial part of the contemporary economy is grounded in exploiting the phenomena of “longing for the real”, namely, a specific kind of nostalgic effect present in contemporary culture. But what does that mean exactly? Firstly, when we talk about contemporary culture, we are primarily discussing a culture which is distinct from any other according to several phenomena most prominently elaborated in the seminal text of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger titled the *Age of the World Picture* (Heidegger 1997) two of which are worth highlighting: visualisation as a mass movement of depiction and immersion into the world of (and as a set of) images, or the absolute conception of the world as an image, and the transformation of culture to cultural policy which, in turn, shapes our perception of the world and where producers are simultaneously the biggest consumers of their own (by)products. This holds true both in a figurative and liter-

al sense as described in McKenzie Wark's conception of the *spectacle of disintegration* (Wark 2013, 3) and it acts as a radicalization of Heidegger's own formulation stating that in modern era "human activity is *conceived and consummated* as culture" and that "It lies in the essence of culture, as such nurturing, to nurture itself in its turn and thus to become the *politics of culture*" (Heidegger 1997, 70-71, my italics). In both, we can observe the effective distortion of our common conception of presence in temporal and spatial terms of experience. "The declension of the spectacle into every last droplet of everyday life means that the life it prescribes can be lived even in one's sleep. This creates a certain difficulty for prizing open some other possibility for life, even in thought" (Wark, 2013, 4).

These phenomenal depictions of our contemporary culture are determined by the techno-scientific structure of contemporary society in the context of the so-called social spectacle, in which "everything that was immediately experienced has receded into representation" (Debord 2005, 7). The era of visualisation began when scientific discoveries and fringe theories became virtually unexplainable through the use of common language which is – at least in the western world – rooted in the metaphysical notion of the world. Thus the object of discovery could only be presented through visualisation – radically post-metaphysical occurrence in contemporary culture – rather than in real-time and space of daily experience. As such, visualisation effectively overcomes the stalemate of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* which concludes with "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (Wittgenstein 2002, 89). And silence is also to be considered one of the symptoms of techno-scientific re-imagining of the world. At the point in which virtual experiences get implemented into our brains without the use of external media (screens, goggles, headphones...), i.e. when virtualities become immediate, the world will itself become silent, and our nostalgia absolute – a dream about the world.

Technology plays a crucial role in this (de)realization of sociality, modern economy and culture, especially under the flags of digitalization, virtualization, and meta-experiences in hybrid environments. Techno-scientific developments of late modernity, especially throughout the 20th century most radically challenged some of the most basic assumptions of our experience of the world, our views on time, space, our grasp of the world as a magnitude, as a history, nature and as boundary which designates the possibilities of immediate experience. While Wittgenstein could formulate a thesis that “sum-total of reality is the world” and that “picture is a model of reality” (Wittgenstein 2002, 9), Debordian critique reveals that through techno-scientific augmentations of (our experience of) the world the “sum-total” has been replaced by the “model” and thus reveals the spectacle as the situation in which pictures *are* the world.

In both phenomena there is another significant change. For the first time in modern history – since the beginnings of the 20th century, with the theories of relativity and quantum mechanics – we are confronted with a radical inadequacy of our concept of reality which is now burdened by numerous extensions, enlargements, augmentations, and virtualizations. The understanding of time and space is no longer self-evident from the standpoint of our everyday life – our interactions with contemporary technology and its ability to radically transform and effectively erase various limitations of immediate experience of the world – and human presence has lost the characteristics of being here, now, and being-there in general. The nostalgic effect of images of past times reveals that the longing we experience in those images is the longing for the world and a type of reality which is not reducible to images, a sense of continuity in being.

When discussing the defining emotion – or, indeed, the feeling – of the modern era, it is safe to assume that nostalgia can be found, and its

effects observed, in an increasing number of phenomena and objects of contemporary culture. In a certain sense, nostalgia emerges as part of the dominant worldview for a large number of people in equally numerous variations, ranging from everyday consumption items (food in “retro” packaging), design (vintage and retro items, original or newly produced) and video games to the complete aesthetics of certain lifestyles in popular culture where one can literally live as though he is living, for example, in the eighties – it is no longer just aesthetic appreciation, it is a way of life.

Phenomenology of nostalgia?

Therefore, when we talk about the contemporary phenomenon of nostalgia, we also discuss phenomena of popular culture that are the result of our techno-scientific development, especially in the last fifty years. The phenomenological analysis should ultimately indicate how the phenomenon of nostalgia reflects in the world of everyday life, primarily as a construction, a certain type of *scopic regime* of post-modernity. From there, the argument can be strengthened that the turn towards a nostalgic worldview reveals a new phase of the social spectacle that adeptly masters the commodification of both the past (as an aestheticized present) and the future (as memories of the present seen from the perspective of an optimistic past). This argument is already at play in Grafton Tanner’s first book, on the phenomenon of internet art practice, vaporwave, titled *Babbling Corpse: Vaporwave and the Commodification of Ghosts* (Tanner 2016) as well as in Debord’s own *Society of the Spectacle*, especially considering the idea of nostalgia as a tool for the spectacular reorganisation of our time, memory and identity in the age of virtualities and visualisations as augmentations and substitutions for and of all sociality.

The phenomenological explication of nostalgia should be considered to be a part of philosophical analysis in the provenance of Martin Heidegger, and specifically of his distinctive method described as *circumlocution* (taken at the same time as a methodological hesitation and phenomenological environmentalization which can also be considered psychogeographic in character).

Heidegger's environmentalism and provincialism was not just a lifestyle reaction to the sinister outlook of modern living inside the enclosure of technological en-framing but rather a most radical gesture of practical exemplification of his phenomenological method seen as being the only one which can authentically access the meaning and make sense of contemporary phenomena outside the grasp of the techno-scientific worldview (which is by all means the spectacular worldview, or world seen as a picture and considered in its technicality). In one central passage of his prolegomena for *The History of the concept of Time* Heidegger will describe his explications to hold a strange, circumstantial and almost nonsensical character by which he is in actuality denoting a certain counter-spectacular or even iconoclastic tendency of his phenomenology to bypass all and any type of visualisation, spectacularization or commodification of thought into image: "But this clumsiness in formulation and definition lies in the theme and in the very nature of the investigation. For to give a narrative account of an entity is one thing, and to comprehend that entity in its being is another" (Heidegger 1985, 151).

It is called a method precisely because, in Heidegger's case, circumlocution as a determinant of style in expression, thinking, and the analysis of phenomena is carried out radically and consistently throughout his entire philosophical project which is hesitant in character, reluctant to give us a clear or any image whatsoever of a certain phenomena through a series of elaborations which can be considered not only phil-

osophical, but possessing also a poetic and impressionist disposition. The *circumlocutive* method of analysis tends towards explication, circular reasoning that incorporates aesthetic, affective, and poetic effects into its results through lengthy discussions and concentric analysis of a phenomenon seen from its essential grounding (with)in the language of everyday life. This is why Heidegger's philosophy (as many of his titles suggest) remains only seemingly "frozen" in preparatory, propaedeutic and introductory stages. The "real" philosophy happens in the effects of reading and thinking through a phenomena, why it is also often described by him as a fundamental ontology, or *phenomen-o-logy* proper. It is worth noticing in that respect the entire paragraph covering Heidegger's explication of the task we ourselves set forth with respects to the phenomena of nostalgia in the shaping of our everyday experience of the world:

In what follows, we shall be concerned with the world as environing world [Umwelt] with respect to its worldhood, that is, with regard to the structure which characterises every thing as a thing of the environing world. The world-hood of the world, that is, the specific being of this entity 'world,' is a specific concept of being. In opposition to the traditional question of the reality of the external world, we shall ask about the worldhood of the world as it is there in immediate everyday concern. We are asking about the world as it is encountered in the daily round of preoccupation; we are asking about the world around us, the environing world; more precisely, we are asking about the worldhood of the environing world. By asking in particular for an account of worldhood and specifying the aroundness in it, we thereby establish in its own right the genuine sense of place and space within the structural framework of the world hood of the world (Heidegger 1985, 170).

When discussing nostalgia, as a contemporary phenomenon, we are always talking about time and the relationship to time within which

nostalgia appears as a construction and as a “standing-reserve” (in a Heideggerian sense, as *Gestell*) or a certain kind of disposition which obscures our relationship with time and space of immediate experience. This way the phenomenon of nostalgia is seen as participating in the essence of the modern age which Heidegger explored in his two essays, “The Age of the World Picture” and “The Question Concerning Technology” in the mid-twentieth century. Even then, it was clear that new social, economic, and techno-scientific phenomena fundamentally determine, and reconfigure the understanding of reality by way of a new understanding of time and space which act as fundamental categories of the experience. This includes the discussion on the possibilities and limitations of thinking in general, especially in the Western metaphysical tradition.

Path towards contemporary nostalgia passes through the final stages of the Western philosophical project, finding its realisation in the social spectacle as the “philosophization of reality” (Debord 2005, 11) or its recession into a “speculative universe”, Debord’s critical prefiguration of globalised capital, cyber-space and VR. Equally, it is a specific kind of “standing-reserve” (understood phenomenologically as the concept of in-formation, *ge-stell* or en-framing) which acts in Heidegger as the essence of modern technology and which shows itself everywhere as a visualisation or “pictorialization“ of the world, making it (world, being, technology,...) fundamentally spectacular. And once informatics takes precedence over metaphysics, everything is pushed forward as being available and subject to manipulation by means of production and/or consumption.

The nostalgic effect, simplified as longing for the return of the past in any sense can be commodified into products and phenomena which substitute the lost time with the objects which enable us to transform our desire (to be at home, for time to have the sense of home) into aes-

thetic experience in the present, a movement which Tanner will call “foreverism” and which is phenomenologically synonymous with (the techno-scientific movement of) visualisation. When the world becomes a picture and reality gets reduced/expanded to a collection of world-views, we tend to satisfy our longing through material artefacts of by-gone time and through an aesthetic which represents a solid immersive environment, different from the impoverished surroundings of contemporary design. They both seem to act as anchors in the floating world of endless visualisations.

Speaking of the in-formation nature of nostalgia and by understanding information from within Heidegger’s phenomenology of technology as a “standing-reserve” (Heidegger 1977), it becomes clear that it – as a specific form of contemporary technology – presents one aspect of reality as “standing-in-reserve,” transforming it into a resource – our memories, our pasts as well as our ability to distinguish fabrications and authentic recollections of time. While in the case of modern technology, the commodification in question is primarily of nature as an energy resource, and in a broader sense, the subjugation of space (n.b. world as a picture), when we talk about nostalgia as a technology, we are also discussing a specific way of commodifying time as an economic resource.

Effective time management is one of the central concerns of the modern economy just as the precision of time measurement is central to modern science. Of equal importance for contemporary culture (as the spectacle of sociality, of society conceived as an image), time is of paramount importance, primarily time conceived as and reproduced as an image. As a technique of mastering time, the spectacle establishes its own patterns of production and distribution of images and meanings, thereby actively encouraging or restraining certain uses of space, time, and any other social product all the while promoting other, favourable

uses. This will become important when discussing the memorialization and commemoration of past events in the context of contemporary nostalgia as its informational-technological character also opens up a possibility of discussing a certain psychogeography of nostalgia.

In his book, Tanner contemplates the contemporary phenomenon of nostalgia from the perspective of Jacques Derrida's *hauntology*, recognizing, even in the early stages of his analysis – which will continue in three more titles dedicated solely to the phenomenon of nostalgia – the inseparability of the phenomenon of nostalgia from the critical examination of the contemporary relationship not only with the past but also with the future. This is particularly true for the future conceived from the perspective of the past: “Whereas postmodernism captures and appropriates the past, hauntology sets the past free to disestablish time as a sequence and transform it into a looping construction” (Tanner 2016, 36). Already implied here – especially in the notion of a “looping construction” – is a certain development that will ultimately lead Tanner to formulate a kind of dialectical superstructure of the theory of nostalgia in the analysis of what he calls “foreverism” in contemporary popular culture (cf. Tanner 2023, 17-...).

This concept points directly to the fundamental problem of nostalgia as a phenomenon essentially marked by the reconception, operationalization, and commodification of time itself, making nostalgia once again seem to be a property of a late stage of the so-called spectacle of disintegration and thus marking the decisive departure from Debord's theory of the spectacle even though it remains deeply indebted to it. Nostalgia becomes an economic tool, political weapon and cultural product of central importance for contemporary life.

Vaporwave as a metaphor

All that is solid melts into air...

(Marx and Engels 2008, 38)

All that was once directly lived receded into representation.

(Debord 2005, 7)

All that is solid melts into PR.

(Fisher 2009, 39)

In this tiresome age, when even the air melts into airwaves, where all that is profane is packaged as if it were profundity, the possibility yet emerges to hack into mere appearances and make off with them.

There are other worlds and they are this one.

(Wark 2004, 178)

At a specific moment in time – with a psychogeographic outlooks of Debord’s *Situationist International* and the poetic chaos of dadaist provenance – the affective, playful, and spontaneous digital artistic practice of vaporwave seemed like an exciting continuation of the struggle against or spark that could shed new light on the potential of the critique of the spectacle. The vaporwave movement had a short life span and was quickly commodified into a new, globally adopted aesthetic driven by nostalgia for the late ‘90s corporate design and early 2000s cyber-punk-(ish)-design.

Vaporwave is ultimately remembered as a significant contribution to internet art at the fringes of the first decade of the 21st century with a unique understanding of the cyberspace as a virtual plaza of forgetting, resembling, a repository of memories, something not that dissimilar to a space into which the main protagonist of the film *The Labyrinth* (1986, Jim Henson), Sarah (Jennifer Connelly), descends after eating a

fruit – given to her by the evil goblin king Jareth (David Bowie) – that erases her memories. From the vast sea of waste – artefacts of popular culture, nostalgic childhood items, etc. – one of Jareth’s assistants recreates the ideal image of Sarah’s room. Despite its incredible similarity to her real room – as it eventually turns out – it is only “an image of happy harmony surrounded by desolation and horror, at the calm centre of misery” (Debord 2005, 31), an immersive environment for spending time, or, better said, a prolongation of the status quo; a harmonious visualisation of the world, or a foreverized landscape, a plaza for endless reminiscing, a world in which memories are let loose and no longer confined to and bound by our imagination.

Moreover, the goblin king himself, Jareth – which can be said of Bowie himself – is nostalgia personified. In a song leading up to the peak of the movie’s narrative, Jareth says – in a desperate attempt at winning over Sarah – he can not live (or continue living only) within her. And in the monologue to follow, the goblin king will suggest that he will be her slave if only she would love him, fear him and do as he says. What he wants then is to become not a living presence but rather a picture put forward and in front of the girl, a visualisation of life, an artificial horizon of possibilities since the picture wants to remain the same in all temporal and spatial situations. Namely, seeing all the “creatures” from *The Labyrinth* in the puppet form at Sarah’s room at the very beginning (and the end) of the movie – we are safe in assuming that the whole plot is a dreamscape from which Sarah wants to wake up from and in which all characters are the ultimate embodiment of nostalgia as longing for the real.

In the phenomenon of vaporwave, the past has become the subject of aestheticization and eventually commodification in popular culture: “... vaporwave is one of these burgeoning artistic forms that seeks to retroactively upend the progress of history by dissolving the notion of tem-

porality altogether or by trashing the icons of our past. (...) all while problematizing our understanding of history” (Tanner 2016, 49). The emergence of this audio-visual genre and aesthetic in the first two decades of the 21st century highlighted one fundamental tendency of contemporary popular culture: a realisation that the cyber-enthusiasm and corporate culture of the 1980-1990s are no longer (if they ever were) reflected in the contemporary social structure. Vaporwave is not just about nostalgia but a reaction to a certain disappointment with a future we ended up with inside our own present. From *Back to the Future* to *Blade Runner* and beyond, the future imaginations are catching up with our present, and they look nothing like generations before us ever imagined.

Unlike vaporwave, contemporary nostalgia in the hands of corporate practices does not problematize our understanding of our past but rather makes the past available as a commodity product, thus making it deeply non- or post-historical. If the fundamental assumption of the spectacle in the 1960s was “everything that was directly lived receded into a representation” (Debord 2005, 7), then the nostalgic turn of contemporary culture – still within the spectacular paradigm – can be paraphrased and radicalised in the following formulation: all that was real of the past has receded and made present as an image.

Besides commodifying the past into products of popular culture and thereby transforming time – conceived as an image – into an immersive environment, nostalgic phenomena also seek to eliminate the past as such by constantly reifying it as an extension of present reality in and through which reality itself is imagined as an environment open to manipulation and augmentation. In a certain sense, modern popular culture aims to immortalise its products and thus avoid the retreat of certain ideas and phenomena into the past by continually commodifying the past into just one aspect of the present. To some extent, this is

the thematic horizon that Grafton Tanner critically explores between nostalgia and its final dialectical radicalization in his trilogy *Circle of the Snake: Nostalgia and Utopia in the Age of Big Tech* (Tanner 2020), *The Hours Have Lost Their Clock: The Politics of Nostalgia* (Tanner 2021), and *Foreverism* (Tanner 2023). The so-called foreverization is the next step in the dialectical understanding of nostalgia as a movement, and this foreverization is maybe best understood from the standpoint of the phenomenology of virtual reality (VR), its reflections in popular culture, contemporary art, and the political economy of the globalised world.

Thus, from the vaporwave movement onwards we can observe and circumscribe just how nostalgia becomes not only a subject in popular culture or a product of contemporary capital but rather how it informs the intellectual and artistic movements which in turn (re)shape our understanding of the phenomena. This is achieved precisely through an abundance of seemingly unrelated movements which circumlocute nostalgia and create alternative landscapes through which one might access and engage the phenomena more genuinely.

The nostalgic turn as part of the culture of the spectacle

Paraphrasing again the famous statement by Guy Debord from the opening of *Society of the Spectacle*, we could say that everything that was immediately lived has receded into nostalgia for the real, a yearning for authenticity, and a quest for a place, a sense of home – in short, presence. As such, contemporary nostalgia reveals itself as the longing for presence (or time) as a symptom of capitalist tendency towards foreverization on the one hand and of the culture of visualisation which closely follows it. Until recently, theoretical discussions about modern

technology often revolved around techno pessimism and alienation lurking from the social use of new technological solutions. However, what is truly at stake, deriving from Martin Heidegger's phenomenological project, is de-territorialization, the removal of situational determination from existence by making everything seem possible everywhere (all at once) because it is visible everywhere and at all times. Due to this relativized and cinematic relationship with real space, the aestheticized past seems surprisingly concrete, not because of its own qualities, but precisely because reality itself is continuously impoverished. Spatial quantities and temporal qualities are being virtualized through technological breakthroughs without proper understanding of just how these developments affect our own understanding of our place in the world. From fast trans-continental travel to Google Earth, search engines and generative AI, our sense of belonging to a world with concrete physical attributes and limitations becomes impoverished and reduced to a picture of a world as spectacularly put in front of us as a map; as seen through the window of a plane, train, car, Google Street View, etc.

This impoverishment thus manifests in the loss of the depth of the experience of the world, now understood through the exchange value of images at all levels of experience. Repeating the enigmatic phrase with which David Bowie introduced his 2013 penultimate record, "Where are we now?" suggests a kind of concern which doesn't bring into question only the possibility of experience but also the question of what is real or is this even the right question to be posed in given circumstances. Directed by the visual artist Tony Oursler, the music video for the mentioned track further emphasises the way in which our world becomes an image open to manipulation, where images re-create memories just as those re-made memories suggest a certain sentimental attitude or nostalgia for an experience which is not so much a return as it is a departure into a mere(ly new) visualisation of the past.

The foreverized production as the infrastructure of the nostalgic turn in the age of the spectacle is particularly visible in the almost incredible achievements of American animated series such as *The Simpsons*, *South Park*, etc. which have “raised generations” of viewers despite the fact that characters, space, and time never change in the series themselves. What is actually at play is future-proofing, development of just such a cinematic/animatic universe which allows an infinite production of virtually the same (visual) experience. Its implementation takes a lifetime (series which you begin watching as a teen will become subject to a nostalgic consumption in one’s adulthood, etc.) while maintaining the possibility to span over generations of viewers, as the *Star Wars* franchise demonstrated. The cinematic universe paradigm enables the production of films and shows which are no longer sequels, prequels or *requels* but rather endless spin-offs and expansions which amount to the gravity of such a spectacular phenomena. Advances of generative AI and the ever-growing importance of VR in all aspects of popular culture only further radicalise these tendencies.

Media theorist and Japanologist Paul Roquet made a significant contribution to the discussion on overcoming reality within what we might call the phenomenology of virtual reality in his 2022 book *The Immersive Enclosure: Virtual Reality in Japan* and his earlier, 2016 title *Ambient Media: Japanese Atmospheres of Self*. He laid new foundations for the analysis and critical understanding of immersive media, starting from the early apparatuses for “virtualizing” the experience of the real world to the latest inventions and trends, with a special focus on distinguishing American and Japanese perceptions and receptions of virtual reality. This distinction is significant as it fits into a critical understanding of the spectacle as a continuation and as an inheritor of “the weakness of the Western philosophical project” that is “reducing everyone’s concrete life to a universe of speculation” (Debord 2005, 11) on the one hand, and Heidegger’s interpretation of the *Age of the World Picture*

as a phenomenal development driven by *Americanization* (Heidegger 1997, 85). Roquet's formulation builds on Paul Virilio's earlier idea of substitute horizons in contemporary informational and techno-scientific culture: "the 'artificial horizon' of a screen or a monitor, capable of permanently displaying the new preponderance of the media perspective over the immediate perspective of space" (Virilio 2005, 14, also 66).

For Roquet, the typical American perception of virtual reality bears the sign of equivalence between the virtual and the real, where the virtual appears as a new, expanded reality commodifying the "real" into one aspect of the virtual. This principle of (photo)realism is applied in all domains of visual culture, particularly striking in the design and aesthetics of video games. The persuasiveness of the virtual environment has a strong feedback effect on the de-realization of reality, with a redistribution of perceptual control (Roquet 2022, 171). On the other hand, the Japanese model of experience virtualization is directed towards the fictionalisation of reality, expanding aesthetically and not grounded in the paradigm of photographic realism but rather in creating immersive environments of popular cultural products – primarily manga and anime. While the American model is based on the radical commodification of imagination towards cinematic production of reality – a shared metaverse of consumption – the Japanese model aims to unfold the possibilities of immersing into already existing imaginary spaces from popular anime and manga series, fantastic environments with their own logic, rules, and aesthetics that allow users to expand the horizons of their imagination in the virtual environment and, so to speak, create their own dreams while remaining in complete control of their role, character and identity.

This speaks also of the difference between environments and enclosures. Namely, as the *Immersive enclosure* suggests, virtual reality has a tendency to become such an augmentation of the real in which it acts only as another tool for effective control and reinforcement of already

established social norms and behaviours. Its psychogeography is limited to economies and policies of attentive spectacular action in the world and phenomenally nostalgic consumption. On the other hand, however, stands an idea which promotes an environmental approach to VR where certain cultural products become habitable and through which the experience and understanding of certain phenomena becomes virtually enriched.

This understanding is another practical effectuation of heideggerian phenomenology which promotes circumlocution over definition, and an environment over system. And even though this type of engagement is for now restricted to exploitation of pop-cultural phenomena like transcribing imaginary works of anime and manga into virtually habitable social worlds, it does demonstrate that the spectacle of virtual reality as well as the longing for the real can be almost paradoxically overcome through an “iconoclastic” virtual experience in which even the subject becomes an authentic actor of an entirely different world. This movement was already implied and described by Gilbert Simondon who philosophically entertained the idea of technology – through what he called a *mechanology* – helping us achieve a higher state of being in the world, a techno-individuation (Simondon 2017:173-...).

The art(ificiality) of the world in immersive media

The enclosure approach reveals the world as increasingly artificial as it reduces reality to visualisation, commodification into image, or by making reality subject to manipulation in and for which cybernetics becomes a new metaphysical horizon. The artificiality of the world is revealed in the fact that today on the horizon of possibilities, the creation of completely convincing worlds of experiences is possible. In these

worlds, concrete alienation is not in opposition to the explorative, social, and creative spirit of individuals. From this perspective, the adequacy of our concept of the world and reality itself comes into question. The techno-scientific development and the revolution in culture and art effectively erase the virtual from virtual reality in constant feedback with the impoverishment and virtualization of the real experience of the world.

In the realm dominated by the nostalgic turn, everything considered real is, in essence, virtual precisely because it has become the subject of visualisation. Virtual reality is an integral part of the nostalgia movement in the sense that, in the inflation of highly aestheticized “pasts” and “futures”, it redefines the very concept of the world and of nostalgia. Virtual reality, as a new ontology of modern cyber-reality, is not only a radically deterritorialized type of reality but also, in essence, timeless. Thus the yearning we experience today is not for a return, but for a sense of belonging to such a structure which allows for a formation of any kind of sound narrative, identity, individuation. Nostalgic turn is thus in essence a yearning for the real as a metaphysical notion of the world.

Viewing it as a concrete upgrade of the spectacle in its integrated form, and affirming the paradoxical and idiomatic description of the spectacle of disintegration proposed by McKenzie Wark, we can paraphrase our initial assumption about nostalgia from Grafton Tanner; the gradual inadequacy of the concept of reality is the decisive movement of the modern era, with the longing for the real being the fundamental object of exploitation in late capitalism. This has been in formulation for about a decade, from the early occurrences of (retro)avant-garde digital art practices, such as vaporwave, and their appropriation and recuperation within the aesthetics of globalised contemporary popular culture. The overwhelming aesthesis of this era then would have to be described through spatial and temporal dissociation, an eerie feeling of becoming virtual and standing outside of time, why we find comfort in experience

based economy and physicality of reproduced artefacts of the old (from vinyl records to wallpapers, and beyond).

In light of theories of nostalgia, the social spectacle, and the techno-scientific overcoming of reality, it becomes clear that the artificiality of the world is not some significant novelty but a phenomenal development set forth from the beginning of the modern era onward. This is because when we talk about the world in the modern sense, we are always talking about the image of the world and a certain worldview. The retreat into immersive environments and the aestheticization of lived experience with synthetic images of (literally) idealised past do not represent a radicalization of the artificiality of the world but rather a part of the symptomatology that corresponds to the search for authentic expression. Unfortunately, “knowing how the world works is not knowing how to work the world” – as stated by the champions of New York ‘00s post-hardcore, Les Savy Fav – and overcoming the artificiality of the world would mean not just achieving authentic expression within it but also creating a more open environment for expression and impression of ideas into the world as an open project and not just looking for an output which belongs to some blackboxed design of a world.

In this regard, Don DeLillo’s statement in *White Noise* – a lamentation on nostalgia in itself – about a kind of Murphy’s Law of scientific progress is instructive. We can paraphrase it here, saying that the greater the techno-scientific progress, the more primitive (and abstract) our yearning becomes (cf. DeLillo 1999). Moreover, the concept of *anemoia*, the invention of the internet pop culture niche on the YouTube channel *Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows*, denotes a state that is ultimately the result of techno-scientific development (of immersive environments), which, in turn, leads to a turn towards nostalgia in the generalised social movement of “longing for a time we have never actually experienced”.

Introducing Nostalgia Movements

The nostalgic turn manifests itself through two fundamental activities both of which – as we have observed thus far and can confirm quite easily from daily experience – belong to the modern development of techno-scientific world-view: exteriorization and immersion. In exteriorization, we have the externalisation and commodification of human imagination, the power of envisioning, and ultimately dreams into images, and then projections, namely, movies. From the invention of linear perspective in the Italian Renaissance onwards, the virtual space of the image separates from individual power of imagining and dreaming scenes into a collective visual fact. In the cinema, we, as a collective body, witness the visualisation of the logic of dreams on the big screen, beyond the dreamer's head, in reality as part of a shared experience of the world. At the same time, at a pivotal moment in the history of the gaze in Western culture, besides our dreams being brought to the surface and commodified at the heart of reality, we are submerged in the image as the horizon of the possibilities of experiencing reality as a whole. In this way, the richness of the image at the turn of the century ultimately led to the impoverishment of reality, which is also valid as an impoverishment of imagination.

This is all achieved through a fundamental illusion of reproducing life (movement, time and space) where there isn't any – on the screen in front of us. And as Bergson pointed out quite clearly at the beginning of the 20th century, the movement (life) is still there, but it has receded into the mechanism of reproduction (Bergson 2005, 331), the projector, or the camera. We can take this in the literal sense but also as a metaphor, especially considering the notion of the projector as a stand-in for techno-sciences altogether with all their popular products, from social media to VR goggles.

But though, by straining itself to the point of giddiness, it may end by giving itself the illusion of mobility, its operation has not advanced it a step, since it remains as far as ever from its goal. In order to advance with the moving reality, you must replace yourself within it. Install yourself within change, and you will grasp at once both change itself and the successive states in which it might at any instant be immobilised. But with these successive states, perceived from without as real and no longer as potential immobilities, you will never reconstitute movement (Bergson 2005, 334).

The artificiality of the world reveals itself through the techno-scientific commodification of daily life in which experiences of experiences replace our sense of immediacy. A truly spectacular meta-verse turns out to be a spectre of social structure and an image of experience which acts as the “artificial horizon” of the “foreverized” world, something not that far from the notion of the “technosphere” as the self-organization of life in the form of an artificial mind (Paić 2022). The world is still there but it has receded into representation, a tendency already anticipated in Bergson’s critical account in the early years of cinema. Where techno-sciences turned time into a discrete measurement, popular culture commodified it into an image of the world which is now available to a variety of technical operations. In the same manner, cyber-space and virtual reality quantified space and made it available for visualisation.

From the perspective of its critical exposition as the spectacle of disintegration (Wark 2013), we are pushed even further as the totality of cultural products seem to be subject to an economy based on eternal recurrence – recycling – which implies in itself the concrete policing of people’s memories. What we end up with is then a question of identity (Pierosara 2023, 305) and coming to terms with individuation based in absence and loss, something Tanner will at the same time problematize

with respects to the seminal work by Yoko Ogawa, 1994 book *Memory police* (Tanner 2023).

It should not come as a surprise, then, that Ogawa's book anticipates the nostalgic turn in our culture within a disturbing science-fiction scenario reminiscent of 1984. In a truly disappearing world, nostalgia itself becomes a way to at least try and to re-territorialize oneself within one's own memories and thus one's own presence and being-there. Moreover, the overall atmosphere of Ogawa's work gives off the impression that the characters of the novel are – as implied also throughout the hugely influential TV series *Twin Peaks* – living inside a dream, or rather a memory of the world that is slowly fading. And *as the world falls down*, the characters' lives remain, everything around them just becomes truly solid-state, not animated by memories, a pure technical image of the world in which all the world is still there, yet it is nowhere because presence is allowed only through memory. One can imagine the same world being repopulated with “memories” in the same manner of their disappearance, slowly and consistently. The world of new memories would be indistinguishable from the old one because all objects and all memories have already been replaced with only a vague feeling of lost familiarity. This vagueness becomes instrumental in achieving the goals of nostalgic consumption.

Debord already described in the 1990s the policing nature of cultural and artistic activities in the age of the integrated spectacle: “Spectacular government, which now possesses all the means necessary to falsify the whole of production and perception, is the absolute master of memories just as it is the unfettered master of plans which will shape the most distant future” (...). “Since art is dead, it has evidently become extremely easy to disguise police as artists. When the latest imitations of a recuperated neo-dadaism are allowed to pontificate proudly in the media, and thus also to tinker with the decor of official

palaces, like court Jesters to the kings of junk, it is evident that by the same process a cultural cover is guaranteed for every agent or auxiliary of the state's networks of persuasion" (Debord 1998, 5, 29).

This short exposition thus aimed only to outline the basic motivation behind the volume you have set before you. It is not only a collection of essays dealing with the subject of nostalgia from variety of perspectives – from those impressionist in character to those with a concrete scientific disposition – but also includes expositions of topics, resources and practices which deconstruct and problematize the phenomena of nostalgia in a more or less immediate sense, explicitly or only in implication. The works collected here act precisely in the mannerism of Heideggerian circumlocution, they sketch out the environment of the phenomena in question, the way it enters our daily life, way it directs our interests and shapes our knowledge and the way we think about the world, either through the lens of popular culture, art, philosophy or media theory, and beyond. Nostalgia, as well as foreverism is in fact and precisely – with respect to what Tanner also points towards in his latest book (Tanner 2023, 16-...) – “an image of happy harmony surrounded by desolation and horror, at the calm centre of misery” (Debord 2005, 31) and thus worthy of our immediate attention and phenomenological interest.

But in order to properly grasp and investigate the nostalgic turn in contemporary culture we must (re)introduce real movement into our field of inquiry, the one Bergson described as being enclosed inside the apparatus of illusion, the same one which has been replaced by the spectacle, and finally the type of phenomenal foundation which seems to be obscured in the age where the world itself becomes a picture of itself, thus giving birth to an eerie sense of longing for the world (real) whereas being totally immersed in it (as a visualisation).

As a commonly shared longing, nostalgia shapes our social relationships, so rather than to focus on the aesthesis of the visualisations which spring from this augmentation of our media environment, the trick is, paraphrasing Wark from his introduction to *The Spectacle of Disintegration* (Wark 2013, 5), not to be distracted by the nostalgic imagery, but to inquire into the nature of the social relationships it directs and prescribes to our experience.

Dario Vuger

Unlocking Nostalgia – Interview with Grafton Tanner

*Could you – as a sort of introduction – sketch out the path which you have crossed in order to arrive at what we could call here ‘the philosophy of nostalgia’? You have written extensively on the subject in your recent books but the phenomena was already established as a major motif in your 2016 book *Babbling corpse: vaporwave and the commodification of ghosts*. Was nostalgia always at the centre for you, or is it a concept which we need to overcome as it might be implied in your most recent publication scheduled to come out this year titled *Foreverism*?*

TANNER: I’ve always been fascinated by nostalgia because it ties together so many of my interests: the experience of time, emotion, memory, media representations. But I started writing as a music critic, so *Babbling Corpse* was my attempt at contextualising the vaporwave genre, which sort of led me to think more about nostalgia. From there, nostalgia has always been a central or peripheral interest. Even the book I’m working on now, which is about exorcism and possession, in some sense is about emotion, memory, and representation. There’s even a little bit of nostalgia in there, too.

Should we consider contemporary nostalgia a symptom of a certain state of our culture, or is it a cause which produces certain cultural effects? Moreover, can it be both, especially in the context of false nostalgia – yearning for a prefabricated past as an aesthetic product – and nostalgia proper?

TANNER: I'm hesitant to distinguish between false and proper nostalgia, mainly because nostalgia is always in some way "false". It's always a renegotiation of the past because memories are always changing and can serve different functions at different points in our lives. But I think I know what you mean by "false nostalgia" – an ersatz representation of the past that's not only inaccurate but also presents a picturesque image of the past that elides the past's more nightmarish qualities. There is a degree to which those nightmares are smoothed over, or erased outright. Nostalgic reflection should prompt us to ask to what degree the harsh realities of the past are being revised, and to whom does the erasure benefit?

I like to think of nostalgia as a human emotion, which means plenty of people can feel it and communicate it with others. But also, it can charge rhetoric just like fear, anger, or any other emotion can. If a political orator produces a nostalgic response in people with their nostalgic rhetoric, then they've achieved their goal. The question I always ask is: what was their goal?

It seems that the fundamental novelty of our time in considering the phenomena of nostalgia is that the concept now describes an entirety of cultural products which shape contemporary society, especially in terms of pop-culture? Could we describe the 'culture of nostalgia' as a stage in some greater cultural development (such as the 'society of the

spectacle', late capitalism, etc) or should it be observed as an entirely new development?

TANNER: I've argued elsewhere that nostalgia is the defining emotion of our time. In my next book, *Foreverism*, I consider the possibility that that might not be entirely true. Regardless, culture and politics today are very interested in keeping past works and ideas alive, either to eliminate the possibility of being nostalgic for them or to provide experiences for indulging in nostalgia. I wouldn't say that's a new development (politicians were getting sentimental about the past and reboots were being produced long before the twenty-first century), but the scale of nostalgic production and consumption is indeed tremendous today.

One major part of your writing is closely connected to American popular culture. Is there an underlying attempt (considering also your derridean influences) to deconstruct the soft-power politics of the US in contrast to other cultural policies on the global stage (Japan, Europe, etc.)?

TANNER: I've dedicated a lot of my research to understanding American culture and politics, mainly because I was born and raised and still live in the U.S. But I find the country fascinating because it exports so many cultural products and ideologies. In the U.S., the prevailing attitude is that it's the greatest country in the world, the freest nation, etc. I've always been interested in how the country casts these illusions even as it rolls back the rights of its citizens.

We already mentioned the title of your new book – Foreverism. Could you shed some light on it and how does it fit into your work, especially

inside the already established conceptual framework gravitating around the notion of nostalgia?

TANNER: The argument in *Foreverism* is that perhaps western culture isn't as nostalgic as we might think. Maybe by keeping the past alive in the present through reboots, throwbacks, revanchist politics, and so forth, maybe our culture is exhibiting a severe anxiety of nostalgia and wants to eliminate it. If so, that would make perfect sense because, since the coining of the word "nostalgia," there have been efforts to eliminate or cure it. So instead of a more relaxed acceptance of nostalgia, and instead of the latest reboot as evidence of our nostalgia, perhaps western culture today is trying to prevent nostalgia by preventing certain ideas from disappearing into the past forever.

To get to that point in my line of thinking, I had to argue the exact opposite, which I did in *The Hours Have Lost Their Clock*. The argument in that book was that our culture is nostalgic, perhaps more than ever before, and that's why everything from the past is getting rebooted, including dangerous ideologies that everyone thought had died long ago. So *Foreverism* is my attempt at turning that argument upside down and seeing what falls out.

I think that the effects of nostalgia as an aesthetic tool for control/consumption is probably best exemplified through music, providing us with vague yet familiar soundscapes which have a 'feeling of a certain era' even though they are fundamentally irreducible to a certain historical genre or trend, from vaporwave to Twin Shadow and Harry Styles...it does seem that when we talk about – or critically engage with

– nostalgia today we are in actuality always talking about false, prefabricated nostalgia. Is that something you could agree with and possibly expand on?

TANNER: I'm hesitant to bifurcate nostalgia into "false" and "true" types, primarily, to refer back to a previous question, because nostalgia is always in some sense "false". Which means it can have shades of "truth", too. When I listen to Twin Shadow, or synthwave music, I can't help but notice how "true" it is to its source material (1980s popular music). I mean, it sounds like the 80s! And as Simon Reynolds argued in *Retromania*, pop culture (including pop music) has been obsessed with its own past for a long, long time – really from the beginning.

Listeners can be nostalgic for vaguely defined past eras just as political orators can reference vague time periods in their rhetoric. Calls to "make America great again", for example, also are referencing a vaguely defined time period: a whitewashed period when white men ruled with an iron fist. But to most supporters of that phrase, it doesn't matter which era it's alluding to – just a generalised "past" will do. This lack of clarity can open the possibility for weaponization. But it also opens the possibility for disagreement as different reactionaries fight over which part of American history to "make great again".

But before going even deeper into nostalgia, we should address the already mentioned ghost in the room. Can you tell us more about the motivations behind the Babbling Corpse, the pop-cultural references you are dealing with there (from the Cabin in the woods to Adult Swim shorts) as well as your heavy reliance on Derridean methodology in your first major work?

TANNER: I cited Derrida in *Babbling Corpse* because I wanted to engage with his concept of hauntology. (I explore the concept a bit more in an article that will be published with *The Routledge Handbook of Nostalgia* sometime soon.) In *Babbling Corpse* I mainly wrote about hauntology, the music genre, which is sort of a companion genre to vaporwave. I wanted to contextualise both genres within their time period (the 2010s), and I saw similar political and aesthetic choices being made in other cultural works, like *The Cabin in the Woods* and the Adult Swim short “Too Many Cooks”. All of these works not only call attention to pop cultural tropes, many of which hail from the past, but also problematize them, sometimes violently. “Too Many Cooks” is about a killer entity that treks through cheesy sitcom landscapes from yesteryear and murders their characters; Ramona Xavier mangles, warps, and truncates the voices of famous pop tunes throughout her vaporwave album FLORAL SHOPPE; *The Cabin in the Woods* envisions an organisation dedicated to torturing and killing characters that match the typical cast of teen characters in older slasher films. To me, they all probe our relationship to the pop culture of the past with a more sceptical eye than other cultural works released at the time, both mainstream and indie.

This topic is especially interesting in the context of the horror genre which has seen an overwhelming number of re-makes, re-quals and pre-quals in recent years. On the one hand we have a heavy revival of the genre through commodification of nostalgia in the most immediate manner while – on the other hand – something ‘new’ is happening on the sci-fi-fantasy front – if we can call it that. The elaboration of a cinematic multiverse of neverending entertainment is somewhat of a contemporary conundrum, being at the same time nostalgic and almost radically present, with no future in sight. Is contemporary popular cinema a good reflection of our – or at least American – society?

TANNER: Neverending cinematic multiverses is what I would call a foreverist development. They appear at first glance to be vehicles for endless nostalgic consumption, but that's only one side of the coin. They aim to eliminate any nostalgia for cultural works or intellectual properties that are extinct or soon to be, so that we won't miss them anymore. The goal is to keep them alive and growing in the present, forever. Popular cinema is still a reflection of the dreams and desires of the public, but cinematic universes reflect the intentions of the corporations that produce them – namely, the intention to foreverize their properties.

Your concept of foreverism has a particular ring to it and as a thesis which almost dialectically engages nostalgia it does sound very intellectually stimulating. It closes in on a particular visual quality of our culture in which 'everything (which was immediately lived) recedes into representation' (Debord) and it might present us with a part of the answer to a question posed by the founder of the academic field of visual studies W.J.T. Mitchell in the title of his iconic essay, "What do pictures want?". Foreverism seems like a good departure point for a critical re-evaluation of our contemporary visual culture and its particular policies of sense-making?

TANNER: I'll offer a variation on that question, one that I attempt to answer in *Foreverism*: What do media corporations want? And to follow up on the Debord quote: Why does everything that was previously lived recede into representation? My argument in the book isn't that "we" are so nostalgic that "we" can't help but turn the past into a nostalgia-glorifying representation of itself. Instead, I'm arguing that media corporations want their past intellectual properties to survive the future, to be future-proofed, so that they will continue to make money. The result of this venture is that it seems that "we" are too nostalgic to think of anything

new. But in reality, the new is continually being edged to the margins to make way for foreverized products.

Could we prefigure foreverism in discussing the differences between the phenomena of American sit-com/family shows from the 80s onwards and serialised animation from about the same era? Namely, while TV shows cannot escape their actors growing older – why reality of life eventually dictates the development of stories and characters – some iconic animated TV shows inhabit a ‘frozen universe’ and run for twenty, thirty years with little or no change to the characters, settings, etc. How does this phenomena inform the notions of nostalgia and foreverism?

TANNER: This is especially relevant considering the push to foreverize actors’ likeness with artificial intelligence. Voice actors age too, and their voices can change. But if their voices are replicated, then the animated series really can last forever. This can happen with live-action series as well, thanks to de-aging filters and AI voice replication. James Earl Jones, the voice of Darth Vader in *Star Wars*, has already allowed a voice replication company to recreate his voice using AI for future *Star Wars* films, now that he’s retired from the part.

Now that we have gone through and mapped out – in brief – your interest and engagement with the phenomena of nostalgia, could you maybe share some intellectual and/or cultural influence through which we might dwell even deeper into your process and interests? Is there a figure, title, icon, cultural trend or intellectual movement you would cite as having influenced your thinking in some major way?

TANNER: My heroes have always been musicians, filmmakers, and novelists. Every time I write, whether it’s an essay or a book, I’m trying

to create an experience for the reader that's like watching a movie or listening to an album or reading an engrossing work of literature. I'm less interested in academic writing, in walking the reader through an argument bit by bit – to me, that's just not enjoyable to read. My favourite nonfiction writers don't just tell stories or outline arguments, they provide experiences. Every time I write, that's what I'm aiming for.

Your transition from nostalgia to the concept of foreverism does have a certain dialectical outlook, especially in addressing the contemporary moment in our globalised popular culture. Taken as such, it also has a substantial methodological potential in development of tools or – rather – attitudes towards and for a more 'authentic' practice of daily life. How would you compare your work to – or locate it among – the likes of Mark Fisher (Capitalist Realism) or McKenzie Wark (Molecular Red) – not to mention even the hugely important Daniel J. Boorstin (if we consider only his book The Image – a guide to pseudo events in America)?

TANNER: I encountered Boorstin in graduate school, and I can appreciate the influence his work has had on media studies. But I was influenced more by Mark Fisher and McKenzie Wark. Both writers introduced me to theory in a way that connected it to praxis. They brought theory down to earth, so to speak, down to daily life. I'm uninterested in engaging with concepts on a theoretical plane only, or within academic cloisters. I don't live in a world of theory. I encounter the "real" every moment of the day, so my writing tries to reflect that.

How would you – could you, should we – compare what we discussed thus far in the context of lifestyles and culture in the US with

other outlooks on the global stage, mainly the influences that come from Korean and Japanese pop-culture? Do you see a difference there, particularly in the way they 'handle' nostalgia or how they 'foreverize' their cultural products or properties of their culture? Might we find some corrective attitudes that you recognize in the cultures and practices – artistic or otherwise – outside the US?

TANNER: I think we should consider cross-cultural examinations of foreverism because the US is very good at exporting foreverized properties abroad. But we have to be careful not to universalize here. Nostalgia is shaped culturally, and one can find variations of it in different cultures, under different names. But that doesn't mean all nostalgias across all cultures are similar. To what degree something like *saudade* in Portugal or *natsukashii* in Japan is similar to nostalgia is hard to determine. They are more or less similar without being the exact emotions with different names. So since I conceptualise foreverism as an anti-nostalgic discourse, it thrives in cultures in which nostalgia poses a threat and must be eliminated. In western cultures, particularly, this has been the case: nostalgia has always threatened progress. But not every culture perceives nostalgia as a threat and might not be interested in foreverizing things. Of course, that doesn't mean major multinational corporations aren't interested in foreverizing things and trying to sell them worldwide.

Aside from being a prolific writer and a critic, you are also an artist. Does your interest in nostalgia as a writer influence your music, do they have a connection in your process or are these two distinct areas of your creative outlet? Do you find some topics to be easier to tackle in music than in writing and vice versa?

TANNER: When I write, I'm trying to say in words what I say in my music.

They are two different avenues down which I pursue similar ideas. In my songwriting, I can express those ideas more obliquely, leaving the meanings up for interpretation, allowing the listener to fill in the gaps. I try to do this in my writing as well, to establish a mood and resist over-explanation. If I listen to a great piece of music and someone asks me what it's about, I don't know if I could explain it, but I can tell you how it makes me feel and I can share it with others. I want my writing to work similarly. I might be able to briefly explain what my books are about, but I try to write them so that reading them provides a unique experience.

Could you recommend some recent works in any media (from books to films and beyond) which you find interesting for the readers and researchers in nostalgia, popular media and critical theory...do you have some interesting readings in the surrounding area which you would theme as important for understanding the 'contemporary moment'?

TANNER: Let me name a few recent favorites of mine. Yōko Ogawa's *The Memory Police* is a novel about an island that slowly loses memories of specific objects and things, and the Memory Police enforce the forgetting. I recently saw Ken Russell's infamously banned film *The Devils*, and it stands up to the hype. It's truly a magnificent, perfectly executed movie that explores themes of power, desire, and belief. If you can find it to watch, do it. And finally, I have to recommend *Which As You Know Means Violence* by Philippa Snow. It's a meditation on self-injury as art, and Snow is one of the best writers working today.

Along the same lines, while talking about your motivations, inspiration and direction in nostalgia research, you seem to be pretty much in tune with – not to say immersed in – the popular culture and the

daily life in the US and elsewhere. How important would you say it is for the researcher of nostalgia/spectacle/digital art & culture to be in close, almost intimate relation to its subject? Are there some fringe phenomena you look out for more than others, where one should direct his theoretical or practical interests in order to better grasp conceptions and phenomenologies we are discussing when talking about nostalgia, foreverism, etc.? Thirty to forty years ago we would definitely be talking about TV (like Günther Anders did) or Cinema (like Jonathan Beller...), while today we might easily become overwhelmed with the flux of visual phenomena on every level of daily experience...

TANNER: I try to stay plugged into what's happening in politics and culture, but I always try to maintain a distance from the churn of the daily news cycle. The last thing I want to do each day is check in and see which news stories are trending, what a politician said or didn't say, the latest celebrity development, etc. As you say, there's a big difference between being in tune with one's culture and being immersed in it. I try to float atop it.

When I'm writing and researching, I tend to look for assumptions in the rhetoric. For nostalgia, I look out for accusations of nostalgia: when someone calls this or that thing "nostalgic," that catches my attention. Because very often, accusations of nostalgia elide more complicated associations. I tend to pay attention to assumptions anyway, whether they're about nostalgia or not. If someone claims that a person has been brainwashed, what does that mean exactly? If a tech person claims that the latest iPhone is the best one yet, what does that mean? I usually start with these questions and go from there.

Finally, could you share some more insights into what you are working on now and what you consider to be your writing prospects for the

future? As the 'nostalgia networks and movements' grow culturally, intellectually and economically, what do you expect to see in this field in the coming years?

TANNER: For nostalgia research, I hope to see more histories of nostalgia that engage with primary sources. I also hope to see analyses of nostalgia written by scholars of color, queer scholars, trans scholars, and scholars with disabilities.

For my own writing projects, after *Foreverism*, my next book will be a history of exorcism and possession since the postwar period. I'm exploring how and why exorcism re-emerged in the west around 1970 and has grown in popularity since. It will be published in the next year or two. After that, I'm not sure what I'll be working on. I'd love to write something about the militarization of education, or maybe a book on guns in American cinema. I'm always searching for new angles and new curiosities.

I would, maybe, try to go over some topics with you in brief that we are going to encounter in the coming chapters of the book as you might give us some interesting outlooks on the phenomena which could in turn provoke additional research and exploration from a certain unique perspective. Firstly, as the book is coming from the geo-political provenance of a (still) young democracy in the Balkans (former state of Federative Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia), do you have any insights or could you comment on the fact that in recent years we see a resurgence of retro phenomena in more than one instance. Lots of it has to do with the disillusion with the expectations from the future which was during the 1980s envisioned through Sci-Fi aesthetic, especially in

the covers of early computer magazines or even the concrete developments of the Yugoslavian Space Program which never took flight so to say. For example, here is one vast online resource for ex-yu computer magazines nostalgia: <http://pc.sux.org/indexMMSlo.html> which was also appreciated by McKenzie Wark on several occasions, especially the aesthetical coupling of computer-enthusiasm and eroticism on the covers of similar magazines.

TANNER: Oh wow this is an excellent resource. I can't comment specifically about nostalgia for the Yugoslavian Space Program, but what you're describing sounds a lot like nostalgia for lost futures, a very hauntological aesthetic. Thank you for sharing this.

On another instance, we have several artistic projects engaging nostalgia in more or less (im)mediate sense which will be reproduced on the pages of the publication. Aside from work by the talented collage artist working under the moniker AMIO MON especially interested in provoking nostalgia through coupling and collaging of ex-yu postcards and space-scapes: www.instagram.com/amio_mon, where do you localise the role of visual arts or even contemporary art in general with respect to the concept of nostalgia? Do you have some visual phenomena you would like to point out in that respect? One of my favourite fringe artistic digital incarnations of nostalgia has been the on-line project <https://www.windows93.net/> which maybe (and at least visually) speaks a lot about the nostalgia-commodities we have taken up in some of the previous questions...

TANNER: Graphic design has certainly enabled artists to recreate or reimagine early digital aesthetics and then make them accessible via social media. I don't know if this trend will ever disappear. The best visual

art, like any medium, can invite us to experience nostalgia in more hallucinatory ways. Or it can deliver nostalgic content to us without interference: a kind of free-base nostalgia. The Windows 93 site is interesting because it unlocked a number of memories I have about early computers. It's always quite disorienting to be wrenched back into the past by just looking at something visual.

Finally, what are your own reflections on the reception of your ideas when coming face to face with your audience, readers and listeners? You have been active for years now not only through writing and making music, but also in lecturing at the University as well as in festivals, conferences and symposiums around the world. How are your ideas received by these audiences and would you say that you are satisfied with what you have done thus far at least in terms of dialogue and deliberation of your ideas with the public?

TANNER: I'm just trying to explore ideas about the world. It's a blessing to be able to have one's writing read by others. As long as people want to hear or read my work, I'll write. I'm also blessed to have the support from my wife, my family, and my friends. Without their love and support I wouldn't be writing.

Dario Vuger

Nostalgia Between Fiction and (Hyper)reality – Interview with Krešimir Purgar

With this interview, we aim to outline a preliminary map of the phenomenon of nostalgia in the context of contemporary visual culture. You have been at the forefront of researching modern visual phenomena for some time now – establishing the Center for Visual Studies in Zagreb, leading various scientific projects, and editing volumes for prestigious publishers (such as The Palgrave Handbook of Image Studies; Iconology of Abstraction – digital images and the modern world; W.J.T. Mitchell’s Image Theory – Living Pictures; Theorizing Images, etc.), which are regarded as significant resources for the study of contemporary art theory, image theory, and media studies. Recalling our conversation during the Nostalgia Movements conference opening, could you briefly position the phenomenon in the context of contemporary artistic practices?

PURGAR: First and foremost, we need to distinguish between nostalgia as an artistic or political tendency and nostalgia as a feeling inherent to modern humans. The Renaissance marks the period in human history where two different views on nostalgia intertwined, creating a dichotomy between the emotional and the rational – a dichotomy that has haunted

us from the Renaissance to the so-called Anthropocene. The Renaissance can be considered the first institutionalized nostalgia because the mentioned dichotomy was based on an ancient understanding of nature as perfection, mimetic representations, proportional depictions of the human figure, “photographic” portraits such as those by Antonello da Messina or Albrecht Dürer, and linear perspective as seen in Perugino’s painting “Christ handing the keys to St. Peter” or Raphael’s “The School of Athens” – this was the rational component of nostalgia. Within such a naturalistic scopic regime, the emotional component also found its mode of representation, based on Western Christianity and its iconography. The Western Christian variation of Jesus as a being with a dual nature, divine and human, allowed Renaissance nostalgia towards the ancient as natural and rational to blend with the divine-emotional. In the Renaissance, nature is no longer (only) the bucolic world of anthropomorphized gods but also the site of hyper-realistic suffering of God-Human, best exemplified in Andrea Mantegna’s painting “Lamentation over the Dead Christ”. The emotional power of this painting lies not in Mantegna’s distinctive linear style but in the sense of a cinematic perspective, a radical observer’s point-of-view shot, as if the camera (in this case, the painter) brought us closer to something we could never approach in real life in that way. Thus, the symbiosis of the divine and human, the natural and the represented, is the birthplace of nostalgia.

Contemporary nostalgia stems from a similar conflict of opposing yet intertwined principles, but in a value sense, it is different: the emotional, i.e., the divine, has been replaced by the national, ideological, class, gender, etc., within capitalism as the rational and techno-scientific. As art has always done from the Renaissance to today, I believe that contemporary art too reflects these same aporias. As we can imagine, the situation today, at least in terms of art, is much more complicated. In other words, incentives for interventions in cultural memory have become

highly instrumentalized. Every artistic act carrying a nostalgic subtext or hypertext is always tied to some allegedly personal trauma, political action, historical-educational sentiment, mourning for a better, more humane, fairer world. Looking at such art, we could almost conclude that the world was indeed better, more humane, and just than it is today. Of course, this is a short circuit of the emotional and rational structure of nostalgia. I will try to explain. What we could call iconoclastic nostalgia in the woke culture of the West seeks to rectify history by removing traces of what, according to an idealized version of a perfect world, does not fit the picture of the current or future perfection. In the United States, there has been a popular movement in recent years to remove Confederate monuments, i.e., memory of that part of American history that “enlightened” parts of American society want to disown today. One such example is the monument to Jefferson Davis, erected in 1911 in Richmond (VA) and demolished in 2020. However, the problem with iconoclastic nostalgia is that history inevitably has already happened, and in that case, all you can do is make access to memory more difficult. It will no longer be part of the society’s memory spectacle but rather something deeply hidden in the archival catacombs. In Croatia, in that sense, we are a bit more advanced though. After the iconoclastic anti-nostalgia of the 1990s, when many monuments commemorating the part of the victims of World War II who ended up on the right side of history were destroyed, some of them have been restored recently. To avoid any confusion: the restoration of anti-fascist monuments should be supported because we cannot consider it a nostalgic revival simply because these monuments were erected in a specific historical context and commemorate the only consensually accepted mass crime in the history of humanity. In our country, another phenomenon is developing today, often associated with art, and that is iconophilic nostalgia, which parasitizes on anti-fascist monuments and places of suffering by recycling them as empty pictures, thereby detached from the historical causality of place, time, and ideology.

Such artworks themselves do not possess the substance drawn from real historical monuments they visualize simply because, through the recycling of the memory place via media transfer and a change in form, they always lose what the original monument possesses – commemorative paths of the place and the formal uniqueness of the original. Admittedly, something is gained: pseudo-nostalgic ideologized object as a modest contribution to the capitalist economy of “engaged art”.

Moreover, it seems to me that this recent case – which is most clearly visible in the way we deal with monuments of the antifascist movement in the territory of the former Yugoslavia – produces, besides popular art with an engaged face, artifacts of everyday consumption, designer objects, and distinctive nostalgic embellishments of the living space precisely because, in our case, contemporary artistic tendencies and aesthetic principles have closely intertwined with the dominant political regime, thus creating a short circuit that is only now beginning to be observed separately, yet with its own set of contemporary issues. Monuments by Džamonja or Bakić could soon – even in necessary modifications to avoid any infringement of copyright – be found on the tables and shelves of enthusiasts of designer artifacts from bygone times (like replicas of ancient busts and temples...). The power of separation (inherent in the spectacular or cinematic mode of production) seems to have done an important job here, enabling the objects of a political, economic, and social era to be viewed almost as artifacts “found outside of history”. Can we say that nostalgia in this regard could be approached archaeologically?

PURGAR: I think that labeling this phenomenon as “archaeological” in a narrower sense would be somewhat unfair to archaeology as a discipline, and even if you are referring to all possible interpretations of Foucault’s archaeology of knowledge, it would be an overstatement.

Here, we are talking about mere commodification, not a conscious historical reflex, or even marginally conscious like nostalgia. However, in your question, I recognize the desire to shed light on another aspect of nostalgia: why it arises in the current time. The historical memory of the generation born between the two World Wars, people who created our recent past, is marked by two war traumas after which the world, despite everything, became a better place than it was in any previous period. In recent times – starting with the terrorist attack on the U.S. on September 11, 2001, and an even more radical response from America, the occupation of Iraq, and the second Gulf War two years later, then the creation of the terrorist theocracy known as the Islamic State, followed by Russian aggression on Ukraine and the latest war of Israel against the terrorist group Hamas – the world no longer seems like a good place to live. When conversations about nuclear apocalypse became a common topic during a coffee break, instead of football or TikTok trivialities, what nostalgic illusion of security can one refer to? To the chaos in the 6th century after the fall of the Roman Empire, to the beginning of humanism in the mid-14th century when the Black Plague decimated a third of the European population, or perhaps to the Thirty Years' War in the 17th century? The timeframe of those periods upon which the contemporary figure of nostalgia could be formed seems severely narrowed.

In our local context, it's even more challenging because we have been taught that the nations inhabiting the territories of the former Yugoslavia, except in deep history, have always been victims, confined in the dungeons of various occupying nations. And of the three Yugoslavias, only the second one was "good and just". So, after the Greater Serbia conquest wars in the territories of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the space for politically correct nostalgia has been narrowed to just about forty years. Therefore, if we want to be in that nostalgia trend, we simply had no choice but to mourn the second half of the twentieth century. Going back to your question, our

Croatian “archaeology of nostalgia” is still just an ideological construct. The artistic, and even commodification aspects of Bakić and Džamonja that you mention have nothing to do with it because these artists in their “second life” have not been either rediscovered, rehabilitated, nor reinterpreted in that nostalgic rearview – they are simply being reused.

The phenomenon itself seems to escape definition and tends to dissolve as soon as one points at it, but the fact remains that a new type of aesthetics has infiltrated our visual culture and thus became relevant to contemporary art production – a tendency to reimagine the past or to develop just such experiences that allow us to “re-live” the past in some commodified form or rather to experience the past as a product. And while these same tendencies have been around for some time now – in fashion, design, etc. – it is only now that they visually saturate our experience of the world to an extent that some would say we live in the “culture of nostalgia”. Is this something that is also confirmed by your experience and research in visual studies?

PURGAR: I think that no discipline exists without an inherent relationship with history – both general history and the history of its own or other disciplines. But, of course, not every area of human knowledge is equally susceptible to history, does not have equal “responsibility” for writing history, and therefore does not have equal predispositions to reimagine or commodify the past. When it comes to visual studies, it is essentially not a discipline but a worldview most interested in the ways images and visuality in general change meanings concerning technology, religion, art, communication, and other areas where images play a crucial role. What confuses the academic community most about visual studies is that it does not see in an image only the meaning predetermined by a completely predictable hermeneutic development, which is inherent in every humanistic discipline. Instead, it leaves the possibility of a much broader range of potential meanings. In principle, this works in such a way that

humanistic disciplines recognize in images only those symptoms for which each of them is responsible – it’s about the division of labor, a kind of epistemological contract that regulates what is allowed to know within disciplinary boundaries. Take, for example, the most famous version of Caravaggio’s *St. John the Baptist* from 1604, located in the Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas City: this painting can be a “typical Caravaggio” because of the characteristic chiaroscuro technique; the adolescent figure of the saint can then be analyzed as a psychologically broken person who does not believe in his own mission on earth; we can focus on the ambivalent semiotic ensemble of the semi-nude body, red drapery, and dense darkness. The sexual aspect of the image can interest us again in various ways: as an alibi for depicting erotic content within religious mainstream but also as a reflection of the artist’s own sexuality; we can recognize a phallic symbol in the left knee emerging from the darkness, but it is also a purely technical solution by which, in a very modern manner, the mere anatomy of the human body is defined by a reflector beam of directed light. So, what do we really see in that painting? We see what we want to see, i.e., what we are looking for in it and for which we are sure that some discipline will give us legitimacy. Visual studies approach its theoretical objects differently. It uses the methodology of different disciplines, and the results of the visual “anamnesis” are never known in advance. Visual studies approaches its theoretical objects with an extremely high level of tolerance for uncertainty. In contemporary jargon, it is easiest to understand this today if we call it a *queer* approach to visual material, and that’s why it will never, at least I hope, be “disciplined”.

When you ask me about the relationship of visual studies to the culture of nostalgia, what is crucial is its queer position that prevents it from succumbing to the academic mechanism of disciplinary commodification. If such a non-discipline lacks its own ideology, strict procedures, and is therefore not particularly popular, it cannot develop a nostalgic sentiment towards any aspect of culture, society, art, etc. Nostalgia as a current

condition or a study of memory, ruin porn, Marxist demiurges, awakened interest in the non-aligned movement, and, entirely locally, the trendy revival of socialist culture in Croatia are all symptoms of fear of a new descent into war, ecological, or economic catastrophe. However rational and real these fears may be, they are, by the logic of the democratic order, necessarily ideologically directed; the problem is not whether the threat is real but who will be blamed if the catastrophe occurs. And it's always the *other*. I think it's good that visual studies, for the reasons I just mentioned, cannot be easily harnessed institutionally in ideological battles on the margins of science and art.

The discourse established in visual studies through W.J.T. Mitchell talks about the power of images, their will towards some goal, etc. Can we consider nostalgia – outside of it being characterized as a defining emotion of our time by Grafton Tanner – a special kind of visual phenomena? Namely, what can visual studies offer us to critically engage with nostalgia?

PURGAR: Okay, I see that you insist on giving some meaning to visual studies in times that demand a cool head. Visual studies can only offer methods that would enable us to consider visual phenomena from perspectives that do not cling to pre-known answers. In the circumstances we find ourselves in, that *could* help, despite my generally pessimistic position. Because of their non-disciplinary queer status within the academic world, visual studies is capable of creating a methodological approach that I have called “theory on demand”. This involves formulating a visual problem that we want to address, and then, like a puzzle, assembling theoretical tools that we believe can help us illuminate that problem. If we start from the premise that the object of nostalgic sentiment can be any produced thing or thought to which we have emotionally attached, whether it originated in the Paleolithic or is related to the trash aesthetics of vaporwave, then it is clear that we must focus on something paradigm-

matic; otherwise, the set of possible tools would be immeasurable and therefore unusable, or, as it happens, we would come to conclusions that were already known to us because we were looking exactly for them. I am currently laying the foundations for a project that would seek to identify what is common to all images from prehistory to the present because it is quite obvious that they have changed very little until the advent of digital technology. If we can detect and convincingly explain that there are anthropological constants common to all images, then a completely new dimension of the relationship between past and present, old and new media, painting and film, artistic and technological visualizations opens up to us. Then we will find out that disciplines do not serve the production of knowledge but its organization, institutionalization, and limitation.

My previous question aimed at a certain de-territorializing effect modern visual culture has on our experience of the world. Specifically, if “all that was immediately lived receded into representation” (a famous paraphrase by Guy Debord), we are invited to consider the following: modern images replace and augment our experience of the world on the fundamental level, replacing everywhere the real-time and real space of experience with images and synthetic visualizations of experiences (on a primitive level of a certain Total Recall movie scenario). Can the overwhelming sense of nostalgia come from the mere fact that we are surrounded by experiences that are only evocative of the real but no longer there to give us a sense of here and now but rather – excuse my rhetoric here – being nowhere (now-here) in particular?

PURGAR: Yes, certainly, that is something we are inevitably moving toward, but it has not happened yet. What you are talking about could be called radical nostalgia from today’s perspective because it will no longer be motivated by the conflict between the emotional and the rational, which, as I mentioned at the beginning, is at the very foundation of Western culture from the New Age to the Anthropocene. Technology

does not currently allow us complete penetration into machine-created otherness. In fact, the transformation of life experience into representation, as Debord notes, is not specific to the society of the spectacle but is the ability of humans of any era to turn something into an image. Ancient Egyptian depictions of harvest work on papyrus and Jackson Pollock's abstract paintings reflect the anthropological given that leaves a trace of lived experience in the image in the same way. Considerations of styles, periods, artistic genius, the Hollywood star system, and the commodification of the past cannot reveal anything essentially significant about these representations, except that these cultural conventions prepare images for permanent recycling within their respective disciplines. Even visualizations we observe using virtual reality devices, the so-called environmental images, are very similar to classical two-dimensional representations – of course, not in the context of art but in the concept of an image. It is just as easy to take off a VR headset to make the digitally produced illusion disappear as it is to lower one's gaze from the ceiling fresco by Andrea Pozzo in the church of sant'Ignazio in Rome and return to the earthly reality from the glory of St. Ignatius of Loyola. The real erasure of boundaries between two-dimensional representation, which we call an image, and three-dimensional artificial environment will come only when we are no longer aware of the illusion, when we experience the artificially created environment as entirely identical to what we now call reality. Until then, let's enjoy the self-imposed illusion because what awaits us afterward probably won't be of our own choice.

Hyperrealism in contemporary art can then also be considered in that respect symptomatic of this cultural shift (nostalgia for the real...).

PURGAR: I wouldn't say so, although your question assumes that such a conclusion might be possible. As a matter of fact, original hyperrealism, that of Richard Estes, Ralph Goings, Don Eddy, Chuck Close, and Robert Cottingham from the late 1960s and early 1970s, emerged in

the United States during the height of neo-avant-garde, conceptual art, minimalism, and hard-edge painting. Therefore, art history interprets it as a regressive, today we would say “nostalgic”, phenomenon in art, a mere sentiment for something irreversibly gone. For art historians, things ideally aligned in the case of hyperrealism because it seemed that the unfortunate teleology of art history, according to which everything has an inevitable course and final purpose, actually worked. Visual arts then entered the era of high-modernist self-awareness; abstraction and reduction were at their peak, and mimesis was finally and definitively abandoned. In such a context, of course, hyperrealism could only be disdainfully rejected as “nostalgia for the real”. However, the discipline of art history once again showed that it is not capable of understanding contemporary art because it always expects art to develop, to show causality, the transmission of influence, or to break with the past, to make visible artists’ geniality and skill, to adhere to connoisseurship and social spectacle. Unlike the neo-avant-garde and its radical concepts, hyperrealism had nothing of that (except skill), not even in traces; instead, it made a confusing and unexpected leap from the problem of form to the problem of media. I know that this seems entirely counterintuitive, but the essence of understanding hyperrealism is not in admiration of form or the artist’s skill in imitation but in the fact that it radically places the problem of the painterly image, the relationship between photography and painting, and the intensity of reality in the image at the center of interest.

Upon closer consideration, conceptual art by Joseph Kosuth and hyperrealism met at the same point in the theory of representation, although they started from different premises: works of conceptual art always offered more information than the artists, enthralled by proclaimed tautology, were willing to admit, while hyperrealistic paintings always offered less information than the photographs from which they were made. The artistic and theoretical value of both of these directions is that they

ask what an image really is, to what extent and in relation to what. Should I mention that it is entirely irrelevant to me that posing these questions was not the intention of the authors? Fortunately, for us observers, art is usually much more (or much less) than what its authors want it to be.

Could we, in that respect, consider “the culture of nostalgia” to be a part of a larger and certainly wider social (pictorial) development (iconic turn, society of the spectacle, etc.)?

PURGAR: Well, of course, all of these are cultural and theoretical tropes, a kind of metalanguage we use to legitimize ourselves as humanistic scientists. How else could we converse and produce surplus meaning? I’m not saying this in an ironic tone, but I genuinely believe that the humanities will do the most for this world if they stop indulging in endless self-understanding as a path to truth, or worse, as the ultimate source of truth. Limiting disciplinary knowledge is the main obstacle to making the humanities truly relevant. So, the problem is not that we use tropes like the iconic turn, culture of nostalgia, or society of the spectacle, but the real question is how we do it. I think the entire humanities should become queer in a way that we will no longer be slaves to academic nomenclature and that we will no longer automatically turn our social, economic, gender, or any preferential or disciplinary position into theoretical argumentation. I don’t know why it is so, but I have the impression that we simply do not want to discover the spaces of freedom that our academic metalanguage opens for us.

Maybe this is a problem of the abundance of academic resources and the overall quantification of the field which is becoming increasingly hard to navigate, and since anything can be made into a research subject closes in to a truly spectacular science, the one which, like a 1:1 map, covers the whole “territory”. I can appreciate and fully endorse your attitude towards queer humanities – which is quite an engaging concept in itself

– but the question remains if the quality of the research will inevitably become circumstantial and inessential to the principle of quantity. Wouldn't that turn even the researchers to the observers without any claim to "objective validity"? This is a departure from our main topic, but I think the problem does inform an attitude taken up here at least in suggesting a cautionary approach to the phenomena in question.

PURGAR: I completely understand your doubt. Most of academic humanities likely share it, whether they are more focused on historical facts or engaged with urgent social issues. I am obliged to clarify my position, but before that, I have a rhetorical question: do we really believe that it is possible to assess the "objective value," for example, of a painting like *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* by Barnett Newman or films such as Harmony Korine's *Gummo*? I am not talking about the cult status of individual works, their (un)popularity, or market value, but about their "objective" value as works of art. All we can do objectively is give them a positivist dimension: determine when they were created, in what artistic, social, or political context; we can engage in the genealogy of styles and their branching, but even the potential diagnosis of the influence of one artist, director, or writer on another (which disciplinary histories particularly love), as you say, is circumstantial, and I would be even more radical and admit: claims of direct influence can be correct, but they can also be entirely arbitrary. Simply put, there is no way we can objectively establish the genealogy of influence, let alone whether such claims are meaningful; formal or ideological similarities are not evidence, they are just an expression – of a critic, theorist, or the artist himself.

Nevertheless, let's try with Barnett Newman. Besides a few undeniable facts about his paintings, such as format, technique, and possibly the year of creation, what eludes any interpretation of his paintings is what they mean, whether they represent something, and especially what is artistically valuable in them. The only thing we can do is describe in as

much detail as possible what we see: colors, their intensity, formal relationships between lines and surfaces, etc. But if we do that, we haven't objectified the artistic value; instead, we have only translated visual experience into a textual or spoken statement. Claude Cernuschi, an excellent historian of modern and contemporary art, found in Barnett Newman's writings that this American artist referred to the German philosopher Martin Heidegger in some places. After that, he wrote a book titled *Barnett Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy*, in which he innovatively discussed how elements of Heidegger's philosophy are reflected in Newman's paintings. Do I even need to mention that traces of any articulated discourse, especially Heidegger's thought, cannot truly be seen in radically abstract paintings because these are two media that cannot be entirely translated into each other; there is always something that goes beyond the interpretation or something that fails to reach it. So, in terms of objective accuracy, Cernuschi's book is incorrect, indeed, it is entirely arbitrary, but without such or some other interpretation, Newman's work would lack any cognitive substantiation, and therefore would be even less understandable, in consequence even less meaningful. Even if Newman gave his word that his paintings were inspired by Heidegger, we can never know if that is true, and even if it is true, who says that connecting with some other philosopher, writer, or musical work, minimalism by La Monte Young comes to mind, wouldn't yield even more interesting results? Cernuschi at least found some kind of trace in Heidegger, and what about Donald Judd and the entire Land Art, especially in the light of ecological paranoia? I think for most modern and contemporary art, from Duchamp to today, we couldn't say anything worthwhile without incessant struggling for meaning; otherwise we would just be inventing ever new ekphrastic acrobatics, and that would be reducing visual art to literature. Cernuschi's book on Newman and Heidegger is a real example of what I consider good practice in visual studies and "theory on demand". In the end, it is just one of many intellectual offers; the truth is that there is no truth in art.

You have stated (radically if not famously) on several occasions that contemporary art has left the domain of art history. Does that fact give us an opportunity to consider and critically engage contemporary artistic practices from the standpoint of popular culture? Does that development also bring us closer to considering contemporary art an accomplice in the overall “weaponization” of the past against our better judgment of our place in the world?

PURGAR: Art is the most effective “soft weapon” that humankind has ever created. Of course, I am not referring to classical art and everything that art history declared its own domain until the beginning of the 20th century. I mean the moment when art ceased to serve cultic, religious, or instrumental purposes of any kind, or, as you reminded me, the moment when art abandoned the domain of this once glorious and powerful discipline. However, here I would not follow your suggestion. When it comes to contemporary art, we can replace the discipline of art history with any other discipline, but art itself, whether old or new, cannot be replaced by popular culture. The status of an artist or a work of art is not acquired through merits in a specific domain but through institutional or, to put it less elegantly, bureaucratic confirmation. We usually consider comics part of popular culture, but if they are exhibited in a museum, then they become works of art. The same goes for movies: they are usually in the domain of popular culture, but if they receive an award at a festival or gain some other kind of legitimation over time, then they become works of art. Unlike products of popular culture, which only become art under certain conditions, contemporary works of art in the narrow sense come into being by the very act of exhibition; they do not need to first gain popularity or any verification outside of what Arthur Danto calls the “art world”. Although this still does not tell us anything about the value of these works of art, paradoxically, institutionalization is what makes art such an effec-

tive soft weapon. It doesn't need to be good or valuable; it is not necessary for anyone to understand it – it cannot be objectively evaluated or, even less, interpreted. Regardless of the fact that in the star system every work is turned into gold, art remains the ultimate space of freedom precisely because we cannot rationally evaluate it.

*I would like to once again take a few steps back in our interview and – going even beyond the timeframe suggested in your first answer – ask you about W.J.T. Mitchell's early *The Last Dinosaur Book* and your thoughts about the suggested "reading" of the visual culture exposing the certain nostalgia for, literally, big narratives as the radicalization of "post-modern" attitudes towards profoundly cynical consumption of history as a product. One of my fairly simple examples would be the fascination with "old" consumer brands of foods, like wearing a Pepsi t-shirt but not drinking Pepsi because it is not good for you.*

PURGAR: Mitchell's book is an incredibly sharp portrayal of the development of visual culture in the 19th and 20th centuries through the observation of a relatively bizarre fascination with a period for which we have very modest material evidence – the era of dinosaurs. The book tells of an extreme form of pseudo-nostalgia, but its main theme is the past as a culturally produced narrative. Mitchell posed a much broader problem because he was interested in how nostalgia is created (and indeed produced) for something that is in every sense so detached from us while made familiar and close through popular literature, movies, picture books, children's figurines, amusement parks, and prize games. It's not about a cynical consumption of history but its production from scratch, so an extremely modern phenomenon of creating a craving for something entirely insubstantial. The example you give, the Pepsi t-shirt, is an excellent, hard-core indication of nostalgia in the era of the internet, radical political correctness, and cultural simulacrum. It is a typical example of proxy-experience, a false involvement through a material

intermediary. In the 1970s, there was a commercial on Zagreb Television, I don't remember if it was for Pepsi-Cola or Coca-Cola, in which a group of cheerful young men and women played volleyball on a wooden raft gently sliding down a river. Let's compare such an experience, even if it was just an advertising exaggeration that no one really encountered, with TikTok challenges or the "excitements" offered to us as we surf virtual spaces on the internet. Recalling movies like Kathryn Bigelow's *Point Break* from 1991, which offered the illusion of real surfing on waves in Malibu along the coast of California or, even earlier, Bruce Brown's *The Endless Summer* from 1966, in which surfers search for that perfect wave along the coasts of Australia and New Zealand, Tahiti, Hawaii, Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa, with what experience can we compare today? Today, we surf through *Transformers*, docu-fiction, survival tips for the rainforests of Borneo, and true crime. Somewhere between fiction, reality and hyper-reality, staged reality has nested – a typical internet genre that forces us into a daily but futile search for authenticity, because only lived experience can provide it. Therefore, preferring today "unadulterated fiction" does not mean living in contradiction – for me, it is a kind of moral obligation. I know, now I'm becoming nostalgic.

This is excellently articulated, and at this pop-cultural moment, we completely agree. The fact that the "dream factory" has outgrown its possibilities and become a power apparatus with its own politics and economies of visibility (or, as Grafton Tanner puts it, the politics of nostalgia) is something that surpasses the frameworks of the spectacle theory into a superior structure that I often refer to as the culture of visualization. Slavoj Žižek aptly described this in his Pervert's Guide to Ideology, a popular exploration of film and ideology, using the example of the movie They Live, where the positions of reality and illusion are turned upside down. We don't wear ideological glasses; rather, the nature of reality itself has become ideologically manufactured, visualized with a maximum 1:1 effect. Our "resistance" lies in counter-constructions of

visibility, in glasses that not only reveal the state of things but, perhaps more importantly, hide our own view from the possibility that “images see where we look”, when and which images become the object of our attention.

PURGAR: I might disappoint you, but I think no “countervisuality” (borrowing the term from Nicholas Mirzoeff) is possible. Not because the dystopian future is inevitable but because it is *already* happening right now; it is the present and reality. Let’s keep in mind that Carpenter’s film *They Live* was made “way back” in 1988. Back then, we could still assume the existence of some invisible force controlling our lives, and we could believe that science would provide us with weapons against the invisible invader. In this particular film, it was assumed that there were mechanisms – in this case, glasses, so prosaically cool and trashy! – that would make the invisible reality visible. Today, resistance is impossible simply because we see our *conquistadores* very well and run towards them joyfully. For example, advertisements used to be in places we could isolate, but now, as we walk through the city, people dressed from head to toe in hyper-branded clothing come towards us like a walking textile tattoos. The endless lines in front of Apple stores every time a new version of the iPhone is released also testify to voluntary subjugation. Social networks have normalized visibility to such an extent that the various regulations concerning privacy, and the supposed ability to manage our own visibility offered to us by both corporations and national governments, are perhaps the most cynical form of nostalgia. The narrative goes that there is voluntary and imposed visibility. Perhaps it was like that in the era of analog media; if you wanted to deny your visibility, you would sometimes make a phone call from a public phone booth, something you even had to do so because, at least in my early youth, phones were not yet in every home. Today, smartphones are considered a fundamental human right and an essential need, like food, drinking water, and freedom. In the modern world, there is a consensual agreement on visibility. Both sides

have voluntarily agreed to it. However, there are some counter-strategies, but they are not aimed at depriving visibility but at diverting attention to other topics that should act as analgesic and enlightening; first, because they calm the anxiety produced by alleged collective guilt for social inequalities, and second, they point us to our human rights that we didn't even know existed. The impossibility of invisibility is what we got in exchange for the possibility of choosing endless identities – gender, internet, avatar, computer-filtered, artificially created. The tactical methods of woke culture in the west, which seemingly advocates extreme sensitivity towards the other and different, enable the acquisition of institutional forgiveness for participating in strategic inequalities. It is forgotten that equal rights will never, by themselves, create equal opportunities, especially if we identify the two and then build political correctness on the attractive illusion of identity. Behind different personalities, there is always only one person.

Could we, perhaps, dwell a little bit on the aesthetics and popular culture in the environment of nostalgia. Namely, when I think about movies like Blade Runner with its somber aesthetic and moral outlook, there seems to be a certain design at play that sells us not only a certain vision of the future but a type of visualization of longing that is proper not to the imagined future but to the immanent present(ness) of our condition. The majority of the film is set in a rather dark, hyper-urban yet socially disengaged environment, and everything seems at the least extra-ordinary (sic). The reference material is clear; the environments of this dystopian imagination already really exist at the time of their cinematic visualization; they are just aesthetically augmented to provide us with a certain feeling. A similar point can be made about the aesthetics of American indie cinema, with Gummo being just one example (but also Virgin Suicides, Clerks, Before Sunrise, Thumbsucker, etc.), in which contemporary everyday life is directed in such a way that it produces (in a way) already implied, if not mentioned – but restated – “longing

for the real”, which is in itself not a radical theoretical conception but a very smart way to optimize visual commodities.

PURGAR: It is very difficult for me to speak about films in the context of reality, especially those that have gained cult or even artistic status. They have unintentionally and often unwantedly transcended their own status from entertainment to artistic. This process is not without consequences; as I mentioned earlier, unlike art in a narrower sense, which acquires its status at one moment, works of popular culture can become art over a longer period of time. During this transition, various things happen: for example, we can project universal fears of one period onto a film, which may appear funny or even more frightening a few decades later, and yet, both reasons can be triggers for their transition to a new, more esteemed status. A good example of this is David Cameron’s *Terminator*. I think American indie cinema gained popularity because it was intentionally different from the Hollywood dream factory; it was more real, certainly, but that reality was always romantically portrayed in films, at least in the examples you mention. Whether this is a consequence of a reflexive desire for the real in American cinema or the optimization of reality as a consumable commodity, probably both; whether we will notice more the first or the latter again depends on whether we watch movies to see reality in them or look for an empty place in them that we would like to fill with our own meaning.

In this context, the process of cultural commodification that happened with Italian neorealism is interesting. For example, Vittorio De Sica’s film *Ladri di biciclette* from 1948 shows the cruel reality, poverty, and hardship in Italy after World War II. The film quickly became a work of art, in part because the magazine *Sight and Sound* included it in the list of the best films of all time as early as 1952. In my opinion, an equally well, if not better-made, comedy like Ettore Scola’s *Brutti, sporchi e cattivi* from 1991 never reached the status of De Sica’s film because Scola shifted

the expected convention of neorealist drama into naturalistic comedy. As a paradigmatic popular-cultural genre, *Brutti, sporchi e cattivi* could not achieve the status of *Ladri di biciclette*, although it portrays reality in a much more dramatic way – no longer as material poverty and ethical dilemmas arising from it in the earlier film, but now as a very bitter fact that poverty can have much more complex, institutional sources, even during the period of the so-called Italian economic miracle from the 1960s to the 1980s. How the extended family of Giacinto Mazzatella, the pater familias, lives in Scola's film, we can easily connect with the reasons why millions of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa and Afghanistan are flocking to Europe today. Although neorealist, the harshness of *Ladri di biciclette* can evoke a nostalgic sentiment in us because it speaks of a period when the creation of a better world began. On the other hand, precisely because it is much closer to our time, while watching *Brutti, sporchi e cattivi*, we are left only with bitterness because we know perfectly well that in a such world not everyone can participate with equal dignity, regardless of the identities one perform.

I remember that during the conference talk, we discussed the phenomena of “nostalgia first” – and somewhat spontaneously – as an element of architecture (and) design. This was perhaps our initial foray into the immediate vicinity of nostalgia, making it an appropriate place to conclude our discussion with just a few remarks on this matter. From the buildings themselves to spaces and dwellings viewed from the inside, the way we embrace and understand certain designs as “homey” and “warm” or “distanced” and “cold” also has something to do with our sense of belonging to a certain temporal and spatial context, which can be constructed. Moreover, postmodern architecture and design seem to have internalized this way of thinking on the level of “style” and

proper aesthetic outlook, in which fragments of bygone architectural eras play new roles in the visual (de)construction of our everyday life in real (material) space and time.

PURGAR: In the time when postmodern culture was in vogue, much ink was spilled explaining how it led to a reversal in the modernist idea of progress. This shift was most easily observed, especially in architecture, where its metaphorical nature was in such an obvious opposition to the modernist minimalism of form. But there are many more factors at play; it's not just about nostalgia, even though some painterly styles of the 1980s, such as transavantgarde, may initially seem to have a nostalgic component. It's not enough for something to resemble the past to carry a nostalgic scent; I think the awareness of a specific object is crucial for the nostalgic sentiment, what we actually crave and how that desired object transforms into a contemporary narrative. Using the ideas of Jean-François Lyotard, a pioneer of the theoretical discourse on postmodernity, it's easy to notice that, for this philosopher, it's about the breakdown of trust in knowledge, not about the figure of nostalgia. In his seminal work *La condition post-moderne* from 1979, he clearly states, "Most people have lost the nostalgia for the lost narrative. It in no way follows that they are reduced to barbarity. What saves them from it is their knowledge that legitimation can only spring from their own linguistic practice and communicational interaction". Therefore, it might be more about the loss of the possibility for nostalgia and the imagination that stems from it, transforming a powerful human feeling into mere form, linguistic practices, and communication. I think postmodernity has much more to do with the development of liberal capitalism and instrumentalized society than with feelings. I admit that resisting the emotional and symbolic component of post-modern art is not easy, but I don't believe that Hans Hollein, Richard Rogers, James Stirling, or any other architect wanted to depict their specific relationship to any object of desire.

For a proper closure, I would maybe just ask you one more fairly trivial question, or rather a recommendation... Namely, are there some books, works (from art or popular culture), or practices that you found to be crucial in determining your “worldview”? What would be the source material for one to get closer to your point of view within the vast horizons of contemporary everyday life? It is something I tend to ask in many of my conversations, and this is perhaps even more important here since we aim to put this interview in a book that should ultimately act as a sourcebook not only for nostalgia studies but for the development of certain attitudes towards contemporary visual culture as a whole.

PURGAR: I’m not fond of talking about myself and my preferences beyond what can be inferred from my texts, books, and usual academic CVs, which I believe reveal quite a bit, as does this conversation. Anyway, I think my “worldview” has been defined by those scientific books that did not reveal the “truth” to me but allowed me to build my proposals for discussion on them – those that are open enough, allowing me to build upon them without feeling the constant pressure to explain what the author intended. Perhaps because it is the first book through which I understood how I want to observe art, movies, read books, and, generally, look around, and because it still defines my approach to interpreting the phenomena of visual culture, Omar Calabrese’s *L’età neobarocca* holds an important place. I came across that book entirely by chance in 1988 when, during a scholarship in my third year of Art History and Italian studies, I wandered the narrow streets on the outskirts of the historic center of Florence. In a small bookstore, I found this book published just a year earlier. I tried to write my graduate thesis in art history following the model of this book. Of course, I couldn’t follow the combination of methodological rigor and the postmodern, anything-goes ethos of the Italian author (in my case, the emphasis was, as expected, on anything-goes), but at that moment, I understood what Mladen Machiedo, my then professor of con-

temporary Italian literature, meant when he revealed to us students that the secret to good research in the humanities is if we manage to connect our discipline with something outside it. I then interpreted it to myself in such a way that the principle must be functioning vice versa too – that we should allow other disciplines or entirely different cultural or scientific phenomena to disrupt our “parent” discipline. From today’s perspective, Calabrese’s book may seem outdated because the cases he describes are strongly tied to specific examples of visual art, architecture, popular culture, and science of the 1980s. Still, his symptomatic linking of individual examples and their interpretation within the culture paradigmatic of that time remains an inspiration for me.

Among the films that define my personal *Weltanschauung* and do not fall into the category of nostalgic sentiment, I can single out *Django Unchained* by Quentin Tarantino. What earned this film a cult and, consequently, artistic status for me is Tarantino’s complete deconstruction of the genre and thematic determinants of the American Western. The movie further questions racial and gender stereotypes beyond cultural mainstream, providing a postcolonial critique wrapped in pop-cultural packaging. It involves a shift in the dynamics between the ruling and the subordinate, portraying Americans as the bad guys and Germans as moral pillars. Moreover, the role Tarantino assigns to fashion as a crucial ally to the main character in defining his self-awareness elevates this film to supreme entertainment and a boundless source of inspiration for critical thinking. Personally, I experienced it as a stimulus to transcend various boundaries of academic disciplining and to create a space for intellectual freedom in general.



PLAY

Nadežda Čačinovič

Nostalgia: an obstacle? – a short comment

You ache because you lost something: your home, your past, or your dreams. That makes you less than satisfied with the circumstances of your life. It can mean that you are critical concerning the circumstances “as such”, not only concerning your predicament.

So far so good: in confronting something surrounding you with something different and better you might be preparing for a change, even preparing to work for a change.

Even in this extremely reductive approach, I must introduce some additional elements. We might work for a change envisaging something new and different. It might qualify as utopia; and so opposed to nostalgia: no place versus a lost one. A Hegelian must despise both nostalgia and utopianism: history, he claims, is proceeding by necessity and law. Hans Magnus Enzensberger used to say critically that nowadays intellectuals carry apocalyptic thoughts in their hand luggage...

We may be moved by the past without being determined by it. Nostal-

gia clearly “moves” us in the sense of emotional experience: but does it involve an “upheaval” – a motion? Or does it immobilize us, does it push us into a passive mode? Do we so to say “drop out” from our own time?

The commercial proposal of Metaverse (seemingly becoming a flop) is the newest use and abuse of imagination. Imagination imposed as a social practice feeds both into utopia and nostalgia. Neither is possible without some kind of imagination. It is a wide field including something called cosplay, an enacting of roles from fiction or the past – a variety of the all-present virtual reality. It seems that the world we live in is “entzaubert” in the sense of Max Weber, disenchanted because it functions only as subjected to function and profit so we have to console ourselves. It does not work quite so well when there are wars and we can not ignore the pain of others – and of course not our own. Arjun Appadurai has described the development of imagination as a social practice: “One of the principal shifts in the global cultural order, created by cinema, television, and video technology (and how they frame and energize other, older media) has to do with the role of imagination in social life. Until recently, whatever the force of social change, a case could be made that social life was largely inertial, that tradition provided a relatively finite set of possible lives, and that fantasy and imagination were residual practices, confined to special persons or domains, restricted to special moments or places. In general, imagination and fantasy were antidotes to the finitude of social experience. In the past two decades ...the weight has imperceptibly shifted. More persons throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of possible lives offered by mass media in all their forms. That is, fantasy is now a social practice; it enters in a host of ways, into the fabrication of social lives for many people in many societies” (Appadurai 1996; 54-55).

That is the context of nostalgia. It is a complex one and we need several viewpoints, the Society of Spectacle with Debord or investigations like

our beliefs with Paul Veyne and Robert Pfaller. Debord shows how experience is hijacked into ready-made forms (Debord 1994), Veyne shows the fundamental ambivalence of belief (Veyne 1988), and Pfaller the curious nature of prejudices (Pfaller 2017)...

In nostalgia there is often a kind of ambivalence: we claim that something in the past was better but do not always analyze it critically. Imagination works in the service of recreation, an image, an object of desire. Utopia needs to be fed by imagination as well. Russell Jacoby's *Picture Imperfect* lamented the deterioration of utopian thought blaming the modern lack of imagination (Jacoby 2007). So he quotes the surgical removal of imagination in Zamjatin's novel *We* which eliminates subversive thought, any quest for alternatives.

But there is no evidence for lacking imagination: as social praxis, it ceases to be subversive. That is not so new. In a paradoxical way in SF fiction other or future worlds are as often as not based on past, medieval motifs – and sometimes by a combination of imagined advanced technology and feudal types of societies.

Nostalgia is a good ally against simple ideas of progress, of a bright future around the corner. Without recalling the past we can not grasp who we are. But the proper mode for that is atonement – remembering the victims, remembering suffering, an image we all learned from Benjamin's *Angel of History*.

Then again, we might want to complicate the timeline. Possibly because we belong to a personality type Galen Strawson defined as episodic: we do not look for continuity in our lives, we do not want to be defined by the past. Galen Strawson published first in 2004 in the *Times Literary*

Supplement and a journal and later as part of his book *Selves* (Strawson 2009) a strong thesis against the role of narrative in establishing our identity, our sense of self and against the normative claim that we can make sense of our life only by forming an autobiographical narrative. Strawson doubts that all human beings are diachronic in their experiences. Episodic persons have little sense that the self was there in the past and will be there in the future. He names some markedly episodic writers: Montaigne, Stendhal, Virginia Woolf, Pessoa, Iris Murdoch... Are they incapable of nostalgia?

Or we might be impressed by the verses of T.S. Eliot's *Burnt Norton* (see T.S. Elliot in Kramer 2007, 33-36):

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in the future?
And time future is contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.
Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door, we never opened
Into the rose garden. (...)

If all time is eternally present, all time is unredeemable. The rose garden (of nostalgia?) belongs to the world of speculation. Strawson's attempt to divide persons into episodic and diachronic (those who want an integrated autobiography) seems a little like a parlor game but it is pertinent to the topic of nostalgia. As is the whole issue of memory.

The conventional wisdom has shifted so we now assume that memory is not a storehouse but a constantly redrawn map. We are mapping, re-establishing, erasing. That looks very much like a narrative procedure and nostalgia can play an important role.

How relevant is the role if we accept the viewpoint of Deleuze's "Immanence: A Life" (the English translation in Deleuze 2005)? Deleuze writes about an a-subjective consciousness, a pre-reflexive impersonal consciousness, a duration of consciousness without a self: a pure plan of immanence. "A life contains only virtuals. It is made up of virtualities, events, and singularities. What we call virtual is not something that lacks reality but something that is engaged in a process of actualization following the plane that gives it its particular reality. The immanent event is actualized in a state of things and of the lived that make it happen".

It seems that there is not enough subjective agency for the impact of nostalgia... but does a will for the subjective agency include the necessity of limiting and controlling nostalgic impulses?

Blaženka Perica

“So far, and yet so close...” Media Possibilities Between Nostalgia and Aura

After decades of interpretations of his text “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”¹ focusing on its historicity, political-social

1 The text in question originally bears the title *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduktion*. In Croatian, it was published in the translation by Snješka Knežević (in: *Život umjetnosti*, 6, 1968.; pp. 22-32) under the title: *Walter Benjamin. Umjetničko djelo u razdoblju tehničke reprodukcije*. The author of the accompanying text employs her own translations, including this title, translating it as: “Umjetničko djelo u razdoblju njegove tehničke reproducibilnosti”, aligning with recent discussions regarding the translation of this title into English. In the Croatian translation, the original German term mentioned in the title (“technischen”) was used, while until recently, in English translations, it was rendered as “mechanical reproduction”. Recently, in light of the connotations these words have acquired from Benjamin’s time to the digital age, a translation of “technical reproducibility” is proposed (cf. Yong 2004). Unless otherwise stated, the translations by the author are used in the accompanying text from the German language, based on the anthology of Walter Benjamin’s texts. *Illuminationen, Ausgewählte Schriften* 1, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M., 1977., which is a lightly revised edition from 1955, and in which the text *Umjetničko djelo u razdoblju tehničke reproducibilnosti* is found on pages 136-169. In the following text and notes, the title of the respective text is omitted and marked as Benjamin, *Illuminationen*. The text was originally written in exile in Paris during 1935 and was first published in 1936 (in a French abridged translation and edited by Pierre Klossowski) under the title *L’œuvre d’art à l’époque de*

relevance, and processes of perception, interest in Walter Benjamin's oeuvre has since expanded to encompass the impact of media production on social practice, on the mediatization and digitalization of reality. Focus on nostalgia and aura is not an exception even within these processes.

The innovations of media and technology and their historical shifts have always been transmitted through nostalgic narratives: before embracing novelties in everyday life, people mourned the loss and demise of previous, obsolete media. Moreover, new technologies have always been defined in relation to older ones: innovators have promoted their advantages, while users have been wary of the new, more inclined to a wistful and sentimental view of the obsolete. Such an approach generates differences that result in the belief that the present is superior to the past (once an innovation is accepted in everyday life), meaning that constant nostalgic reminiscences of the past do not actually confirm that past, but rather affirm the status of the present. Such a conclusion could also be valid for the effects that Benjamin's text "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" has had since its inception.

In any case, the common denominator in observing nostalgic narratives about media changes is the fact that the values of the new are assessed by the standards of the old, as noted by Umberto Eco as far back as 1964 (Eco 1994). Although even after 60 years, Eco's analysis is still valid in many aspects; it should be emphasized that Eco's critical description of the media is correlated with the fact that new media were determined "in relationship to earlier technologies of representation",

sa reproduction mécanisée in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 5, 1936, Heft 1, pp. 40-66. Theodor E. Adorno edited the third, final, and authorized version of the text in 1939 (in: Walter Benjamin: *Schriften*. Band I, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1955., pp. 366-405). The text underwent five editions, all of which are gathered in: Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit, Werke und Nachlaß*. Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Band 16, Suhrkamp, Berlin 2013.

or – as Dominik Schrey argues (Schrey 2017; Niemeyer 2014, 27-39): what is “new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media”.² Benjamin’s analysis of aura undertaken over eight decades ago was based on his assertion regarding its loss caused by reproducibility and the technical innovations of his time. The number of theorists who directly or indirectly address this phenomenon (such as Gumbrecht, Mersch, Osborne, Purgar, Seel, Rebentisch, Wiesing, ...) within current aesthetic discussions, visual studies, or image sciences, leads not only to the conclusion that perhaps it is not primarily important how accurate Benjamin was in his analysis in the text on the artwork and reproducibility but rather that it is far more striking that this analysis has left enough open questions, even deficits, which have become a source of many productive reflections on and about contemporaneity. Moreover, one should not overlook the fact that all recent aesthetic theories refer to artistic production that has emerged after Benjamin’s time, including the very recent one, in numerous examples to those that have accompanied technological progress, including inquiries into the possibilities of reproductive expressions. This includes not only film, video, or computer-generated art, but also, for example, multiples, the various potentials of so-called appropriation art, and primarily various forms of spatially defined creations, mostly installations.

In any case, media theories owe much to the ambiguities identified by Benjamin in his relevant text and the concept of aura, as well as the oscillations he detected between the emancipatory role of media in mass culture and the degradation to which mass culture is exposed,

2 In this description, Schrey relied on two sources: (Sterne 2006, 338-348) and (Bolter and Grusin 2000, 15).

as noted by Mike Yong, who emphasizes that Benjamin's text was to some extent a precursor to the theory of simulacra and simulation. Yong quotes Jean Baudrillard: "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" – and observes: "In this sense Benjamin's assertion that the original under technical reproduction ceases to exist is taken to its most extreme in Baudrillard, in which the disintegration of the original has been such that it is no longer, even, a point of reference. The hyperreal spins of reproductions endlessly, without grounding" (Yong 2004).

For a large number of younger media theories, shifts in the mediatization of social reality are more intriguing than Baudrillard's *hyperreal*, thanks to processes of so-called nostalgia and "aura-ization". In this case, too, interest in Benjamin's contributions to the origins of reception theory and media is indispensable. These shifts sometimes unexpectedly call into question established perspectives when considering the roles of nostalgia and aura – not only in the context of theory but also in contemporary artistic production.

Nostalgization

In his endeavor to discuss alternative approaches to the past based on selected works of contemporary art, John Potts in his text on the journey into the past (Potts 2014) encounters phenomena of "contempt, nostalgia, and enigma", which initially points to the characteristics of the recent consumer culture obsessed with the immediate present and the very near future: we are witnesses, namely, to a radical orientation towards the continuous production of new products and information, leading to "cultural amnesia" and "memory atrophy". Potts reminds us

that as early as the early 1980s, theorist Fredric Jameson diagnosed a “perpetual present” and “obliterate traditions”, and industrialist Henry Ford proclaimed a slogan back in 1916 that could also apply to post-industrial society: “We don’t want tradition. We want to live in the present (...) We create today” (Potts 2014, 213). In our present day, nobody truly believes in industrial progress anymore, or in the progress fervently propagated by avant-garde artists such as futurists (Marinetti) or Russian constructivists (Tatlin). Therefore, Potts writes how all that remains is the ideology of Silicon Valley technocracy, which promotes information and network technology as (albeit somewhat convincing!) hope for improvement in the world.

However, if history is unwelcome in the present, and if media culture, according to Lev Manovich, shapes social structures by privileging the “immediate present”, fueling social media’s hunger for the latest information (Manovich 2013, cited in Potts 2014, 215) – then where does the great interest in nostalgia come from in contemporary aesthetic theories, artistic practice, and even everyday life? Probably because the progressive, hectic, and turbulent present prompts people to seek some kind of escape to a “quieter” past, while cause and effect interchangeably shift positions, each stimulating the other. Among other things, Potts points out that today – unlike in the 1990s when information was organized on the World Wide Web, and when search engine functions, i.e., searching and browsing services, were still current – on Facebook or Twitter, one seeks only “constant updates of friends’ activities” and a “continuously changing stream of information-bursts” (Potts 2014), and each event is just a series of delocalized images, each news item only appears to be replaced by a new event... The consequence of this is that each successive generation of Apple products discards the previous one as digital trash, and the ephemerality of information, especially frequent information about various ecological disasters or social violence that we learn about through TV or satellite, flows so

rapidly that it does not allow for questioning backgrounds, deeper analyses of the reasons for current or historical events. In this way, the fundamental preference for living in the present and the very near future only accelerates the rapid forgetting of received content.

In these circumstances, Potts understands nostalgia in terms of personal emotional attachments to the past (longing for childhood, family home, youth, etc.), but in his view, this personal inclination is suitable for creating retro-cults, commercializing nostalgia on a collective level. Thanks to the possibilities and logic of social networks, personal nostalgias and sentiments are easily constructed for lucrative purposes as market and media versions of the past: there are, for example, radio stations specialized only in hits from certain past periods; TV series that are glamorous versions of historical periods (“new vogues in retro-fashion,” e.g., *Downtown Abbey* or *Mad Men*) or exotic simulations of some (actually non-existent) cultures, and advertisements are “costumed” in the appearance of former products or historical circumstances in order to convince of the supposedly long-standing tradition of quality, considering the precisely calculated group of “nostalgic” users. Besides such simulated, “constructed phantasms of the past for those who have not experienced that real past” – reconstructions of past periods turn nostalgia into a market commodity and make it only an ideological ally of progress, and users into consumers. Moreover, through commercialized nostalgia, the superiority of our present is only reaffirmed. In this way, both nostalgia and memorization are fostered to the detriment of “memory abdication,” and after this negative assessment of nostalgia, Potts poses the question: “What would a non-nostalgic representation of the past look like?” (Potts 2014, 217). He finds the answer to this question in recent artistic works that do not acquiesce to the general obsession with our contemporary moment with new and even newer (information, products) and the adoration of the present moment, which fosters and

nurtures the erasure of real history, but rather oppose the ephemerality of events, even when addressing memory, “play with contradictions or reveal processes of meaning production, bring to light (principles of production) formations of national identities or cultural forgetting” (Potts 2014), with the important note that they do so rooted in real time and space. By clearly distinguishing between the memory of nostalgia and memory as a creative potential/aspect of art – Potts emphasizes the transformative character that each memory carries: each act of memory actively re-creates past events and experiences, which is evident in many contemporary works of art that reference memory or archival content. Exceptional works, such as hand-drawn animations in William Kentridge’s films (*The Refusal of Time*, 2007; *Felix in Exile*, 2003) or photographed reconstructions of cardboard models of scenes from historical or personal sources by Thomas Demand, are the best examples of approaches in which nostalgia, coupled with media technology, finds truly creative expressions.

Processes of nostalgia today instigate a tense play between the present, the past, and memory that interests many contemporaries – both theorists and artists. Instead of criticizing the currently widespread consumer and media nostalgia, as pointed out by Potts, highlighting its commodification due to digitization and the focus of social networks and media in general on the eternal new Present, Dominik Schrey changes the perspective of observing this phenomenon: he believes that nostalgia, especially today, should always be taken seriously when it comes to the media. Schrey states: “I will discuss one of the most recent manifestations of this general trend: the longing for what is assumed to be lost in the continuing process of digitization that accounts for contemporary media culture’s widespread romanticizing and fetishizing of analogue media. Symptoms of this ‘analogue nostalgia’ in its broadest sense can be found in every area of culture and society. For example, in 2012, the Academy for Motion Picture Arts and

Sciences awarded the most Oscars to *The Artist* (Michel Hazanavicius, 2011) and *Hugo* (Martin Scorsese, 2011). Both of these films celebrate not only the artistic qualities of early cinema but also the celluloid filmstrip as its material basis” (Schrey 2014, 27). Schrey focused in his text on “analogue nostalgia” (Schrey 2014, 34),³ encompassing all “obsolete media” which no longer include only books or traditional artistic media but also all those audio-visual creations of technological provenance that have changed audio-visual reception with every new technological invention. However, the removal of gramophones and vinyl records, cassette players, outdated cameras, TVs, old cinemas, etc., from everyday use did not mean their complete disappearance. These are phenomena that only confirm that every innovation in the history of technology and media has always been read as a nostalgic narrative. These “(non-)dead media” are still present, indeed, they live their golden age in recent processes of remediation and “relentlessly haunt popular culture obsessed with its own past” (Schrey 2014, 27). It seems that this temporal perspective of Schrey’s on the tendencies of contemporary culture is opposite to what Potts discussed, when he, together with Manovich, emphasized the “hunger for the present” in the same culture. However, if we read “opposite” as “alternative”, we will find that it is only different perspectives from which we observe the multifaceted influences of nostalgia.

So Schrey, not unlike what Potts affirmatively described in the works of Kentridge and Demand, will emphasize how media can – as a means of virtual access to the past – be a prerequisite for mediating nostalgic content, but they can also be the content of nostalgia themselves, and in doing so “the sentiment can be directed towards their specific medial

3 Schrey mentions that the term “analogue nostalgia” was introduced by Laura U. Marks in 2002.

constitution, their materiality, the aesthetics resulting from these factors, or all these combined” (Schrey 2014, 29). The reason lies in the specificity of cultural memory, which is shaped not only by the quality of production of a certain period but also “by subtle properties of the recording media themselves” (Schrey 2014). This means that nostalgia is present in digital remediation as a particular kind of self-reflexivity, but in doing so, it reveals its ambivalent character: it can represent a renewal of some ideal from the past, but it can also be a tool that uses nostalgia as part of the creative process, i.e., it involves differentiation, dividing into the traditional approach to narrative on one hand, or medial functionalization of nostalgia on the other. For example, the content of a digital photograph may have no connection to past reality (or any reality), but it can take on the appearance of “old photographs”, thus activating a nostalgic narrative, i.e., becoming a tool in the process of creating that particular digital photograph. It’s no longer about the past becoming part of the present in nostalgia; instead, the present itself is nostalgic, making it seem as though it’s about the “natural” content of today’s culture of archiving and preserving heritage. In this context, the interest in Schrey’s text lies in the term “virtual ruins”. He says that “analog nostalgia in remediation simulates a process of aging that has not yet occurred, nor will it ever (at least not in the form simulated)”, and that this state is “analogous to the artificial ruins (their aesthetic significance then) from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, since analog nostalgia includes artificial, or rather, virtual, ruins of the digital era” (Schrey 2014, 35). However, if ruins were once attractive to people in the 18th and 19th centuries as “markers of absence”, Schrey argues the opposite for virtual ruins: digital simulation of analog decay marks presence since it simulates precisely that life or “soul” which digital media has always been accused of lacking. Looking at it from this perspective, we could conclude that in analog nostalgia, the processes and traces of the decay of analog are “stored”. Through the

features of virtual ruins, Schrey raises the question: Why were some aspects of analog media once considered mistakes or problems, but today, in the remediation of analog aesthetics, they are considered advantages? A scratched gramophone record or tape from a cassette player, or even the sound they made when reproduced, are willingly “incorporated” into installations of contemporary media production, or simulated as if it were inherent in analog media, a certain imperfection – precisely present. Schrey explains: “In the high fidelity medium of digital video, where each generation can be as imperviously perfect as the one before, artists are importing images of electronic dropout and decay, ‘TV snow’ and the random colors of unrecorded tape, in a sort of longing for analog physicality” (Schrey 2014, 34). It’s primarily about not the degradation of digital technology, but exclusively about the digital remediation of analog aesthetics within the digital. This aesthetics of analog media, desirable in remediation for “errors/defects” and analog materiality, also expresses a desire for indexicality, “a retrospective fondness for the ‘problems’ of decay and generational loss that analog video posed” (Schrey 2014, 34). However, the problem of indexicality – or at least what was – according to Schrey, completely wrongly – implied has other levels.

Emphasizing how unclearly defined the characteristics of the terms analog and digital are, how different meanings they take on in various contexts, and that there is no possibility of a concept of media purity, in further questioning the revaluation of faults and imperfections of analog media and the specific noises they create, Schrey raises questions about the “metaphysics of recording” and the “double logic of remediation”, both of which originate in the questioning of human desire to record experiences of reality as authentically as possible, to bring art as “faithfully” close to life.

Critiques of media metaphysics have been very present in recent decades. Rooted in the idea that mediation is measured in terms of distance from life was already Bergson's metaphysical stance that film illusion cannot truly present the continuity of movement (equivalent to life) because movement itself is what happens between static images (Bergson 1944).⁴ Schrey mentions theorists (Sterne, 2006) who have noticed similar metaphysical arguments regarding the discontinuity of digital recordings. Such arguments support the notion that discrete samples processed in binary code are only "simulations" of what they represent, thus lacking the "essence", "soul", "authenticity", or "aura" of real recorded sound/image. However, the need for "real life", for authenticity in audio or visual recordings should not be posed as an ontological or metaphysical question – it is primarily a socially constructed question, as emphasized by Dominik Schrey supporting theorists who argue that some analog media (e.g., magnetic tape) possess the same discontinuity as binary code (zeros and ones) in digital storage.

Discursive analyses by other theorists (Bolter and Grusin 2000) also detect the same desire for authenticity, notes Schrey, but this proves to be a contradiction in the "double logic of remediation:" on the one hand, there is a desire for immediacy, i.e., "transparent presentation of reality", and finds its expression in the media's efforts to erase all indicators of mediation and to present their representation as life itself. However, hypermediation takes the opposite direction: the tendency is towards multiplying signs of mediation, and thus the non-transparency of representation. The paradox here, as Schrey emphasizes, is that immediacy and hypermediation do not exclude each other but coexist and depend on each other, sharing the same demand for authentic

4 Bergson's approach to time and movement greatly influenced the conception of the temporality of the aura and the "dialectical image" in Walter Benjamin's writings.

experience. It is then possible for hypermediality to become an authentic experience – the “excess of media” becomes an immediate experience when, for example, specific signs of mediation behave as if they distract attention from the immediacy of recorded sound and thus – in a process inverse from the intuitive one – create authentic experience in the first place.⁵

Schrey reminds us that in recent years, the category of the analog has often been delineated in opposition to the digital, and he states that it is entirely wrong to completely identify it with the indexical (Schrey 2014, 30). However, if we understand the index as a trace (cf. Krauss 1977), it remains unclear what is wrong with this identification when Schrey himself insists, towards the end, on describing analog media in terms of their self-liquidating functionality through traces of wear. Analog media not only break down but also deteriorate and age (e.g., vinyl records, film and audio tapes), and the traces of material fatigue and wear are most noticeable in the areas that have been most used. Such places are often the causes of errors/failures as well as the targets of media transformations, remediation in which digital processes simulate aging processes that have not occurred and will not occur. Virtual ruins. Therefore, Schrey writes: “In this regard, analogue nostalgia as an aesthetic practice is the paradoxical attempt to preserve decay and plan contingency” (Schrey 2014, 35) after establishing: “Moments of imperfection of analog media in digital performance are therefore nostalgic traces of a bygone era of mechanical reproducibility, traces that can be said to have become auratic, and as such have become available for aesthetic practice of all kinds. This aesthetic practice can in any case be remediated and appropriated

5 In this description of media metaphysics and the double logic of hypermediation, Schrey relied on two sources: (Sterne 2006) and (Bolter & Grusin 2000).

in digital media to simulate or mimic the sign of authentic or auratic experience” (Schrey 2014, 30). Although not further discussed here, behind the concluding observations in Schrey’s text, there is almost an explicit assertion of the congruence, almost identity, of analog nostalgia and aura, although this requires certain explanations: in the quote from Schrey’s text, we encounter how the “nostalgic trace has become auratic”, which is either a rather rough neglect of Benjamin’s explanation of the aura – especially in relation to the concept of trace – or it is a claim in which the identification is already assumed to exist.

If we recall Benjamin’s definition of the aura as “the appearance of distance, however close it may be”, and the trace as “the appearance of proximity, however far it may be” (Benjamin 1977, 143) – and bring this into the context of Schrey’s conclusions about nostalgic traces that can become auratic or about hypermediation that can be an authentic experience – we must necessarily note discrepancies. If we could find an answer for these discrepancies in the revaluations of these concepts, which are not unexpected decades after Benjamin’s definitions, and especially due to transformations of reception conditioned by the expansion of media in social reality, we cannot overlook newer contributions to aesthetic-theoretical discussions concerning Benjamin’s concept. In these theories, it is unlikely that we will encounter a clash between nostalgia and aura, let alone aura and trace.

Auraticization

The term “analog nostalgia” has long been occupying recent discussions on the nature of the relationship between nostalgia and media, but it seems that in a certain way, the medial problem of the phenomenon of aura is also affected by it what can be inferred from Schrey’s statements and some more recent essays on the concept of aura viewed from the perspective of media theory.

One such noteworthy essay comes from Magnus Wieland, who surprisingly convincingly detects the aura in a place where – if we follow only Benjamin’s definitions of aura and trace – we would not expect it (Wieland 2019, 94).⁶ Why? Although (as is evident from his text) he was familiar with Benjamin’s distinction between aura and trace in terms of opposing the appearance of distance (aura) and proximity (trace), Wieland’s starting point in the context of aura research is documents which, in sign theories such as Charles Sanders Peirce’s⁷ triadic one, represent an index (alongside the representamen and the interpretant), i.e., a sign that occurs in a causal-temporal and/or spatial relationship, corresponding to the term *trace*.

Contemplating the auratic potential of a document in conditions of media production, or the correctness of Benjamin’s claim about the “loss of aura”, presupposes some prior limitations that must be accepted, knowing the oscillations in interpretations of the concept of aura that have arisen primarily thanks to Benjamin’s functionalizations of that definition: although he slightly varied them, he used them in a larger number of very diverse contexts that his work abounded with, resulting in an even larger quantity of interpretations that interpret possible Benjaminian interpretations. Depending on whether he referred to the natural context or exclusively to that of the artwork, to the opposition of the original and the copy within the framework of the reproducibility process and technology (then) of new media; whether he interpreted the perception of aura in changing historical conditions of social practice or thought of the perception of aura as purely aesthetic experience of a *Jetztzeit*; whether perception

6 Comparison also: Schauplatz Archiv (degruyter.com), p. 6. (accessed: July 28, 2023)

7 Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) developed a triadic theory of signs in his essay “On a New List of Categories” from 1887.

for him was “dispersed perception” conditioned by contingent reality or one in cinema, in front of or behind the camera introducing “optical unconscious”; whether aura depends on subjective or objective, on material object-related or immaterial non-object-related conditions; on spatially (dis)located or temporally (dis)continuous manifestations... All of these are some of the questions from which each term and each mentioned relation can become (or has already been and is) the starting point for some new interpretation.

Stimulated by the fact that archival documents – with Wieland referring to archives where rare manuscripts and manuscripts are kept – have a dual function: informational and presentational, and that they are preserved in places inaccessible to laypeople, in archives that are both semiotopes and stages, Wieland first extracts some of Benjamin’s basic theses about the aura from the text “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”.⁸ In doing so, he determines that the characteristics mentioned regarding rare manuscripts and archives can be related to the properties attributed to aura by Benjamin: presence; uniqueness; authenticity; tradition/history; distance/inaccessibility. Wieland’s assessment of these features is accompanied by an interesting remark: he says that it is a “quasi-nostalgic counter-concept to mass replication technologies” (Wieland 2019, 94), i.e., copying. Like Potts and Schrey, who explore nostalgia, and Wieland, who explores the aura, he notices the convergence of two concepts (the “quasi” before nostalgia can be disregarded if we later learn from Wieland’s text that he relied on Schrey’s diagnoses of the original (cf. Schrey 2017, 140)).

8 Since the text has multiple editions, including a French one with which Benjamin was not satisfied, and which he later extensively revised and reworked, Wieland mentions that he used the latest authorized version from 1939 in his text.

In the next step, after questioning the dignity of rare manuscripts, Wieland moves on to the issue of the “loss of aura” thesis and then to the examination of the possibility of auratization of digital copies. He analyzes the definition of aura from the mentioned text – as do most theorists – where it reads: “a unique phenomenon of distance no matter how close it may be”.⁹ Wieland closely examines the paradoxical relationship between distance and proximity in this formulation, which has puzzled and prompted numerous new interpretations by theorists. However, for the potential auratization, it was more important, and necessary for Wieland to quote two other passages from the same text where Benjamin supplements his concise and unclear definition: “Even

9 The text containing exactly this definition originally has the title “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduktion” in: (Benjamin 1977, 142). Benjamin first mentions the aura in 1930 in the collection “Erfahrungsprotokollen zum Haschischgebrauch” where in the text titled “Mitteilungen über das Wesen der Aura” he engages in a polemic with theosophists, clearly distancing himself from their understanding and use of that term. See Walter Benjamin: *Fragmente gemischten Inhalts. Autobiographische Schriften* (1930) in: (Benjamin 1985, 588). The same definition of the aura Benjamin recorded in the text “Kleine Geschichte der Photographie” from 1931, where he notes that the phenomenon occurs in daguerreotypes and early portrait photographs. See Walter Benjamin: *Kleine Geschichte der Photographie* (1931); in: (Benjamin 1977, 378). However, Dieter Mersch also mentions a supplemented definition: “Die Aura ist Erscheinung einer Ferne, so nah das sein mag, was sie hervorruft. In der Spur werden wir der Sache habhaft; in der Aura bemächtigt sie sich unser” (The aura is the appearance of a distance, no matter how close what causes it may be. In the trace, we grasp the thing; in the aura, it seizes us). This addition to the definition allows for a clearer interpretation of the aura than the definition from the text on reproducibility. From the latter formulation, it was not easy to decipher what is “far” and what is “close”. From the supplemented definition, on the contrary, it is clear that the appearance of distance is caused by something that is obviously outside of us and that obviously seizes us, or as much as the aura itself remains a mysterious phenomenon, it occurs in the encounter of the subject with an object. Mersch cites two sources for this extended definition of the aura: One is the *Passagenwerk (Arcade Project)*, an extensive but unfinished work that Benjamin wrote from 1927 until his death in 1940. Adorno edited and published the text in the anthology in 1955 (*Gesammelte Schriften*, Frankfurt a.M., p. 560). The other source was Benjamin’s letter to Adorno dated December 9, 1938. (See Mersch 2002, p. 49).

the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence ‘here and now’, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” and “The here and now of the original determines the authenticity of the work of art” (Benjamin 1977, 139).

These selected additions, along with the commonly applied definition of aura, allow Wieland to conclude that Benjamin’s inclusion of the concept of the original versus reproduction allows for reading aura as a historically determined dimension, thus “liberating” further explanations of the temporal dimension of the “here and now” in the definition and introducing the document, the object of his study, into his own shorter version of understanding Benjamin’s aura, which he formulates as follows: “According to this understanding, aura therefore arises from the spatial presence of the observer’s present and the past of the document that the observer – no matter how close it is to him – will never be able to attain”.

Since those familiar with the topic are well aware of the key moments of difficulty with the concept of the aura, when the starting point for understanding it could be something else, another quote¹⁰ from Wieland will not fail to mention that his interpretation of Benjamin’s aura is not all that Benjamin meant by it, and skillfully shifts the discussion to the level of the spatial category of perception in general (thinking of the aura) by claiming that in Benjamin’s sense it is also possible to say that the aura always requires distance, although the requirement

10 Benjamin wrote about reproduction as a negative phenomenon in modern society, or rather, about the tendency of the masses to want to bring everything closer, to handle things up close, which is where images of things, or rather: off-images of things, reproductions, copies, serve well. Such statements, and there are several in Benjamin’s text in question, do not refer only to aesthetic perceptions but also to the given socio-political conditions, which significantly changes the focus of defining the aura as carried out by Wieland.

can be directed at the observer and formulated as “NOT looking at the object up close”. Since distance itself requires the visual perception of something distant, which is not at hand but is within reach of the eye, Wieland’s goal is to declare perception as the fundamental problem of the concept of the aura and the key theme of Benjamin’s text in question. With the argument that Benjamin also started from the standpoint that the “demise of the aura” was anyway “caused by changes in the medium of perception”, Wieland will, through distance, come to the conclusion that the “formation of the aura is substantially independent of the object of perception” (Wieland 2019, 96), and consequently, independent of the relationship between the original and the copy. Namely, if perceiving the aura is a question of the original, then non-auratic perception is appropriate to the copy, so it turns out that the copy is just another kind of medium – the original cannot be grasped by man, and copies are available everywhere, within reach.

In order to return the relationship between the original and the copy to the problem of distance, spatial dimensions, and towards the effort to encompass the digital, virtual (non-)space of the archive, Wieland will remind, on the one hand, of how much Benjamin emphasized the specific place in the definition of the aura. On the other hand, he will lean towards a topological interpretation of the aura as presented by Boris Groys, according to which the material character of the work, nor its provenance, are not important at all compared to the mere place where the work is located in order to have the status of an original (Groys 2003, 33-46). This is, of course, less relevant if we distinguish between the terms topological and topographic, as it is quite certain that Benjamin meant the concrete, physical space of the work, not its mathematical appearance.¹¹ Moreover, for him, it

11 Topology is not the same as topography: topology is a field of mathematics that

was important to emphasize that “there is a nature that addresses the camera differently from the one that addresses the eye” (Benjamin 1977, 162), which according to Benjamin results in “the unconscious space”¹² replacing the space infused with human consciousness. This space is subject to change, distortions, or rather, the abilities of the film camera to interrupt and continue the image; elongate and shorten, enlarge and reduce, in short: to deform the relationships within physical space, through which, according to Benjamin, we learn about the “optical unconscious” which is analogous to the “unconscious of psychoanalysis” (Benjamin 1977, 160, 162). If this is indeed Benjamin’s affirmative “discovery”, then it is certainly not because this space would be a topological space characterized by resistance to changes.

With all these assumptions in place, where aura is established as a topological effect, Wieland lays the groundwork for the auratization of manuscript documents (which are typically considered less attractive than works of art) within the specific topos of the archive where they are preserved. As Wieland himself writes, this broad arc from the dignity (aura of the original) to the digital nature of the document was necessary to reach the decisive question: can a digital manuscript have an “aura”?¹³

deals with the properties of space unaffected by deformations such as stretching or twisting; it involves sets of open structures used to define functions on a topological space. Topography, on the other hand, is a branch of geography that studies the surface features of the Earth and other physical, visible, astronomical objects such as the sun, moon, and planets. See: *topological* (en-academic.com) (accessed on August 16, 2023).

12 Benjamin uses metaphors at this point to underscore that different, human consciousness: we can only roughly be aware of someone’s step, but not of what happened in the interval before, from the previous step to the current one. In doing so, he actually proves the influence of Bergson’s thesis on the moving image, which cannot truly present continuity because the movement occurs in intervals, between images.

13 Magnus Wieland mentions that he took this question from: (van Hulle 2014).

However, the ultimate question is about the consequences of displacing such a copy into the immaterial internet accessible worldwide, with the argumentation guided by the claim that the relationship with the original does not necessarily have to be auratic, while digital forms of presentation can certainly develop auratic effects.

The reason for this lies in the possibilities developed in the field of reproducibility, which have been optimized over time due to the “danger” of copies threatening the value of the original, as Benjamin himself asserted. In this regard, Wieland must be given credit: From the perspective of the digital age, it becomes clear that it is the advent of reproduction that has defined the qualities of the original. This progression of things (natural but still historically conditioned) is exactly what Benjamin foresaw when he wrote about authenticity, arguing that the awareness of authenticity (the property of aura) in the case of a medieval Madonna statue was not necessary at the time the statue was created but developed over time, in later centuries (Benjamin 1977, 139, n.3).

In short: the dignity of an original manuscript is unquestionable since its treatment largely revolves around its untouchability, and its place of preservation, the archive, is conditioned for auraticization, which has been radically optimized with digital archives. In the digital age, however, treatment and presentation – what Benjamin termed the exhibition value of the work, supplanting the cult value of the auratic original (Benjamin 1977, 149) – have undergone fundamental changes: in digital records, original documents are maximally protected, as what we touch is the illuminated screen of the device, never the document itself. Accessibility to the work, in this case, the document, is enabled, yet it remains an inaccessible “phenomenon of distance”. Moreover, optimizing presentation conditions certainly also involves maximizing

the visibility of the original in digital records: by enlarging or virtually altering its position, the document can be more precisely observed; with advanced reproduction technology (as Benjamin already pointed out, referring, however, to analog photography and film cameras (Benjamin 1977, 161)¹⁴), qualities of the work/digitized manuscript that are not visible to the naked eye can be discerned.

These characteristics support the possible emergence of a new form of aura during the virtual presentation of original works or documents; consequently, deficits and criticisms directed at reproductions or copies are diminished. Copies, too, do not always have to be identical, a common criticism in comparison to originals, as it is not uncommon for discrepancies in the appearance of copies to occur during copying, making them a kind of unique item (Wieland 2019, 102).

Wieland's observation that the original today has become a "weak copy of itself" refers to the fact that our knowledge of originals in reality is obtained through reproductions, which only serves to enhance the value of the original: in this way, the value of certain works can only increase. Thus, Wieland's thesis about the possibilities of the aura of a digital copy has been validated: digital media have not erased originals but have paved the way for a new kind of aura experience: in the guise of a digital copy. Wieland's thesis that with digitization reproduction gains greater qualitative value and that the digital dispositif does not cause the degradation of the auratic experience sounds plausible.

However, he himself predicts that the presentation of a digital copy could be further improved, but then, as Wieland concludes, there

14 Here, Benjamin even explicitly mentions the advantages of filmic visual effects over the more modest capabilities of painting.

is already a danger that maximizing the resolution of the digital document's image could lead not only to fetishization, as happened in the analog era, but perhaps the document itself would then be rendered completely invisible (Wieland 2019, 104). It is precisely because of these concluding remarks in the text that it is difficult to believe that the raising of the value of the digital copy occurs "only if we rid ourselves of the nostalgic notion of the dependence of aura on materiality" (Wieland 2019, 103).

In continuation

The discussions on nostalgia in the texts of Potts and Schrey, as well as Wieland's text on the potential aura of digital copies, pointed to possible correspondences between these concepts in several ways. In the case of both concepts and their recent revitalizations, Walter Benjamin's oeuvre is an indispensable reference, not only because the reception of Benjamin's work (and persona) was marked by nostalgia (or melancholy), but also because the aura, born out of mourning over its loss, emerged in his writings imbued with the spirit of nostalgia. In the discussions about nostalgia, as well as those in the discourse and theories of media, Benjamin's nostalgia is increasingly affirmed, while interpretations of the aura in the same discourse generally do not grant Benjamin the right with his predictions about copies defaming original works of art; on the contrary, it is argued that through digitalization, the aura has not disappeared but rather returned. Philosophers, advocates of new reflections on aesthetic foundations, may not always agree with this.

It is important to point out that despite the breadth of the field and approaches to discussions about the concepts of nostalgia and aura, one can ultimately observe a division that determines the discourse

on nostalgia and aura from two perspectives: one socio-historical and the other aesthetic-artistic. However, this division proves to be very unstable when considering the consequences that advanced technology and media have brought into these discussions. Philosophers such as Lambert Wiesing, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Frederic Jameson, or Martin Seel, especially Dieter Mersch – to mention some whose texts largely rely on Benjamin’s reflections on art and aura as “a phenomenon of distance no matter how close it may be” – certainly will not evaluate aura, nostalgia, or the influence of media on aesthetics in the same way. Moreover, Mersch would certainly not accept the equal value of a copy and an original as Wieland does. In Mersch’s complex aesthetic approach to art and understanding of the aura event, observation occupies a prominent place, which, according to Mersch, is primarily responsive: observing is always a response; the eye returns the gaze to what is being shown, enabling openness, and with the response, observation has taken on responsibility, having an ethical function that Mersch finds in Benjamin’s concept of the aura, but certainly not in technology and media (Mersch 2002, 46-53), to which he denies any capacity for responsibility.

All of this does not mean that there is no close connection between nostalgia and the aura, for which we have found evidence here precisely through perspectives offered by technology and media. And, in the end, hasn’t Dieter Mersch, who is not particularly inclined toward media, stated that memory, so fundamental to nostalgia, is actually genuinely auratic (Mersch 2002, 111)?



PAUSE

Silvia Pierosara

Nostalgias, Critical Memories, Imaginative Fabulations

In this contribution, I present a work in progress, a Critical Theory of Nostalgia from an ethical standpoint. Why nostalgia? Because I believe that there is a link between nostalgia, memory, and history. Nostalgia can be seen as the feeling that accompanies memory, but also as a tool that triggers the need to make historical memory. Why Critical Theory? Can we say that the first generation of the Frankfurt School thought of nostalgia (together with melancholy) is an antidote to the triumph of instrumental reason? Is it a way of slowing down and containing progress? My attempt to answer these questions proceeds in three steps.

1. Some historical notes

The term “nostalgia” was coined by physician Johannes Hofer in 1678. For a long time, nostalgia was considered a pathology (at least until Karl Jaspers’s *Heimweh und Verbrechen*). This disease of nostalgia affected Swiss soldiers far from home. It was described as a lack of initiative due to a longing for home (it translates to the German *heimweh*, homesickness). In the nostalgic patient, vital spirits obsessively

produce images of home. They impair the patient's agency by absolutizing their belonging. It is no accident that the term (not the feeling) was coined when the idea of historical progress first emerged. Paraphrasing Foucault, we might say that nostalgia is not only a disease, but also a *fault* in the age of personal initiative and triumphalist progress.

2. From a critique of nostalgia...

Nostalgia (as a pathology) has been seen as an impairment of a person's capacity to orient towards the future. Such a view can be further explored and understood through the concept of "restorative nostalgia" (Boym 2001), a concept that can be associated with "imagined sameness" (Gullestad 2002, Palacios 2014).

It is possible to trace the origin and evolution of "nostalgia's" ambiguity to specific periods of intellectual history. During the Enlightenment period, for instance, nostalgia was considered an obstacle to progress. Romantic poets and philosophers conversely reformulated nostalgia as a vividly experienced and radical state of desire. In *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, the Romantic sensibility that processed nostalgia (*sehnsucht*¹ in German) did so with a sense of tension:

On the one hand, Romantic philosophers felt nostalgia for – they wished for – the infinite, the eternal, and the absolute.

On the other hand, they were aware of the unreachability of the infinite, the eternal, and the absolute.

It was supposed that those seeking the fulfillment of nostalgic desire would always be disappointed owing to its elusive nature: therefore,

¹ The dictionary contains the headword 'nostalgia', which translates to the German *heimweh*. It is as if the German language keeps track of the structural ambivalence in nostalgia: between identity closure and openness to the infinite.

mainstream etymology treats nostalgia almost as a pathology. However, the philosophical import of the term as emphasized by the Romantic awareness of ‘the infinite, the eternal, and the absolute’ indicates an understanding and appreciation of both the fullness and transience of time that complicates this.

If we take the above seriously, then we must say that the feeling of nostalgia is directed towards a state of fusion, indistinction, sameness, continuity, and linearity. This state ignores differentiation, both on a personal and a social level. It does not accept the transience of time, a transience that always implies fragmentation, pluralization, and the (non-teleological) emergence of new possibilities (Boym 2001). As Levinas teaches us, the wish to recompose a lost unity (with the mother and with the original community) is violent. It gives rise to, at least, two distinct risks:

1. A distortion of personal imagination, which leads to a deception of memory (the imagined past is always better than the real one).
2. The instrumentalization of nostalgia on a social and political level.

These risks are intertwined. Indeed, the use of nostalgia provides the illusion of retaining something that is not retainable (and that maybe never have existed). It can, therefore, be considered a social pathology. If an amount of nostalgia can be considered physiological – a “reaction against the irreversible” (Jankélévitch 1983: 299) – then this natural feeling must be elaborated and supervised. This is because it can easily shift into a container of fears, one that comes from perceived threats to identity and continuity. That is, it can be instrumentalized (Davis 1979). The current “overdose of nostalgia” or “nostalgification” (Angé and Berliner 2014: 2, 6) has its roots in what Boym (2002) calls “restorative nostalgia”. Restorative nostalgia contrasts to “reflective” nostalgia:

Restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home [...] Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition (Boym 2001: xviii). The above highlights the necessity of a critique of nostalgia as social pathology. Nostalgia – specifically reflective nostalgia – has fuller concerns than merely retracing the past. It can proactively influence the present by using the past as a way to meditate on mistakes and shed light on their avoidance and solutions.

Without reflection, nostalgia can be a masochistic impulse – one that is fixated incomprehensibly on negative actions and outcomes. Nostalgia thus becomes a more complex and ambivalent prospect: a grounding or disruptive force depending on the purpose it serves. Where one person perceives justice through nostalgia, another could reflect with disappointment. This ambivalence is also deeply felt in relation to the sense of time in nostalgic feeling: On the one hand, nostalgia deals with the irreversibility of time; it represents a suffering from the impossibility of returning to a desired and imagined lived happiness. On the other hand, nostalgia deals with the reversibility of time; it serves as a force able to repeat the past (to attract the sufferer to a condition of suffering they have experienced).

The linearity of time is of concern to both propositions here. One should not take for granted that something that has occurred is unavoidably lost; it may simply be structurally lacking, or not have completed its full arc of time. Nor is it inevitable that history is progressive in nature. Nostalgia – specifically reflective nostalgia – helps to distinguish between loss and lack. Nostalgia seeks voices from the past, with an awareness that some actions and consequences are final, but also with the hope that by reflecting on the past, some justice can be achieved for future generations. Nostalgia cannot restore or repair unavoidable

damage: rather, it is a critical feeling that can activate two purposes: (1) prompting discussions of the linearity and unavailability of progress and time and (2) conveying possible outcomes (for example, repeating mistakes will provoke suffering).

Nostalgia can also be perilous, particularly when experienced by individuals and communities who have suffered deeply. Being vigilant against nostalgia's destructive potential can, however, activate the critical perspective (explained above) on our experiences and how we navigate time. The structural lack that underpins temporal experience can be an obstacle to fulfilment. Nostalgia can provide a way to live with this lack without using surrogates for meaning and sense, and to come to terms with memory and history. As Bergson (1896) noted, memory is an action, and history is not a coherent and cumulative path towards justice. Only by actively starting anew and challenging the idea that happiness can be achieved only by feeling complete or whole can cycles of injustice or suffering be broken.

Considering the above, we may conclude that nostalgia can help to mitigate two unhelpful impulses relating to time: the despair of future injustice and the hampering belief that happiness can be contained only in the past. An individual who or community that embraces reflective nostalgia is more likely to be aware that the idea of happiness as wholeness is a fiction, that happy experiences never occur in the same way as they have in the past, and that experiences of suffering can be repeated. One could describe 'good' as having a greater capacity for arising in new and creative circumstances, and 'evil' as thriving in banal and repetitious conditions. Imagination facilitates possibility, but it can deceive subjects into trying to shape the past according to their desires.

3. To nostalgia as critique? Or: Is there a positive meaning to and function of nostalgia in our understanding of time and in our making of history?

I begin this section by repeating some questions that Boym asks. Are “nostalgic manifestations side effects, of the teleology of progress” (Boym 2001: 10)? Is there a “reflective nostalgia” that “dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity” (Boym 2001: xvii)? To be used as a critical tool, nostalgia should be recognized as potentially reflective, as a mediated feeling and approaches to what is absent. It should not be treated as just an immediate feeling aimed at restoring something unavoidably lost or something that never existed. As we will see, this suggests a reversal of imagination.

In this section, I propose a way forward. This starts from some contemporary suggestions and positive reconsiderations of nostalgia. It ends with a reference to Max Horkheimer’s famous letter to Walter Benjamin. According to Atia and Davis,

[s]tudents of memory have often been inclined to look sympathetically upon informal, communal projects of remembrance, particularly among subordinate or marginal groups and in cases where that group memory has not readily been legitimated by more rigid kinds of historiographic understanding. Nostalgia can be a potent form of such subaltern memory. At the same time, if the value of this kind of recollection stems in part from its rich particularity and sincerity, then its most urgent need may be to free itself from the unexamined clichés of nostalgic thinking (2010: 181).

Moreover,

[i]f ‘nostalgia’ names the particular emotion or way of thinking that arises from a deeply felt encounter between our personal continuities and discontinuities, then nostalgic emotion might be nothing less than the felt awareness of how identity is entangled with difference (Atia and Davis 2010: 184).

We can, then, say that Nostalgia is a form of subaltern memory to take care of. It is a sign that the linearity of time should be renegotiated without any deceptive attempt to gain, conquer totality, sameness, final reconciliation. Nostalgia can be directed towards both the past and the future if it is seen as a tool that fosters a non-linear interpretation of the past. Nostalgia is a tool that helps to link continuities and discontinuities, and it helps to manage the latter in a constructive way. It also helps to re-open the past. As Hartnock puts it, “nostalgic individuals may equally, in the face of a present that seems overly fixed, static, and monolithic, long for a past in which things could be put into play, opened up, moved about, or simply given a little breathing space” (1995: 456).

These virtualities of nostalgia can only be actualized with certain precautions. The relationship of individuals and groups to the past should be guided by an awareness of the *nonidentical* (Adorno 2004: 120). This means that continuities always go hand in hand with discontinuities, as do identities and differences. What is lost is unavoidably lost; it is unrecoverable as such. Trying to resurrect it involves striving for a totality that is not human. To be effective, a reflectively nostalgic approach to the past must dialogue with the historian. It must dialogue with his knowledge of archives, which are relevant for what they preserve and what they do not contain. This proximity with the historian is vital for avoiding deception

(including self-deception). Listening to the past does not imply trying to rescue it from already-given pain and suffering. Nor does it imply healing wounds (that might have turned into scars). Instead, it involves exercising a sort of “critical fabulation” (Hartman 2008: 11). Imagination is used reflectively rather than pathologically.

I will take a cue from Benjamin and Horkheimer to assess the critical potential of nostalgia in reference to the past. For Benjamin, nostalgia can (perhaps implicitly) be seen as an “immanent critique of the concept of progress” (1999: 476). Yet, it is also something that deals with the desire of continuity:

And so, from time immemorial, historical narration has simply picked out an object from this continuous succession. But it has done so without foundation, as an expedient; and its first thought was then always to reinsert the object into the continuum, which it would create anew through empathy (Benjamin 1999: 475).

But, continuity is a problematic concept, if not an illusion. There is an ambivalence according to which nostalgia is both an obstacle to progress and a wish for continuity (as a standpoint). Horkheimer’s writes as follows in his letter to Benjamin:

The determination of incompleteness is idealistic if completeness is not comprised within it. Past injustice has occurred and is completed. The slain are really slain... If one takes the lack of closure entirely seriously, one must believe in the Last Judgment... Perhaps, with regard to incompleteness, there is a difference between the positive and the negative, so that only the injustice, the horror, the sufferings of the past are irreparable. The justice practiced, the

joys, the works, have a different relation to time, for their positive character is largely negated by the transience of things (471).

In reply to Benjamin's comment:

The corrective to this line of thinking may be found in the consideration that history is not simply a science but also and not least a form of remembrance <Eingedenken>. What science has "determined", remembrance can modify. Such mindfulness can make the incomplete (happiness) into something complete, and the complete (suffering) into something incomplete. That is theology; but in remembrance we have an experience that forbids us to conceive of history as fundamentally atheological, little as it may be granted us to try to write it with immediately theological concepts (ibid).

Here lies the possibility of reading nostalgia as a critical tool oriented towards the future. Nostalgia should not be aimed at reconciling something irreconcilable. Rather, it should be aimed at understanding the past as irreclaimably gone. The suffering is completed and impossible to heal. But, it is also worth being recalled so that we may act differently in the future. Nostalgia can give voice to events and people that need redemption. Such a quest for redemption cannot be satisfied. Yet, it is a story worth narrating because it can configure the "longing for the infinite and for complete justice", never reachable, but capable of imagining and prefiguring radically new futures. Imagination can, then, be reversed. From a pathological state, it becomes a critical tool without illusions, one that gives voice to the unheard. It is not able to heal wounds, but it can transform the present and anticipate the future.

Horkheimer posited that completeness is contained within incomplete-

ness. Redemption without theology will remain elusive. For Benjamin, the act of remembrance alters incompleteness. In both approaches, there is an acknowledgement that the past cannot be returned to or healed. At this juncture, one might consider two points when assessing the virtues (if any) of nostalgia:

1. The completeness of suffering that comes to terms with the wish for totality: that is, the fact that we will never achieve a total understanding of the past and must accept this limitation.
2. The imaginative power of remembrance that can leave space for another kind of nostalgia: a feeling more akin to melancholy than may initially appear to be the case.

We may highlight the emergence of a “physiological” concept of nostalgia, one aimed at “justice practiced”, “joys”, and positive experiences. As previously stated, nostalgia may motivate a search for justice for past suffering if we take the concept of living with ‘lack’ seriously. One cannot undo what has been done, but one can sensitively and radically reflect on past experiences and acknowledge what is lacking within the structures of the present to impact on the future.

For Adorno, temporal experience has an “ethical” significance when one seeks redemption. Living and acting within an arc of redemption is worthwhile in the attempt: its fulfillment is not guaranteed or certain, but we should embrace redemption “as if” the notion existed. As Adorno writes:

The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would

present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light (1974: 247).

Imagination can also become openness to a better future by liberating the possibility of a “critical fabulation”. The notion of fabulation can be traced back to Latin rhetorical studies (specifically, Cicero and Quintilian). Saidiya Hartman’s notion of “critical fabulation” involves the positive use of nostalgia in an “emancipatory” and “forward-looking” manner. Imagination is liberated when we become aware of and embrace uncertainty. For Hartman, it is possible to imagine and create a narrative of suffering. Through this narrative, space is created for mourning where even those who are unknown are remembered in a way that does not necessarily aim to heal or solve the pain. Hartman writes:

the intention here isn’t anything as miraculous as recovering the lives of the enslaved or redeeming the dead [...]. Narrative restraint, the refusal to fill in the gap and provide closure, is a requirement of this method (2008: 11-12).

This method implies an understanding of nostalgia that transcends any notion that it consists of a pathology of the imagination. It moves towards a feeling of something unavoidably lost, which is why we should persist in giving it voice. This is the only way that nostalgia can service a future that is different from the past and that is emancipated from the suffering it contains. One might, however, ask the following question:

What if the idea of a lost past, of a lost home, were used to motivate and justify contemporary emancipatory paths of subaltern categories; not to regain a complete unity, but to build solidarity-oriented communities anew?

This question addresses migrant identities, which are created by the outcome of a negotiation (Ritivoi 2002). In Hartman's book *Lose Your Mother* (2007), she narrates a journey to Ghana that she took to trace a community that had existed to her only as she had imagined it. She envisaged that she would find people with a common historical trauma, united through a past scarred by slavery. Her initial experience of this journey revealed a different truth: Hartman felt the loss of a reunion that she had long imagined. Yet, by starting from an awareness that what she had hoped for was not there, she was able to more fully acknowledge and appreciate the suffering of an enslaved people, and their nostalgia for a home that never existed as such.

In Hartman's work, nostalgia entails the progressive recognition of an origin that is impossible to rediscover: traces of the past, and particularly of lived experiences, disappear. Past injustices and joys in equal measure can therefore only be imagined. Imagination cannot retrieve senses of totality or pure wholeness that are invulnerable to change and reformulation: rather, it should liberate unexplored potentialities that are shaped and visualized in the present for the future. The 'past recalled' is an active legacy that should be rethought, reshaped, discarded and reclaimed as much as necessary to make justice possible. To conclude, the idea and the practice of critical fabulation, or the act of imagination and narrativizing to produce concrete outcome with the ability to impact the future, are analogous to the work of nostalgia in two important ways:

1. Nostalgia distinguishes between loss and lack because it does not (and should not) assume that past experiences, positive or negative, are structurally complete. Rather, past experiences constitute a structural and unfillable lack. The completeness of past experiences refers only to the fact that they have occurred in a moment that is irretrievable and unrepeatable. However, this does not mean that they are complete in any other sense. The inherent lack in experiences persists, and with this lack in mind, we should be able to distinguish nostalgia from loss. If we appraise historical events while acknowledging the inevitability of lack, this awareness helps us to avoid generating false narratives of pure origin or a sense of wholeness and continuity that never existed.

2. Nostalgia, like imagination, facilitates (i) identitarian processes that aim to restore an origin by inventing it and (ii) an ethically committed future open to exposing past injustices and making a conscious effort to prevent suffering that is caused by the repetition of events, even when the traces are no longer present. Nostalgia for a redeemed world or imagining a better future is not an effort to artificially return to the past: it is an attempt to prefigure an achievable future, even if its origin is by definition beyond reach. Justice that serves to create a better future must be constructed rather than recovered.

Alexei Kazakov

Revisiting Svetlana Boym as a Reader of Reinhart Koselleck

It is difficult to overstate the centrality and influence of Svetlana Boym within the 21st-century discourse on nostalgia. Since the publication of her landmark 2001 work *The Future of Nostalgia*, where she notably advanced her famous restorative/reflective distinction, one is hard-pressed to find any major scholarly publication on nostalgia that does not at least mention her. Beyond the strict confines of academia, the book's trade-paperback status additionally helped her ideas find their way into popular works of non-academic cultural criticism such as Simon Reynolds' *Retromania*, as well as countless newspaper and magazine articles and blog posts. Her rare talent, which combined intellectual lucidity with popular accessibility and emotional resonance, cemented her rightly-deserved status as a global and indispensable voice on the topic, making her ideas invocable everywhere from the most sober neat-necktied academic conferences to wine-soaked discussions taking place on dimly-lit balconies with increasingly overloaded ashtrays at the threshold of late night and early morning.

The flip side to this widespread popularity has arguably been a flattening which frequently reduces a body of complex, multifaceted thought to a singular contribution: the above-mentioned restorative/reflective dis-

tion, which today constitutes Boym's primary legacy. But this legacy is also to some degree a distortion. As Grafton Tanner has recently noted, "Boym clarifies that these nostalgic tendencies 'are not absolute types.' And yet, to this day, her 'typology', as she calls it, is often cited as the essential framework for understanding the emotion" (Tanner 2021). A distinction which in the first instance was meant neither to exhaust nor to dichotomize the typology has since been transformed into a conceptual cleaver deployed to neatly categorize every conceivable expression of nostalgia into one of two distinct camps of "restorative" and "reflective", often on the basis of the user's own personal likes or dislikes of the individual instances: Mark Fisher and vaporwave on one side, Donald Trump and Greta Van Fleet on the other.¹

A more thorough reconsideration of the subtleties of Boym's distinction, while important and necessary, cannot be carried out head-on. I want to first focus here on a different aspect of this "distorted legacy" of Boym's, generated by the other element which renders the contemporary deployment of the restorative/reflective distinction problematic: its detachment from the broader context of Boym's thought, itself the indirect product of a variety of intellectual influences which can be partly gleaned from the voluminous endnotes of her books and articles. Primary among these is the German historian Reinhart Koselleck (1923-2006), to whose work she once described herself as "particularly indebted", even as her own approach "overlaps but never entirely coincides" with it (Boym 2017, 176n2). It is this "overlap" which concerns me here. Boym's intellectual debt to Koselleck is most clearly displayed in pp. 7-10 of *Future*, where

1 Such a characterization markedly ignores, for example, the fact that the very porousness of the distinction is embodied precisely in the paradoxes of a figure like Fisher, whose hauntological depression mixed with the desire to "not give up the ghost" of popular modernism at every turn. For him, *Burial* was supposed to be the soundtrack not to a mere languishing over lost futures, but to their recovery. I will return to this point later.

Boym explicitly invokes Koselleck's name in her account of how the shifting experience of time in the 17th through 19th centuries contributed to nostalgia's apparent shift from a condition of "curable soldiers" to one of "incurable romantics"; but, with the structural importance of this account within Boym's overall conceptualization of nostalgia as being "at the very core of the modern condition" (Boym 2001 xvi), Koselleck's influence equally manifests itself at several other key moments throughout her work. It is thus a core contention of mine in this paper that one cannot fully understand Boym's conceptualization of nostalgia without being familiar with Koselleck's philosophy of history.

Despite the importance of Koselleck for Boym's thought, he remains a virtually unknown or otherwise underutilized figure in the literature on nostalgia.² Arguably, this could be attributed at least in part to two things which immediately strike readers of Koselleck. The first is the highly dense, technical, and – simply put – difficult nature of the material, which itself presupposes a preliminary familiarity with a wide range of authors, ideas, and historical events, many of them fairly obscure. The second is the frustratingly unsystematic nature of Koselleck's writings: his only published monographs are his doctoral thesis *Critique and Crisis* (1959) and his as-of-yet-untranslated *Habilitation* thesis *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution* ["Prussia Between Reform and Revolution"] (1967), with the bulk of his thought taking the form of contributions to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (a dictionary of concepts which he co-edited with Werner Conze and Otto Bruner and published in eight

2 Two major exceptions to this observation can be mentioned here in passing, though they certainly do not constitute an exhaustive list: Peter Fritzsche's *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History*, and Thomas Dodman's *What Nostalgia Was: War, Empire, and the Time of a Deadly Emotion*. A thorough and worthwhile consideration of the relative strengths and shortcomings of these two excellent works would require more space than is available here, and must thus for the time being be consigned to future considerations.

volumes between 1972-1997) and journal articles later republished in the collections for which he is best known: in the anglophone world, this would be *Futures Past* and *The Practice of Conceptual History*.³ Each reader is thus left somewhat to their own devices in trying to deduce what they feel to be the central message of Koselleck's writings, which could perhaps be best described as a series of "variations" (in the musical sense) on a cluster of common themes; the question of which themes take structural precedence then partly becomes a function of what the reader *wants* to fish out of Koselleck for their own uses. Given the scope of this paper, these considerations will orient my approach in elucidating Koselleck's influence on Boym's thought – a project I undertake not merely for the purposes of scholarly erudition, but also to argue that nostalgia researchers should be paying significantly more attention to Koselleck's thought and its potential to contribute to our conceptual understanding of nostalgia.

My goal in this paper is thus twofold. I will first reconstruct what I take to be a "conceptual core" to Boym's understanding of nostalgia on the basis of a series of passages from *Future*. In doing so, I will equally turn to the relevant parts of Koselleck's thought and use them to elucidate this somewhat terse "conceptual core" in Boym – in other words, I will demonstrate Boym's debt to Koselleck while simultaneously enriching

3 *The Practice of Conceptual History* (2002) is a volume published uniquely in English. Meanwhile, there is the uniquely French volume *L'expérience de l'histoire* (1997), containing arguably the two most important single essays for understanding Koselleck's thought as a whole: his article "History" (*Geschichte*) in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, and "Historik and Hermeneutics" (*Historik und Hermeneutik*). The latter was first translated into English only in the recent collection *Sediments of Time* (2018), while the former, to my knowledge, has not been translated into English at all. *The Practice of Conceptual History*, meanwhile, contains articles that have yet to be translated into French. Many texts have yet to be translated out of German at all, notably many of Koselleck's contributions to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. Thus, depending on the linguistic capacities of a given scholar, their understanding of Koselleck could differ somewhat substantially, leading to an incongruity in Koselleck's non-German reception.

the account she sketches out. This will be followed by a consideration of how our understanding of the restorative/reflective distinction ought to be coloured as a result.

Amidst the whirlwind of multifarious poetic characterizations of nostalgia that are found throughout *Future*, it might at first glance appear difficult – if not indeed contradictory – to distill from Boym’s thought anything like a singular, formal, definitional “essence” of nostalgia. She lingers on the tongue-tied “convoluted syntax” of exilic nostalgia, which always fails to adequately articulate the mess of contradictory feelings regarding the homeland (hence her typical response of either “yes, but it’s not what you think” or “no, but it’s not what you think” when asked if she misses the Soviet Union); she stresses the importance of the interplay between individual and social memory and the various paradoxes and inconsistencies that arise as a result; indeed, at one point she even affirms that “nostalgia remains unsystematic and unsynthesizable; it seduces rather than convinces” (Boym 2001 13).

Despite these characterizations, however, I want to argue that there is nevertheless something like a conceptual core to Boym’s understanding of nostalgia that lends a certain degree of underlying unity to its various purportedly “unsynthesizable” expressions. This “conceptual core” is articulated largely in the introduction and first chapter, whose historical account of nostalgia I take to be a kind of structural “frame” for the book as a whole. This may seem counterintuitive given that the title of the book clearly suggests that Boym was more concerned with nostalgia’s future rather than its past: to boot, she explicitly affirms in the introduction that “the future of nostalgic longing and progressive thinking is at the center of [her] inquiry” (Boym 2001 xvi). But equally undeniable is the strong historicist impulse on display both in the text itself and the vast network of literature cited in the endnotes, prominently featuring names

like Hannah Arendt, Benedict Anderson, Richard Terdiman, Marshall Berman, and Eric Hobsbawm: to understand who we are today, we have to understand how we came to be.

It is this “how we came to be” that provides the common background against which all the myriad “unsynthesizable” expressions of nostalgia are rendered intelligible by and through a singular concept of “nostalgia”. If this were not the case, then the basic requirements for conceptual unity would not exist, such that it would be ultimately chimerical to refer to the subject of one of Hofer’s case studies, the insurrectionist at the Capitol, and the daydreamer spinning a Springsteen record as “nostalgics” (for upon first glance, these three examples have nothing to do with one another) – but the validity of the restorative/reflective distinction is wholly predicated on such expressions having a common ground upon which the distinction can be made in the first place. That common ground is the experience of modernity.

Now, simply pointing out that Boym takes “modernity” to be central to understanding nostalgia is hardly a groundbreaking insight. But the full extent of what “modernity” is, exactly, often tends to be left out of discussions of Boym’s work – particularly the “shifting experience of time” which she herself stresses so strongly. “Modernity” instead frequently becomes a vague catch-all to identify the series of rapid and accelerating changes brought about by secularisation and industrialisation since roughly the 18th century, with the implicit understanding that the historical experience of nostalgia is engendered primarily by a negative reaction to this change. A closer reading of Boym reveals, however, that the material change in itself has more so a function of *exacerbating* nostalgia as opposed to being its root cause. Rather, in multiple instances she characterizes nostalgia specifically as “a *result* of a new understanding of time

and space” (Boym 2001 xvi, my italics).⁴ This new understanding of time and space constitutes less of a “development”, as with the technological advances that comprise industrialisation, and more of – to borrow a word that Koselleck uses occasionally – an *inauguration*. Though the steam engine was new, technology itself was not (for it was preceded by the cart, the wheel, and animal husbandry – hence to this day we measure engine output in analogical “horsepower”). In contrast, as we shall see a bit later, the modern experience specifically of time has no true premodern analogue. More than any technological development, it represents the true nucleus of the modern condition in its specificity.

Though Boym frequently considers space and time together, it seems to me evident that it is time and not space that today constitutes nostalgia’s fundamental essence. One needs only to think of how one could spend one’s entire life in one’s own hometown, and yet still feel *nostalgic* for one’s childhood; or of how the category of spatial longing, though at one point in history intertwined with nostalgia as *Heimweh*, is today understood as a separate category (namely, homesickness when directed to the interior and wanderlust when directed to the exterior) which is quite distinct from what we mean today by “nostalgia”: one today feels *homesick*, not *nostalgic*, when missing one’s home country during a psychologically taxing bout of international travel.⁵ Nostalgia is a cate-

4 Interestingly, the full sentence this passage is pulled from re-appears almost word-for-word on p. 11 of the book, though conjugated in the past tense. Aside from these two instances, there are multiple other moments of reaffirmation: “In my view, the spread of nostalgia had to do not only with dislocation in space but also with the changing conception of time” (p. 7); “Modern nostalgia is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for ... the edenic unity of time and space before entry into history” (p. 8).

5 This is evidently not the case for the original sufferers of Hoferian nostalgia (such as the late-17th-century Swiss students whom he would diagnose with the illness); but this points to the conceptual history of the word rather than being an outright contradiction. My own view is that the contemporary understanding of nostalgia represents a more accurate understanding

gory of expatriates, not tourists. It should therefore not surprise us that alongside the passages that twin space and time,⁶ we also find passages such as these:

At first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time – the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams. In a broader sense, nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. The nostalgic desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition (Boym 2001, xv).

Not only are space and time distinguished here, they are pitted against each other: the nostalgic desires to revisit “time *like space*”. They may “chart space on time and time on space”, but it is ultimately *time* that is the determining factor in the inaccessibility of the nostalgic’s object of longing: I can easily revisit the physical space that houses a nostalgic

of nostalgia as a concept, priorly “bridged over” by spatial categories at a time when historical acceleration had not attained the degree it has today. Such considerations are beyond the scope of this current paper, but the conceptual history of the word is treated skillfully elsewhere – canonically in Jean Starobinski, “Le concept de nostalgie”, *Diogenes* 54, 1966, pp. 92-115; masterfully in André Bolzinger, *Histoire de la nostalgie*, Paris: CampagnePremière, 2007; and most recently, with synthetic tour-de-force, in Thomas Dodman, *What Nostalgia Was*, University of Chicago Press, 2018.

6 See, for example, “Nostalgia charts space on time and time on space and hinders the distinction between subject and object; it is Janus-faced, like a double-edged sword” (Boym 2001, xviii); and “Nostalgia is not merely an expression of local longing, but a result of a new understanding of time and space that made the division into ‘local’ and ‘universal’ possible” (Boym 2001, xvi). Koselleck, too, in this vein, points out that our sensorial inability to intuit pure time forces us to adopt spatial categories as metaphors to speak about time: “revolution”, “reaction”, “shift”, “rise and fall”, “movement”, “acceleration” and so on are all originally spatial terms which are given new meaning to signify temporal phenomena (Koselleck 2002, 6-8).

memory, but such an experience has never done anything other than perturb me all the more. It is thus no surprise that Boym grounds her extended consideration of contemporary nostalgia's origins most prominently in a changing conception of *time*, considered separately from space, during her historical survey in the first chapter of her book.

The genealogy in chapter one is tied together – as implied by the title “From Cured Soldiers to Incurable Romantics” – by the idea that “nostalgia turned from a treatable sickness into an incurable disease” (Boym 2001, 7). This distinction rests on Boym's observation that, in its early days, nostalgia could be cured via the simple act of repatriation, but that this prescription seemed to have lost its curative powers by the end of the 18th century. It is precisely to a changing conception of time that she attributes this development, providing an explanation with continual reference to Koselleck. She writes:

The religious wars in Europe came to an end but the much prophesied end of the world and doomsday did not occur. “It was only when Christian eschatology shed its constant expectations of the immanent arrival of doomsday that a temporality could have been revealed that would be open to the new and without limit”. [n. b. this is a direct quote from Koselleck's *Futures Past*.] It is customary to perceive “linear” Judeo-Christian time in opposition to the “cyclical” pagan time of eternal return and discuss both with the help of spatial metaphors. What this opposition obscures is the temporal and historical development of the perception of time that since Renaissance on has become more and more secularized, severed from cosmological vision (Boym 2001, 8-9).

It is important to stress here that this passage is essentially a summary of the contents of the first essay in *Futures Past* (though the direct quo-

tation is pulled from the thirteenth), because the notion of secularization with respect to the experience of temporality occupies a structural role in Koselleck's thought which is not always present in other discussions on the topic. Secularization is sometimes reduced simply to "disenchantment" in the broadly Weberian sense: as the world is demystified through scientific discovery, its ensuing rationalization and bureaucratization undermine the feelings of wonder we might experience towards the sublime. Nostalgia is then categorized specifically as a spiritual dissatisfaction with this state of affairs and a longing to experience this sublime. In contrast to the hazier Romantic *Sehnsucht*, its specificity lies in its conviction that the possibility to do so had existed at some point in the past but no longer does today: the nostalgic scoffs at Friedrich's Wanderer, thinking the sea fog to be too little and, more importantly, too late. Put succinctly, this is a broadly "psychological" understanding of secularization and says nothing about a shift in the experience of temporality itself, which is the central structural element in Koselleck's understanding of the phenomenon. Given Boym's explicit references to Koselleck in this section, we can be reasonably certain that it is indeed to his understanding of secularization that she subscribes to. This does not preclude the "psychological" account, but it does reduce it to the status of an effect rather than the core dynamic.

Koselleck notes that, until well into the 16th century, the Christian experience of history was defined by "the constant anticipation of the End of the World on the one hand and the continual deferment of the End on the other" (Koselleck 2004, 11). This End, anticipated as something not remote but rather imminent, provided the frame of reference for the interpretation of all novel contemporary historical events as mere modes of the Final Judgment: "Luther saw the Antichrist in possession of the 'holy throne', and for him Rome was the 'Whore of Babylon'; Catholics saw Luther as the Antichrist; peasant unrest and the growing sectarian

militancy of diverse sections of the declining Church appeared to foreshadow the last civil war preceding the Fall” (Koselleck 2004, 12). Thus what Koselleck calls the “horizon of expectation” – roughly, the interpretative framework through which novel events are rendered intelligible for those experiencing them – was nearly continuous with the “space of experience”, or the sum of incorporated and remembered past events. Historical events were generally comprehended as modes of the extant space of experience and any events that did not fit the space of experience could be grasped only as harbingers of Judgment Day, as this was the only horizon of expectation available to the pre-modern Christian world.

The Reformation differed from the previous historical calamities of Christian history, however, in its sheer intensity and its sudden utter fragmentation of the Catholic world in two. Thus Luther not only prophesied the End as imminent within the coming or current year, but equally noted the rapid acceleration of radical change in the world order, observing that God had shortened the final days for the sake of the chosen, for “almost all of the new century had been pressed into the space of one decade” – namely, the one since the Diet of Worms (Koselleck 2004, 12). Koselleck notes that this theme of acceleration appears also in the discourse of Robespierre at the end of the 18th century – though under markedly different conditions – when he declared in a famous speech from 1793 that “the time has come to call upon each to realize his own destiny. The progress of human Reason laid the basis for this great Revolution, and you shall now assume the particular duty of hastening its pace”. Koselleck observes that this phraseology represents an inversion in the horizon of expectation: whereas Luther saw the compression of time as a sign of the rapidly-approaching End of the World brought about by God, Robespierre saw the acceleration of time as “a human task, presaging an epoch of freedom and happiness, the golden future” (Koselleck 2004, 12-13): in other words, by Robespierre’s time, human agency had

replaced God as the motor of history. The decoupling of the horizon of expectation from the strict confines of an imminent Judgment Day thus opened up the possibility to conceive of a future world radically different from the current one, thereby empowering human actors to propose revolutionary political programs bent on realizing this new world. This new concept of never-ending progress “opened up a future that transcended the hitherto predictable, natural space of time and experience, and thence – propelled by its own dynamic – provoked new, transnatural, long-term prognoses” (Koselleck 2004, 22). In other words, religion’s exit from the determination of the experience of temporality left a structural vacuum – one which was then occupied by the new concept of progress, which, in Boym’s words, “became a new global narrative as a secular counterpart to the universal aspirations of the Christian eschatology” (Boym 2001, 10). The period stretching roughly from Luther to Robespierre, and the phenomena within it that account for this shift in perspective, is what Koselleck refers to as “early modernity” [*frühe Neuzeit*], a period marked by a “temporalization [*Verzeitlichung*] of history”, which in Boym appears via the language of “the division of time into Past, Present and Future” as discrete temporal planes (Boym 2001, 9).

This opening-up of a new horizon of expectation, however, constitutes only one half of the temporal experience that characterizes modernity. Koselleck speaks of a *space* of experience and *horizon* of expectation because for him, “the presence of the past is distinct from the presence of the future”, for “cultivated expectations can be revised; experiences one has had are collected” (Koselleck 2004, 260-1). Experience and expectation thus operate in two fundamentally different ways, and it is the *tension* between these two “dissimilar modes of existence” that generates historical time. Hence Boym’s above characterization needs to distinguish the two different ways in which the past and the future, respectively, are divided from the present. It is with regards to this that

the French Revolution holds its major import in the history of temporalization within modernity. Boym characterizes this in the following way:

The French Revolution marked another major shift in European mentality. Regicide had happened before, but not the transformation of the entire social order. The biography of Napoleon became exemplary for an entire generation of new individualists, little Napoleons who dreamed of reinventing and revolutionizing their own lives. The “Revolution”, at first derived from natural movement of the stars and thus introduced into the natural rhythm of history as a cyclical metaphor, henceforth attained an irreversible direction: it appeared to unchain a yearned-for future. The idea of progress through revolution or industrial development became central to the nineteenth-century culture (Boym 2001, 9).

However, this accounts only for one side of the equation – namely, the experience of those caught up in the excitement and energy of the Age of Revolution. Naturally, those who were less enthusiastic about this turn of events were liable to be diagnosed with nostalgia. In this context, Boym defines nostalgia as “a longing for that shrinking ‘space of experience’ that no longer fits the new horizon of expectations. Nostalgic manifestations are side effects of the teleology of progress” (Boym 2001, 10).

It is this last characterization which, I contend, best summarizes the “conceptual core” of Boym’s understanding of nostalgia. The image of a “shrinking” space of experience at first glance seems odd, given Koselleck’s contention that spaces of experience expand to incorporate novel historical events following breaches of a prior horizon of expectation: in the strict sense, spaces of experience cannot really “shrink”, aside from instances of the obliteration of historical record (in this regard, we could say that,

for example, the infamous doctoring of historical photographs during the Stalinist purges to fit the official Party narrative would have constituted an attempt to “shrink” the space of experience – though ultimately an unsuccessful one, as evidenced by our very knowledge of it). But a crucial aspect of this expansion and incorporation is the rippling effect of recontextualization across the rest of the space of experience. The occurrence of novel historical events makes us reconsider the past in a new light: one can no longer perceive Luther’s antisemitic tracts without a background awareness of their contribution to a German antisemitism that ultimately culminated in the Holocaust, just as one cannot perceive the scientific discovery of nuclear fission in the 1930s without a background awareness of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The language of “perception” is key here, for it is not up to the individual actor to decide whether or not they want to incorporate these things into their orientation in the world: cognitive dissonance and bad faith aside, once something is a part of the space of experience, it imposes itself in a way that cannot be ignored. The nostalgic, desperately trying to cling to a prior instantiation of the space of experience untainted by the vagaries of the subsequent histories that recontextualized it, thus finds no consolation in the wry, level-headed observations of their contemporaries who point out that the media from the era of the nostalgic’s longing is still accessible – even more accessible – as it ever was. What the nostalgic wants is not the ability to spin a *Dark Side of the Moon* vinyl, but to hear it the way it sounded in 1973 – before the Sex Pistols, before Joy Division, before Nirvana. Under such conditions the image of a “shrinking” space of experience is exactly correct, for this reflects the psychological experience of the nostalgic who takes the components of a space of experience frozen in one moment in time to be essential: each recontextualization is in turn a corruption and a degeneration, thus shrinking the desired space of experience over time. Such an understanding of the phenomenon of nostalgia applies just as much to fans of progressive rock who long for the early

seventies as it does to Trumpists who long for a time from before the progressive political developments of the last 15-odd years (whether the target be 2007, the 1950s, or anywhere in between) and Swiss mercenaries who, according to Kant, missed not their homeland but their youth. What they all have in common is a reaction to a temporal dynamic that had been set in motion by – and has since been continually exacerbated by – modernity, understood at its core as the temporalization of history.

I believe that it is in this light that we ought to understand the significance of Boym’s restorative/reflective distinction. I stated earlier that the common practice of seeing this distinction as a strict dichotomy through which to rigidly classify each expression of nostalgic longing into one of two camps is a misguided reading – though, admittedly, it is a plausible one, as Boym herself seems to do this at several moments in her book⁷ which clash with her more general characterisation of the two kinds of nostalgia as “not absolute types, but rather tendencies” (Boym 2001, 41). The resulting ambiguity is rendered more puzzling by her apparent distancing from the distinction in later writings – for example, though the word “nostalgia” appears some fifty-odd times in *The Off-Modern*, not

7 For example, restorative nostalgia aims for “total reconstructions”, while reflective nostalgia “lingers on ruins” (Boym 2001, 41) – two approaches that are hardly synthesizable; in the same vein, she states that Alois Riegl’s distinction between intentional and unintentional memorials “roughly corresponds to the distinction herein between restorative and reflective nostalgia” (Boym 2001 78); She writes that “Restorative nostalgia evokes national past and future”, while “reflective nostalgia is more about individual and cultural memory” (Boym 2001, 49); she characterizes Mikhalkov’s films as “spectacular scenarios of restorative nostalgia” (Boym 2001 67), ostensibly in contrast to reflective nostalgia; the gravel and weeds on the abandoned train tracks at Grunewald Station in Berlin “provide an antidote to restorative nostalgia” (Boym 2001 195); “Restorative nostalgics don’t acknowledge the uncanny and terrifying aspects of what was once homey”, while “Reflective nostalgics see everywhere the imperfect mirror images of home, and try to cohabit with doubles and ghosts” (Boym 2001, 251); in that vein, “While restorative nostalgia returns and rebuilds one homeland with paranoid determination, reflective nostalgia fears returning with the same passion” (Boym 2001, 354). All of these passages appear to suggest a contrast that point to a dichotomy.

a single time is it qualified with the adjectives “restorative” or “reflective”. Instead, Boym is now playing with new characterizations absent from *The Future of Nostalgia*: “anticipatory nostalgia” and “prospective nostalgia”, this latter term appearing to largely stand in for what she meant by “reflective nostalgia” in *Future*,⁸ complete with dichotomistic contrasts to a different attitude that, though it remains unqualified, carries all the hallmarks of “restorative nostalgia” (“prospective nostalgia” distinguishes itself, for example, from “the self-righteousness of those who claim to restore their national heritage”) (Boym 2017, 40). As such, I want to argue that, not unlike the “conceptual core”, there is an alternative and perhaps *prima facie* unintuitive reading of Boym on this point that nevertheless better reflects the spirit of Boym’s thought.

To begin, it is worth specifying that, when Boym refers to “two kinds of nostalgia”, she seems to take restorative and reflective nostalgia not as two different *nostalgias*, but rather as two distinct *reactions* to a common underlying condition of nostalgia that both kinds partake in. She writes:

Restorative nostalgia evokes national past and future; reflective nostalgia is more about individual and cultural memory. The two might overlap in their frames of reference, but they do not coincide in their narratives and plots of identity. In other words, they can use the same triggers of memory and symbols, the same Proustian madelaine pastry, but tell different stories about it (Boym 2001, 49).

8 It would be worth exploring Boym’s semantic shift from a backwards-facing adjective to a forwards-facing one.

The important distinction here is between the narrative and the factual: the difference between the two kinds of nostalgia lies not in the madeleine itself but in the stories told about it. The base for the experience is the same, particularly when we note that “national past and future” and “individual and cultural memory” are only really separable analytically; empirically, these things tend to be intimately interwoven. To put it another way, both the “reflective nostalgic” and the “restorative nostalgic” pull from roughly the same space of experience, but depending on the individual’s desires, beliefs, habits, and so on, their intentionality will be directed towards certain parts of it over others, and they will react to it in differing ways. This is without even mentioning that one can hardly distinguish restorative and reflective nostalgia on the basis of putting “national past and future” in one camp and “individual and cultural memory” in the other: it is perfectly possible to experience reflective nostalgia with regards to a national past (as Boym herself clearly did with regards to the Soviet Union), just as it is perfectly possible to engage in restorative nostalgia directed towards cultural memory (this is so abrasive with Greta Van Fleet that Anthony Fantano once aptly characterized them as “a [Led Zeppelin] cover band without the covers”) (Fantano 2018).

This last point leads us to another – namely, that it is hardly reasonable to suggest that any particular instance of nostalgic longing can be qualified as either *wholly* restorative or *wholly* reflective. I had mentioned earlier that this is visible most clearly in the complexities of a thinker like Mark Fisher: his obsession with hauntological pop on the one hand and his deeply insightful critiques of neoliberalism on the other culminate, ultimately, in the disappointing concluding chapter of *Capitalist Realism*, where his vision of a “Marxist Supernanny” offers little more than the suggestion that we return to the sort of state planning and public service broadcasting which was characteristic of the British post-war welfare

state of his early childhood, with virtually zero consideration for the social and material conditions that make such a vision if not untenable, then at least requiring substantial revision. The gradual political failure of Western socialism over the course of the 1970s is chalked up largely to a sort of neoliberal sleight-of-hand that progressively shrouds society in the *épistémè* of “capitalist realism”; there is little to no consideration of the deeper, underlying anthropological shift that occurs around this same time and how this both engendered socialism’s collapse and made neo-liberalism appear as a desirable solution. In this way – though the comparison is admittedly a bit abusive – Fisher begins to approach the sort of reductive conspiratorial thinking that characterizes restorative-nostalgic narratives of national recovery. Though the nostalgic tendencies of Fisher’s thought are undeniably axed more towards the reflective than the restorative, it would be a mistake to write off those aspects of his narrative that indicate the presence of a restorative drive.

The presence of the restorative in the reflective occurs not only on the level of these sorts of intellectual aporias: the very act of intellectually “reflecting” on nostalgic yearning itself carries a restorative element, which, in representing the past, is always a *re-presenting* which allows the nostalgic to access the sweetness of homecoming, even if for a fleeting and ambivalent moment. Just as when one remembers the taste of a favourite food, one can taste something like a phantom version of it on one’s tongue,⁹ the past is made present again when we talk about it and

9 I find it useful to think of these things with metaphors deriving from senses we are not used to speaking about, as this renders the oddity of the experience more immediate; performing the intellectual exercise of trying to remember, for example, the taste of a strawberry, and experiencing memory in the form of taste, highlights the peculiarity of an experience that, in the auditory or visual field, has become banalized from continual use in our largely audio-visual culture. I do not experience the “weirdness” of memory when I remember how a favourite song of mine goes or what an old location looks like in the way that I do when I try to remember the taste of a food,

reflect on it. The War on Drugs' *Lost in the Dream* is indeed a work of "reflective nostalgia"; but in its sounding like, as it was once perfectly described by a music critic, "a Springsteen album that's been dubbed on a Maxell tape, and then warped slightly after sitting for decades in a musty car glove compartment" (Hyden 2019), listening to it brings us closer to Springsteen and the Americana vision that his music conjures up. Adam Granduciel's vision, like Fisher's, is (we could say) "dominantly" reflective but contains irreducibly restorative undercurrents.

Likewise, dominantly restorative-nostalgic media is incapable of achieving full "authenticity" due to the unexorcisable *Aufhebung* of those medieval "lost years" between the recreation and its original polluting the final product with the patina of the present – and this applies just as much to the political as it does to the cultural. According to Boym, restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* while reflective nostalgia thrives in *algos* (Boym 2001 xviii); but there are no "nostics" or "algics", only nostalgics. And accordingly, the feeling is never wholly bitter nor wholly sweet, but always bittersweet.

This brings me to my final point. It is no accident that "restorative nostalgia", in the literature, is essentially a pejorative expression that has no defenders: nobody picks up the mantle of restorative nostalgia and criticizes reflective nostalgia as being "the 'bad' nostalgia". This is because the tendency towards a more reflective mode of nostalgia is, I believe, in large part a function of the nostalgic's degree of historical consciousness, by which I mean their awareness – implicit or explicit – of the conditions of modernity I have described above.¹⁰ A key element of this historical con-

or a highly specific touch-based memory.

10 "Modernity", of course, does not begin and end with Koselleck – a person can possess

sciousness is nuance: it seizes the complexity of the nostalgic dilemma, with all of its paradoxes, ambiguities, and conflicting narratives. This runs counter to what we could call the “reductive” tendency that Boym attributes to restorative nostalgia. By this I mean that her characterizations of restorative nostalgia generally stress the selectivity and black-and-white nature of restorative narratives:

Restorative nostalgia knows two main narrative plots – the restoration of origins and the conspiracy theory, characteristic of the most extreme cases of contemporary nationalism fed on right-wing popular culture. The conspiratorial worldview reflects a nostalgia for a transcendental cosmology and a simple premodern conception of good and evil. The conspiratorial worldview is based on a single transhistorical plot, a Manichaeian battle of good and evil and the inevitable scapegoating of the mythical enemy. Ambivalence, the complexity of history and the specificity of modern circumstances is thus erased, and modern history is seen as a fulfillment of ancient prophecy (Boym 2001, 43).

It is crucial to note Boym’s usage of the word “premodern” in this passage: it indicates that a key part of what constitutes the divergence between the restorative and reflective perspectives is that the latter is aware of our being “stuck with” modernity, as it were. Thus, reflective nostalgia grasps the complexity of the problem it faces, disenchanted with the restorative proposals that come off as far too easy of a solution. As historical consciousness grows, so too do those patterns of thought

historical consciousness without being familiar with him, and full historical consciousness goes beyond him. Cf. p. 5 of this essay, which lists some of Boym’s other influences who have contributed to the canon of critical writings on modernity.

that tend to be characteristic of “reflective nostalgia”. To this extent, we can characterize nostalgia not just as “a historical disease” but also as “a historian’s disease”. We must take care to note, though, that such thinking, if it does not keep in mind the porousness of the restorative/reflective distinction, runs the risk of a kind of self-deception wherein the intellectual sees themselves as “wholly reflective” and doesn’t take stock of the elements of their nostalgic experience that might carry restorative elements, thus distorting their understanding of their own condition to eliminate some ambiguity.

In sum, what I have tried to present here is a new rubric for making sense of Boym’s understanding of nostalgia and her restorative/reflective distinction on the basis of her avowed intellectual debt to Koselleck. Rather than taking her statement that nostalgia is “unsystematic and unsynthesizable” as referring to the concept itself as a whole, I see her as referring to *each individual experience of nostalgia with regards to itself*: the nature of each expression of nostalgic longing being a mixture of the restorative and the reflective mars it with paradoxes, cognitive dissonance, and overall conceptual messiness, even as the source of that experience – modernity – remains something which, while highly complex, can be considered with a degree of systematicity that allows us to work towards a rigorous definition of nostalgia. On this basis I hope to have laid the groundwork for a reconsideration of Boym that goes beyond merely taking the restorative/reflective distinction detached from the broader framework of her thought.

Ronald Alvarez Vera

Nostalgia as an Existentialist Source Through Cinema

The etymology of the term nostalgia derives from the Greek words νόστος (nostos= return) and λγος (algos=pain). The literal meaning of nostalgia, then, is the suffering evoked by the returning, mentally or physically to somewhere or someone. Is evident that we are used to making a connection between nostalgia and suffering every time we hear that word. Because the sensation is unpleasant, we tend to avoid the nostalgic state. Not everybody wants to remember or have a nostalgic experience again because of this conception.

The purpose of this article is to touch our nostalgia from another perspective, re-connected with it and, in the process, with ourselves when we experience this gravity pull in order to recognize nostalgia and listen to what it has to teach us. The main vehicle for this journey will be art, specifically through two distinguished cinema creators like Andrei Tarkovsky and Akira Kurosawa. We will examine the nostalgia and existential moments that converse through these film's aesthetics.

Mirror. Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky. Mosfilm (USSR), 1975



Nostalgia as an opportunity

The most common concept of nostalgia comes from psychological sources as a connection of feelings and thoughts of the past that generates mostly immaterial pain that eventually will translate into the physical plane like trembling, tears and any other tangible ache. It is a biological response to past experiences. Nevertheless, the aim of this article is to define nostalgia in philosophical terms establishing a relation between nostalgia, pain, past and an opportunity of wisdom through cinema as an existential catalyst.

In this sense, we feel nostalgic of all we have lived and want to get another opportunity to experience it again but also all those moments that never occurred, all those imaginary outcomes of our past decisions. When anyone is extremely nostalgic, it can also become a state of vulnerability, but it is not a weakness, on the contrary, it is a source, a gate, an inflection point to meditation, knowledge and wisdom.

Existentialism is a philosophical study of those trivial but fundamental questions, such as Who or what am I? What am I here for? And the list can be endless. Søren Kierkegaard was a Danish philosopher, considered the father of existentialism, and after him, this philosophical theme has influenced the entire discipline and others, like psychology, theology and arts in general. Roughly, existentialism is concerned about the human dimension involving freedom, free will, responsibility, morality and the meaning of human life. So, the reflection integrates all the dilemmas and paradoxes in the ancient search for meaning and the essence of human life. Precisely for these characteristics, existentialism is bound to Nostalgia.

Kierkegaard said that the first state of human beings is the aesthetic one, in which all we seek is pleasure. It is a natural and necessary state in which every human being connects with emotions through music, poetry, theater or any kind of art expression.

The subject matter is an essential element, inasmuch as it is one factor, but it is not the absolute, since it is only one element. It could be pointed out that in a sense certain kinds of classic works have no subject matter, whereas in others, however, the subject matter plays a very important role. The former is the case with works we admire as classic in architecture, sculpture, music, painting – especially the first three, and even in painting, insofar as there is any question of subject matter it has importance almost solely as an occasion (Kierkegaard, 1987, p.52).

In such conditions we are always distracted and desperate to satisfy any desire we may have. So, we will never be able to admit that we are not in trouble, suffering and needing something more pure,

Stalker. Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky. Mosfilm (USSR), 1979





Stalker. Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky. Mosfilm (USSR), 1979

genuine and stable. This is the reason why the nostalgia state is so important because it brings us back to reality, to our human and fragile condition, where we can begin questioning life itself. Nostalgia allows us to be in an existential state and brings us an opportunity to reorganize the pieces of our life, to get back into ourselves, to listen and realize what, sometimes, we are too afraid to admit.

This is a deconstruction process where we are able to see the puzzle in many different possibilities. Deconstruction, a Jacques Derrida's concept, means breaking the illusion of normality, the calm atmosphere of everyday life and also the illusion of constant control of our lives. In other words, deconstruction is an existentialist questioning. It is not only about the "structure of opposition" (Derrida, 1981, p.41) like good or bad because deconstruction is not meant for the dominance of one thought, feeling or action in particular but breaking the solid structure of being. In other words, nostalgia is not about feeling depressed and

forgetting it is to be happy. We need to deconstruct the nostalgia state by remaining in search for new meanings of itself because there is more than only pain, suffering and untouchable past. There is no universal truth of human nostalgia, there is only the personal meaning for our nostalgia that could teach us something if we are brave enough to ask her.

Tarkovsky's poetic dimension

Films have this ability to get us into a nostalgic atmosphere that will generate existentialist thoughts. One of them was Andrei Tarkovsky, who was born in 1932 in the Soviet Union. He was the most important director in postwar Soviet art cinema and is widely considered one of the greatest influential directors in art cinema history. Tarkovsky's films explore the spiritual and metaphysical world through slow pacing, long takes, dreamlike visual imagery, powerful nature takes and meaningful scripts that makes "Tarkovsky's mature filmmaking approach as a systemized poetics of narrative composition" (Redwood, 2010, p.2). Absorption and emotional empathy instead of intellectual or analytical decomposition.

A distinctive characteristic through all the Tarkovsky's filmography is the emotional atmosphere generated rather than an intellectual one:

At the end of *Stalker* the title character collapses on his bedroom floor and bursts into a condemnatory tirade against the writer and scientist's blind intellectualism: "Calling themselves intellectuals those writers and scientists. They don't believe in anything... They've got empty eyes"! Taking this stance even further, in *Nostalgia* the character Domenico shouts at a passive crowd before committing suicide: "What kind of a world is this when it's a mad man who tells you that you should be ashamed of yourselves"? In Tarkovsky's last film, *The Sacrifice*, it is the protagonist Alexander

who laments his own lifeless intellectualism: “I studied philosophy, the history of religion and aesthetics. And by the time I finished I’d dug myself into a hole (Redwood, 2010, p.5).

Especially in *Nostalghia* (1983), there are three characters: an Italian woman Eugenia, a Russian poet Andrei and an older Italian man Domenico. In the entire film, the element of water creates a hypnotic atmosphere where the characters and the spectators will reflect through the whole film. Water is the cleansing element in Tarkovsky’s films, the “ether” where our existential wonderments will face us. The sound of dripping water resonates in the unknown void and generates the nostalgic mood.

The Italian woman is in love of the Russian poet but he does not feel the same way. So, she represents the nostalgia for love. That passionate feeling that she never will get. On the other hand, the Russian poet is looking for inspiration. He feels lost in a world without poetry. He is nostalgic for the creative power of poetry.

And finally, the older men are the representation of love and poetry in life itself. He is nostalgic for a better world. A world

Nostalghia. Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky. RAI 2 (Italy) & Mosfilm (USSR), 1983





Nostalgia. Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky. RAI 2 (Italy) & Mosfilm (USSR), 1983

where all human beings live wisely as a loving ideal united family. So, love, being loved, the search for meaning in life and a desperate new, almost utopian, way of life are existentialist's essential elements that emerge from a nostalgic state. Another element in this film is fire, as an internal desire for accomplishment, a synthesis, as a wise guide in nostalgic moments. There is always light after darkness.

An intellectual explanation is a fundamental resistance because thinking during a film interferes with the experience itself of a work of art. The moment we separate and begin to analyze the scenes, then we are destroying the essence. Tarkovsky's art functions to "stimulate the spectator's awareness of these spiritual or transcendental spheres of experience" (Redwood, 2010, p.9).

A nostalgic atmosphere required emotional, psychological and philosophical levels in order to immerse the audience into a holistic experience. Tarkovsky managed to create films in which the script, scenography, characters and music complemented brilliantly.



Nostalghia. Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky. RAI 2 (Italy) & Mosfilm (USSR), 1983

Kurasawa and the oneiric utopia

Another example of this existentialist openness is through Akira Kurosawa's films. He was a Japanese filmmaker and painter who has been considered the greatest Japanese film director in cinema history. In his film called *Dreams* (1990), composed eight scenes that, in a cinematic technique and colorful display, expose Kurosawa's oneiric realm in "an anthology of essays" (Prince 1999, p. 304). Even though the film begins with "Sunshine Through the Rain", a folkloric quality is established immediately, the cheerful spirit will dissolve through the entire film. *Dreams* underlines a subtle atmosphere of regret, sorrow, despair and nostalgia because Kurosawa's spectrum is full of "narrative brilliance which reveal their own tensions" (Desser, 1983, p. vii).

A central episode is "The Weeping Demon", a man is surrounded by dandelions taller than humans. He finds a mutant human (demon) because of the nuclear holocaust that has destroyed civilization and the biosphere. These demons were millionaires and government officials, so they are now paying for their sins but Kurosawa invited us to identify ourselves in those mutants because we all are responsible for the current and unpromising future. I think we are not so far away from this eventual scenery

in our real world. This nostalgia of the past and fear of the future could be dangerous if we stay numb, lost in our disillusion instead of taking this crisis as an opportunity, an inflection point, like an existential revolution that will bring us a bright blossom for humankind.

So, a better world, where people live in harmony with their environment is, as a possible solution for our times, the concluding scene “Village of the Water Wheels,” where a young man meets a wise elderly. The older man is fixing a broken water mill wheel. All the people in this village live without electricity. The older man explains that all the people decided long ago to abandon modern technology, and laments the notion of modern convenience and the pollution of nature. Perhaps this scene is Kurosawa’s way of reminding us of a better and often forgotten time but also a possible future, a constant nostalgic state of a utopian world.

Finally, at “The Tunnel” scene, an entire ghost platoon of World War II is walking behind their commander. He is afraid and emotionally devastated seeing that all of his friends and soldiers are dead but they do not really know about their fatal situation. In his expressions we can find an intense desire to go back in time and prevent the death of his entire platoon. The terrifying air transforms into a nostalgic one, where the commander comprehends, accepts death and, in order to continue with

Dreams. Directed by Akira Kurosawa. Akira Kurosawa USA, 1990.





Dreams. Directed by Akira Kurosawa. Akira Kurosawa USA, 1990

his life, he makes the phantoms understand that they are in fact dead. So, in an emotive farewell, both, platoon and commander, face the uncertain destiny ahead of them. The existential questioning of this scene is undoubtable. First of all, the tunnel represents the portal to the dead world, a bridge between the living and the dead generated by nostalgia. Immediately, the concept of life and war crushed in front of our eyes. The tunnel shows us power, irrational human obedience, human massacre, regret but also empathy and a window of opportunity to emerge and learn from our constant mistakes.

Conclusion

Cinema, with all its elements, is a source for trigger in us a psychological and emotional state that generates an internal awakening, a reflection of our own existence. Not all films have this power to express the inexpressible in such an aesthetic, enjoyable and nostalgic form. Meaningful films like *Nostalghia* of Tarkovsky and *Dreams* by Kurosawa have the ability to explore life and orbit it through an existential lens. In both directors we, as spectators, can feel on different levels that

there is something behind every scene, talking to us. Most of the time we do not know what we are witnessing but one thing is for sure, we know that we need to watch because there is a mirror waiting for us underneath the films. Kurosawa and Tarkovsky's ambition is more artistic than intellectual. Their emotional films have the objective to initiate an unusual and discomfoting intensity in the audience in order to establish a unique connection between the scenes and our own life.

Without feeling lost in the nostalgic state, it will be impossible to really know the *self*. We need to stop running away from ourselves. Feeling nostalgic is not a weakness, but an opportunity to reconnect with our feelings, our lost, flaws but also with another perspective of how life is structured. Once we are immersed into the nostalgic dimension everything is possible. We are not a finished project, a predicted line, we can deconstruct ourselves and always learn from our mistakes and be better than before. But the only way is through seeing ourselves in a mirror. It is better to embrace our thoughts and feelings, a difficult and painful task, rather than living an anesthetized life. Nostalgia is not a pleasant state but it is necessary for a re-start, to reconnect with ourselves, to get knowledge, guidance and wisdom. We have seen that concrete cinematic representations hold the key to unlock some of our deeply ontological uncertainties.

Dreams. Directed by Akira Kurosawa. Akira Kurosawa USA, 1990



Josip Klaić

Gesture and Space: Sacrifice of Performance and the Victory of Image

This article uses photography series by Edward Steichen, Krešimir Tadić, and Zlatko Kopljar, and aims to examine the relationship between body gestures and spaces in which performances took place. Different authors are quoted in their readings of gesture in photography, which leads to understanding certain spaces as a whole. Spaces lose authenticity over time, and are left empty because those who inhabited them or visited them are no longer there, or cannot experience them auditorily. The performance protagonists, now in photographs, remain merely faint figures of abandoned places, which served as spaces of art. Each of the three examples, although primarily different in their photographic tendencies, in a way acts as a witness of the photo conquering over the performance itself. If the chosen examples cannot tie the bodies to certain spaces, which are crucial to understanding the performances, then photography is doing the same, twice removed.

Space-Body-Gesture-Event

What is the space in art now, and what it used to be? The burst of viewing the world through the antique-christian lens transformed art itself, which includes the space it belonged to. Greek view of art as something religious is gone, as is the modern representation of the world which depicts something as sensual, natural, and human with divine being.¹ Still, that is not to say that no remnants exist. However, the leftovers are nothing but an aesthetic category, and do not represent the original work in its whole. As Kazimir Malevich states in *The Manifesto of Suprematism*: “An antique temple is not beautiful because it once served as the haven of a certain social order or of the religion associated with this, but rather because its form sprang from a pure feeling for plastic relationships. The artistic feeling which was given material expression in the building of the temple is for us eternally valid and vital but as for the social order which once encompassed it-this is dead”.² The social order Malevich mentions is in fact the link between human and divine. Milan Galović describes Malevich as one of the few vanguardists who penetrated isotropic space, namely with his *Black Square*, while Piet Mondrian, for example, decided to stick with horizontal and vertical lines that represent the mentioned human-divine bond.³

Galović emphasises the bond between human and divine in space in art as depicted in Ancient Greece; the space of living, *polis*, and everything it contains: a temple, theater, agora, gymnasium. Such a city and the life it contains are indeed a meeting point of heavenly and earthly, mortals and

1 Galović, “Umjetnost kao događanje svijeta”, 27.

2 De Micheli, *Umjetničke avangarde 20. stoljeća*, 255.

3 Galović, *Bog kao umjetničko djelo*, 306.

immortals, divine and human. The temple is a place of gods, as is the theatre when tragedies are at play. All Greek art can be seen as divine presence in earthly places, as intertwining human and divine. Furthermore, Galović says that a medieval church is also a place of connecting all the arts, as well as a ruler's court. The ruler's presence in the court makes it what it is, because it is the representation of their power, given unto them by legitimacy of God's Mercy, giving them a sacral dimension. According to Jacob Bruckhardt, the state as a work of art in Italian Renaissance culture was represented, among other ways, through decorative architecture and festivities which symbolize life transforming into art.⁴

When Galović says "to stay in place", he does not refer to staying still, but being a part of events taking place around you. "There is no home without its occupants, no state without its citizens, no Heaven without deities". Still, contemporary man is unfamiliar with such concepts, as they do not have a place to call their own, or a permanent home. In a way, they are now a stranger to the art itself. The autonomy art gained after the end of the metaphysics era allowed it to be kept in the lifeless space of museums. That erased art from the spaces people inhabited and frequented and isolated it. Therefore, the man was only left with roaming the now abandoned spaces, which led to turning body into the main tool in such spaces. Žarko Paić states: "The end of metaphysics marks the beginning of body language".⁵

Body between two worlds, heavenly and earthly, occurs as a singularity of the moment's event. At first, it occurs as an original imprint, then as a reproduction difference of art's imprint.⁶ Paić discusses furthermore: "An

4 Burekhardt, *Kultura renesanse u Italiji*, 367.

5 Paić, "Dogadaj i razlika", 8.

6 Paić, "Dogadaj i razlika", 10.

event cannot be preserved in its singularity in no other way but through simultaneous media projection. The simultaneity of event and its and its artistic variety preserved in a given moment – punctual presence, as Barthes defines the evil spirit of photographic evidence of reality – shows that the condition for enabling an event is its reproduction, which inevitably and necessarily distorts it”.⁷

The path which leads to authentic spaces of art we mention goes through the remnants of their authenticity which are nothing but an aesthetic category, as explained by Galović, over the body, crucified between earthly and heavenly, without its own space, and finally to the technological reproduction of its eventness, noted by Paić, is the path which needs to have connective tissue. I find that tissue within the body language – gestures. According to Gadamer, gesture is the only thing that can be retrieved from the Greek religion of art in the human form.⁸ Nevertheless, we must differentiate the notion of gesture from its common definition. Gadamer states that gesture is not merely the shape of a human figure, but the whole background of the image, and creative gesture of the artist behind it. It is substantial rather than subjective. Gesture is inextricably entwined with tragedy, while tragedy is entwined with sacrifice. To experience it with our eyes means to go through centuries of Christian spiritual history at once, as Gadamer states, and Greek art manifests itself as contemporary.⁹

This includes a whole series of gestures or, as Žarko Paić states, bodily postures before the divine: knee bends, raising arms, bowing the head.¹⁰

7 Paić, “Dogadaj i razlika”, 13.

8 Gadamer, *Ogledi o filozofiji umjetnosti*, 242-243.

9 Gadamer, *Ogledi o filozofiji umjetnosti*, 246.

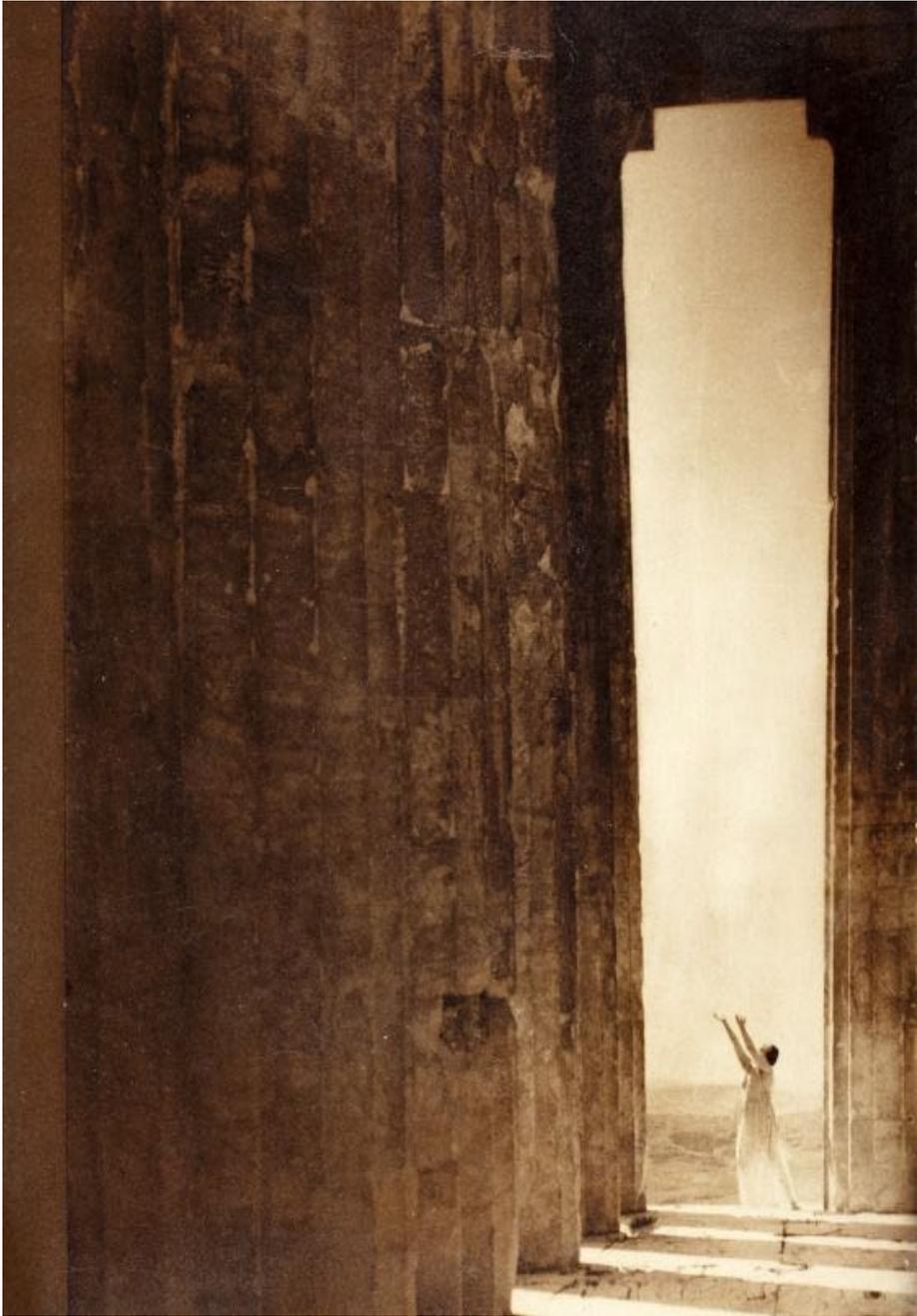
10 Paić, “Na putu bez povratka. Grci – mit i metafizika”, 283.

Namely, both Gadamer and Paić rely on Hegel, namely in *Phenomenology of the Spirit* sees artistic religion (*Kunstreligion*) as the way which will restore the divine and human to the world. However, the *divine is leaving* in the time of technogenesis, as Paić claims. Through three selected examples (dance, theater, performance) and photographic cycles, this trinity of relationships – the divine/non-divine space/place, the body at the moment of the event and its gesture – will aim to be linked into a set of relationships between modern art and metaphysical Greek-Christian vision of the world.

Edward Steichen – Isadora Duncan in the Parthenon, Athens, 1921

Neoclassicism of the 1920s is not just another negligible stylistic occurrence developed as a reply to oversaturation with vanguard artistic directions in an attempt to regain order in painterly figuration or found in Prokofiev's and Stravinsky's music, let alone a path toward totalitarianism in art. Stemming from Hölderlin's lyrics in German romanticism, through Nietzsche's rebirth of tragedy, all to Heidegger's capital clash with history of metaphysics in *Being and Time* (1927), the return to the Greeks and authentic Greek art haunted European philosophers during 19th and 20th century.

By observing the photographic series by Edward Steichen *Isadora Duncan in the Parthenon, Athens* (1921), two photos stand out: those in which the famous dancer stands in the Parthenon on Acropolis in Athens. In the perimeter portico of the temple surrounded by columns, Isadora Duncan, dressed in a classical Greek costume, raises and spreads her arms towards the sky. Apart from the monumentality of the columns, their bearing strength and the relation of proportions to the human body,



Edward Steichen, *Isadora Duncan at the Parthenon*, 1921. © The Estate of Edward Steichen / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

the first thing that is noticed is the sky and the space outside the temple. The surrounding world of the temple can be seen through the vestibule. The vertical intercolumniations through which we observe the outside of the temple establish the Heaven-Earth relationship, which the dancer further emphasizes by raising her arms. Apart from the architectural-spatial aspect, the materiality of the temple shines through Steichen's photograph. With the dance of light and shadow, Steichen emphasizes the stoneness of the temple. Its pores and cracks, temporal scars that still shine under the same sun today. In *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel notes the difference between a Greek temple and a German Gothic cathedral. Unlike the cathedral, which disproportionately strives for height and aims to reach Heaven through its verticality, the temple simultaneously strives to grow into Heaven and take root in the breadth and depth of the Earth. One cannot go without the other because Earth and Heaven would then be separated. As Galović elaborates in his aforementioned work – in the temple, God is present through the statue, in front of the temple, He is present through an altar on which the sacrifice is offered as a union with the divine. The statue in the temple and the altar in front of the temple are the two axes of the *temenos* (τέμενος), the sacred space on Earth. The altar in front of the temple and the God who resides in the temple through the statue are united through the act of sacrifice. The explanation of these relationships within the space of the *temenos*, which is not only made up of the temple, but also of its front of and outside of it, i.e. the entire sacred space, is impressively brought by Martin Heidegger in *The Origin of the Work of Art*: “A building, a Greek temple, does not reflect anything. It simply stands there in the middle of a cracked valley cut into a gorge. The construction work wraps the image of God and lets Him, in this concealment, go out into the holy district through the open, pillared vestibule and simply be there. Through the temple, God is present within the temple. That presence of God in itself is the expansion and limitation of the district as holy. (...) Standing there, the building resists the storm

that rages over it and just like that, shows the storm itself in its immense power. The shine and glistening of the stones, which seem to exist only by the grace of the Sun, still bring to the open the light of day, the breadth of sky, the darkness of night. Its ascension makes the invisible space of air visible”.¹¹

The shine and glistening of the stones by the grace of nothing but the sun surpass the photographic image, the sky and sun rays can almost be seen. Aesthetic category of the temple can also be felt in the Steichen’s photo. However, we are not able to comprehend the essential vitality of the temple that we are talking about, not through a direct encounter with the work, even less through its technical reproduction. Therefore we still remain crucified between the worlds it represents. And that is exactly what Isadora Duncan’s body and gesture emphasize in both shots. That is, if there is neither altar in front of the temple, nor God inside of it, the place of God and man’s encounter becomes the open lobby between the pillars, which is now occupied only by a body whose sacrificial gestures desperately cry out for gods, unsuccessfully and in vain, while the storm rages in the sky. The body of Isadora Duncan, posed in a tragic gesture, puts her neither on Earth nor in Heaven. Gadamer discusses Iphigenia and her gesture as simply lost, it touches its own boundary toward the other, invisible empire: “The image depicts lostness in itself”.¹² Our own boundary toward the other, and toward divine, impossible to reach, divine which cannot hear and act as *deus ex machinae* to dissolve the act, is what permeates all of Duncan’s body, from head to toe. Besides, her gesture was, iconographically and iconologically, determined long ago. For example, in Timanthes’ famous depiction of the myth in question, a Pompeian fresco from the 1st century, Iphigenia is led to be sacri-

11 Heidegger, *Izvor umjetničkog djela*, 61.

12 Gadamer, *Ogledi o filozofiji umjetnosti*, 246.



Edward Steichen, *Isadora Duncan at the Parthenon*, 1921. © The Estate of Edward Steichen / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

ficed. Her father Agamemnon mourns her, covering his face with hands. Iphigenia herself, ready to give life to the gods for the higher law of the polis, spreads her arms towards the sky where Artemis and the Nymph are riding a doe. With the *deus ex machina* intervention, the human sacrifice will be replaced by a doe. The gesture of raising her hands is there-

fore crucial in understanding Duncans act within the space of the lobby. Nevertheless, Paić's statement that the concept of Hegel's *Kunstreligion* encompasses the gestures of raising the arms to heaven, as well as bending the knees, he himself, I would say, previously distinguished in the same text: "The depictions of the figure of Christ according to the iconography of the Old and New Testament determine the history of the pictorial art in Western culture, while the mythical speech of the Greek gods appears as an eternal stream of drama in literature, precisely because tragedies, unlike agony, are essentially connected with the word, rather than the image".¹³ Words of Greek tragedy and images of Christian agony depict similar, but not identical themes: Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia, and Abraham's sacrifice of his son, Isaac (both of which, incidentally, mark the end of sacrificing people in the will of gods in Western history). And while the first offering is aware of her being sacrificed to gods (Iphigenia), the second one (Isaac) is being offered without him knowing. Iphigenia goes through self-questioning, and then accepting her fate, Isaac accepts his role without knowing. Iphigenia raises her arms toward the sky to be closer in offering herself to gods, while Isaac bends his knees in order to distance himself from it. What is the difference?

Joseph Ratzinger (later known as Pope Benedict XVI) in his *The Spirit of the Liturgy* tries to explain it: "If we take a look at history, we can find that the Greeks and Romans rejected kneeling. Against quarrelsome gods, such as the myth described, such an attitude was completely justified. It was all too obvious that these gods were not the God, even though man depended on their whimsical power and had to secure their favor for himself, according to his capabilities. Therefore, it was said that kneeling is not worthy of a free man, that it does not fit into the culture of Greece, but was rather a gesture of barbarians. Plutarch and Theophrastus char-

13 Paić, "Na putu bez povratka. Grci – mit i metafizika", 283.

acterize kneeling as an expression of superstition. Aristotle marks it as a barbaric form of behavior (Rhetoric 1361 a 36).¹⁴ Also, Walter Friedrich Otto states that the Greek gods are not legislators but shining ideals that people and heroes encounter face to face. The Greek man does not kneel before the gods, but, if he cannot look him in the face, tries to reach him. Kneeling in the Christian sense implies submission to one God. For now, the gesture of Isadora Duncan's body remains. While dealing with space, body and gesture as an image that comes to us through Steichen's distorted reproduction of reality, we need to touch upon the performative-dance act itself, that is, its performance. Without going into detail about Isadora Duncan's dance style, it should be mentioned that this pioneer of modern dance was directly inspired by the Greek image of the body based on the scenes that can be seen on ancient vases. Her creation is compared to the position of a Greek tragic hero, as she herself declared: "I was possessed by the dream of a Promethean creation, which can rise from the Earth upon my call, descend from the sky, and create dancing figures, the likes of which the world has not yet seen".¹⁵ Therefore, it is not just about scenography for the sake of mere impression, but about thoughtful exploration of the pristine Greek. However, if we take into account Steichen's choice of frame, in which the architectural-spatial category of the temple came to the front, along with its material aspect, which he manages to convey through the masterful treatment of light and shadow, leaving the body secondary and small compared to its strength and size, we can understand we say that the human figure is just a figure lost in space and abandoned by the gods.

In Steichen's photography, it is clear that neither the mind nor eye of a contemporary man can understand the need for human life in such places,

14 Ratzinger, *Duh liturgije: temeljna promišljanja*, 180-181.

15 Cooper Albright, *Engaging Bodies: The Politics and Poetics of Corporeality*, 96.

so the aesthetic overpowers the vital. Martin Heidegger will confirm on another occasion what kind of a place could. Namely, in 1962, he will visit Greece for the first time in his life: Athens, Delphi and Delos, after which the text of *Retentions* is to be written. Finally he stands in front of a Greek temple, namely the Parthenon in Athens, and experiences the following: “An unattainable glow made the building float, at the same time raising it into a firmly rooted presence, merged with the load-bearing rock, which oozed with the abandonment of the sanctuary. Inside of it, the absence of the runaway goddess lurked. No archaeological descriptions, no historical explanations could withstand the silent onslaught of the approach. The knowledge and changes that we brought with us, as an addition to those who come later, fell into the abyss”.¹⁶ This prior knowledge is called retention, Heidegger states, and can barely be reached before it is lost: “The barely reached retention changed the organization of browsing. The latter was then replaced by photographic devices and video cameras. ... It (the mass) threatened with a fever of arrivals and departures in sight-seeing, the fever that unexpectedly absorbs you and reduces everything to an object, present there only for the observer. Who could gainsay, or deny that many of the myriad took a seriously received impression of the surroundings of the Acropolis to their winter vacation?”¹⁷ The barely reached retention, just before this philosopher experienced the temple and in which, as he says, *the concord of the temple resounded, the building parts of the temple construction lost their materiality, the fragmentality dissolved, the spatial dimensions and measures condensed in a singular place, as well as the invisible proximity of runaway goddess’ absence*. They would all be traces of the possibility of reliving a life, traces of the connection between human and divine, of fullness and wholeness (*congregation*), and not just experienced through aesthetic fragments of

16 Heidegger, *Zadržavanja*, 220.

17 Heidegger, *Zadržavanja*, 220.

impression of an object. *Retentions*, title of the text, refers to an attempt to experience that primordial Greek. In addition, in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, he also mentions the merging of the stone of nature and stone temple as one. In the same text, Heidegger once again subtly refers to the distance from the divine through the techno-image of modern times, when he describes the sanctuary in Delphi: “People taking photos everywhere. They cast their memory into a technically produced image. Not suspecting anything bad, they renounce the unknown celebration of thought”. Interestingly, film records of Heidegger, in which the famous philosopher observes the Acropolis, have also been preserved. Finally, can we acknowledge the difference between Heidegger’s celebration of thought, and the crowd that, as he says, discards its memory into a technically produced image? Can that difference be applied when discussing the relationship between Isadora Duncan’s act of performance of the body and gesture and Steichen’s act of photographing the act that will result in a distorted reproduction of the techno-image? Isn’t that precisely why the Greek temple and its aesthetic category, which Malevich mentioned at the beginning, squeezed out any possibility of reaching true liveliness in an attempt to retain the original, which, again, renounces the celebration of thought?

Krešimir Tadić – Ivo Vojnović: *Allons enfants!*, director: Kosta Spaić, Rector’s Palace, Dubrovnik, 1968/69

Dubrovnik Trilogy by Ivo Vojnović, one of the most notable works of Croatian dramatic literature, describes the downfall of the Republic of Dubrovnik and its patrician order throughout the 19th century. This modernist play of romantic death begins with the dramolet *Allons enfants!* set in 1806 on the day Napoleon’s army invaded the city. In its sole act, the lords gather in the house of Orsat the Great, who decides to let the French

inside the city walls following a heated debate, knowing that this will be the end for Dubrovnik. Despite the host Orsat begging them to do otherwise in the hope that the dying Republic can still be saved, the deed is done. The climax of the drama comes when the Rector¹⁸ himself, who was forbidden to leave his Palace, enters Orsat's salon to the astonishment of all present. Although Vojnović's original text, which is supposedly based on real historical facts, places the action in Orsat's private home, Kosta Spaić's adaptation, in accordance with the idea of the so-called ambient theater of the Dubrovnik Summer Festival, places the drama in the Rector's Palace itself, therefore making an unimaginable twist. Here, space in the theatrical sense, as Georgij Paro believes, is not only illustrative, but also metaphorical. I would add that it is not only ambientally, but dramatically important. As Paro explains: "Orsat lives in the Rector's palace, and the Rector – illogically – enters his own residence to visit him? This factual nonsense effectively and dramaturgically materializes the metaphor of the decline of the Republic of Dubrovnik, Rector's Palace being its main symbol".¹⁹ When the Rector's possible exit from the Palace is announced, from which, according to the ancient laws of the Republic he was not allowed to leave even to his own, let alone someone else's private home, Orsat will cry: "That is death!". Also, in the supplement to the dramolet written by Branko Gavella, one of the lords says that he *does not believe in all those antiquities – Rector in the Palace, Rector from the Palace*.²⁰ It is therefore clear that even the lords themselves, as the bearers of power, do not believe in the dying medieval order of the Republic. Historical data states that in the 18th century, rectors no longer went to

18 Knez in Croatian: head of the Republic of Dubrovnik.

19 Paro, *Iz prakse. Gavella, Amerika, Dubrovnik*, 157.

20 Gavella's addition to the text is in the archive of the Division for the History of the Croatian Theatre at HAZU.

the Palace alone for their one-month mandate, but with their families.²¹ Gradually, inviolable distinction between the public and private, which was warned about by the famous inscription in the Palace, whose origins are ancient: *Obliti privatorum publica curate*, was gradually lost. Nella Lonza explains that the phrases *Rector in the Palace* and *Rector from the Palace* denoted the one who becomes a Rector, and the one who ceases to be Rector, thus the Rector and the Palace are tied in symbolic perception as well as terminology, as if with a double knot. In addition, as Lonza furthers, the Rector, with his minor real power that lasted a month, remains only a representation of the government, a figure in which the personification of the abstract State is embodied, and his public appearances must not be frequent so as not to fall into banality.²² He would perform publicly on certain occasions in front of the Palace's porch, whose scenography with stone decorative plastic, along with epigraphy of high poetic style expressed all the characteristics of the humanist city-state of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance. Igor Fisković meticulously analyzes that stone theater in portico and atrium: the half-capital with Asclepius' figure points out the possible origin of Dubrovnik as Greek in its pursuit of ancient ideals, the capitals of *Judgement of Solomon* and *The Rector Who Judges*, as well as the personification of *Justice* and *The Angel of Prudence* emphasize the justice of the ruling institutions. In addition come personifications of *Love*, *Harmony*, *Strength*, depictions of the *Fall of Armed Forces* and the *Expulsion from Darkness* that make up the iconographic program of the "good government".²³

21 Lonza, *Kazalište vlasti. Ceremonijal i državni blagdani Dubrovačke Republike u 17. i 18. st.*, 43.

22 Lonza, *Kazalište vlasti. Ceremonijal i državni blagdani Dubrovačke Republike u 17. i 18. st.*, 41-47.

23 Fisković, "Kiparstvo na palači Kneževa dvora", 74-78.

The task of the stone fragments was clear: “With them, the idea of a microworld in which Dubrovnik framed the principles of its self-preservation with the cohesion of carved handicrafts was presented... The symbolism was undoubtedly complemented by the narrative, not trying to find absolute harmonies in the arrangement of the sculptural works, but rather in order to integrate their contents within a solid building, which, according to this postulate, purposefully served to represent the being of an independent city-state.”²⁴

With this, he clearly notes the primacy of content over form, of life over aesthetics. Fisković also points out that the portico of the Palace was modeled on the nearby Cathedral and practically took over its role and, to a certain extent, Christian iconography, and that thus “the new palace of secular-political power became the place for managing the fate of an increasingly self-aware social community in the City”. Let’s go back to Jacob Burckhardt’s statement mentioned at the beginning of this text, in which he states that festivities in their highest form are a transition from life to art, to which decorative architecture greatly contributed: “The artistic brilliance shown by Renaissance Italy derives only from the common life of all classes. Here we are only interested in the ceremony as a sublime moment in human life, in which religious moral and poetic ideals take visible form”.²⁵ Rector’s Palace used to be such a place as well – it did not belong to the Rector-ruler, but was open for all classes. In words of Nella Lonza: “Before the collapse of the Republic of Dubrovnik at the beginning of the 19th century, the Rector’s Palace was the central administrative building, where almost all state institutions resided, and the government premises were accompanied by appropriate iconography, which conveyed messages about ‘good government’ and republican

24 Fisković, “Kiparstvo na palači Kneževa dvora, u: Knežev dvor u Dubrovniku”, 78.

25 Burckhardt, *Kultura renesanse u Italiji*, 367.

virtues. The stone shell of the Palace has been preserved to this day, but with the end of the Republic, the functional continuity was interrupted and soon, many traces of the life that took place there disappeared”.²⁶ All of the aforementioned is an aesthetic ornament and decor to the contemporary man, and to the man of humanism it is *a representation of the existence and essence of an independent city-state*, as defined by Fisković, which is located in the semi-open spaces of the portico and atrium of the Palace, the meeting place of the state and citizens, of the ruler and the public. And while the Rector was only in one closed part of the Palace, in the semi-open atrium and portico to which the citizen has access, the inseparability of the state and the citizens, life and art was present – in the architecture of the space, in the image of the sculpture and in the words carved in stone. That is, until the moment when the citizens and the ruler leave that space. Vojnović’s move to displace the Rector from the Palace is, as Orsat himself said, death. The climax of the one-act play will be when the Rector tries to leave Orsat’s salon, and Orsat stops him and shouts: “No! – This is my house! – This is my door! – I am the ruler here!”. Because the Rector is the master only when he is in the Palace, and Orsat is the master in his house.

This is where the principle of republican inviolability of the private, which never mixes with the public, shines, not even when the Rector is dining in the Palace, as opposed to the monarchical principle. And truly, at a historic moment when brothers and sisters from a Corsican family of lower nobility divide the once powerful European kingdoms in their game of thrones, who can still believe in the inviolability of the ancient republican order? “*Well, prince, Genoa and Lucca are only estates, properties of the Bonaparte family*”, as Tolstoy commences his novel *War and Peace*, with words uttered by Anna Pavlovna Scherer to Vasily Kuragin. Orsat, in a

²⁶ Lonza, “Prostori vlasti, prostori svakodnevice”, 236.



Krešimir Tadić – I. Vojnović, *Allons enfants!*, dir. K. Spajić, 1969

pathetically worn monologue from today's perspective, will desperately call out: "We are still the authority!... I... You... We!... – We, the kings! – We, the masters! – Wherever we show up, the emperors follow us!... And our sea, and our forts – and our churches... And the Palace – everything is still there, alive – alive! How can it possibly disappear?"

But in fact, it all does disappear. And everything there is dead – dead. The sea, and fortresses, and churches, and the Palace. In the dawn of modern time, the world in which the Rector and the Palace can be one dies, the place where all classes live together is lost, as Bruckhardt states.

Now the Palace becomes a museum (officially in 1950), and some time after it is turned into a theater stage. However, this is no longer the stage of life, which Burckhardt talked about, but one of illusions and art, as Mira Muhoberac says. With Spaić's directing process, the Palace becomes Orsat's home, and the Rector becomes a guest. This performance comes to us through a series of photographs by Krešimir Tadić, which are now kept in the Division for the History of the Croatian Theatre at HAZU. Tadić records the exact moment of climax for a reason, when Orsat kneels before the Rector and begs him to establish an absolutist monarchical order in exchange for the republican one that extinguished itself with a

Krešimir Tadić – I. Vojnović, *Allons enfants!*, dir. K. Spajić, 1969



quorum. In doing so, he unwittingly kills the very idea of a republic in exchange for the idea of Dubrovnik, whatever it may be.

He kneels before him, to the astonishment of the others, kissing his insignia of power, the red cloak, and calls himself the Rector's slave. That gesture of kneeling, which Tadić records, summarizes the growing distance between previously pretty much equal members of the same government. The space of the open atrium, which was used for the meeting of the state and the citizens is expressed through the meeting of the character of Rector (Zvonimir Rogoz/Karlo Bulić) and Orsat (Tonko Lonza) in this staging. Their republican equality is now replaced by a submissive gesture and a desperate plea to which, *nota bene*, not the Rector himself knows how to answer – he is lost for words. In addition, this gesture is lost in space. The modern representation of the world mentioned by Galović, which shows something sensual, natural and human, which, at the same time, contains something divine, is here represented in the state and the ruler through the Palace. Vojnović describes the disintegration of the old order that disappears before the force of the modern age and cannot be resisted, while Spaić goes one step further in his theatrical-performative act and points to the impossible return of the old to the original place. Tadić's act of taking a photo and distorted reproduction of a techno-image are yet another step further from gestures and bodies that express their powerlessness, and the axis falls on the aesthetic category of places that lost, not only the direct unity of social relations, but also the unity of life and art. As Mira Muhoberac points out, Tadić pays attention to the emptiness of the interior of the Palace in the photo, making it the main participant.²⁷ It is interesting that we can see almost no scenographic interventions in the play itself, only displaced characters as foreign bodies that do not belong to the place they

²⁷ Muhoberac, "Spaićev *Allons enfants!*".

appear in. The photographs have expressionistic shadows of a grim gothic horror (the second part of the *Trilogy* was originally called *Shadows*). Spaić's placement of the characters is taken into account by Tadić in order to emphasize their role of being strangers in this place. Not only are Vojnović's characters strangers in that time, but Tadić's actors as persons are also foreign bodies in an otherwise unnatural theater space.

Zlatko Kopljar – *K9 Compassion*, 2004/05

The work of Zlatko Kopljar contains proof that what is important is simultaneously ancient and contemporary, and that human and artistic destiny is always faced with the same questions of its existence. It is the artist who pinpoints the issues discussed here: the issue of the body and its gestures, the issue of the relationship between the divine and human, the issue of art and its space. The inextricable connection of all these categories runs through the 30 years of Kopljar's work which, at the same time, relies on the tradition of Western art history and is immersed in the moment of the present. Kopljar's language is the traditional language of art, one that uses the motif of sacrifice and offering through the classic iconography of the Renaissance and Baroque. Moreover, the spaces where that language is used are extremely inappropriate. Indeed, it is as if that is the key problem of human existence in the world today – man still is as he once was, but the world is no longer the same.

Starting with his first work, *Sacrifice* (1992), he washed his face with water and prepared for sacrifice in a ritual act known since the Old Testament (*Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me*, Psalm 51). His next work *Sacrifice of Isaac* (1993) is directly inspired by traditional Christian iconography. The photo is a reenactment of the sacrifice of Isaac in which Kopljar plays the role of Abraham, Isaac's father. However,

what is missing from the photo is an angel sent by God to stop the act. Leonida Kovač notes this at the time: “It is up to the observer to decide what the actors in the image are looking at, and what they do or do not see, and whether it is an angel. There is no sound”.²⁸ The angel can only be present outside the image because the divine cannot even be re-enacted in the modern age. The most famous painter of realism, Gustave Courbet, allegedly pointed that out much earlier with the statement: “I saw neither angels nor goddesses. That is why I did not paint them”. Kovač wonders: “What or who is being sacrificed, to what or to whom, and why? Are the exhibited works (called *Sacrifice*) themselves a form of sacrifice, or are they a representation of the sacrifice made? Maybe they represent the scenography of sacrifice. Scenography whose intention is to give the gallery space prerogative of a temple, long after the moment in which art was desacralized”. Writing about the same exhibition, Sandra Križić Roban will emphasize the intensity of the artist whose own sacrifice was laid before the bier of art: “In a time when it actually seems that art is slowly disappearing, in which the spaces it has explored since the existence of the human race no longer have anything to offer, everything is called into question, including the existence of man. His fragility and vulnerability took the place of the classical understanding of the heroic.”²⁹ Both authors very early point out Kopljar’s moment of twisting the concept of sacrifice, which is no longer laid on the altar to the gods in front of the temple, but on the altar of art in an art gallery. What for? Johannes Rauchenberger states the following for Kopljar’s work *Reliquary* (2015): “As the self-proclaimed heir of religion, art has accepted the strength and reputation that once distinguished religious scenes: aura, truth, unquestionability, sovereignty of interpretation”.³⁰ Kopljar’s Reliquaries are bronze models

28 Kovač, “Opasni prostori”.

29 Križić Roban, “Guljenje kože”.

30 Cvetnić, “The power and vulnerability of the firefly”, 20.

of New York's MoMA and London's Tate salivated in bronze, similar to medieval saint's reliquaries. In medieval Mediterranean cities, these reliquaries could be touched and kissed in rituals that emphasized the connection between the divine and human. Such rituals and rites took place in the cities themselves, on the streets serving as a meeting place of the sacred and the profane, in ceremonies for transition from life to art, as the aforementioned Burckhardt described. However, as Sanja Cvetnić points out, Kopljar's "paraliturgical powers" are not allowed to be kissed or touched in the gallery space.³¹ Most importantly, nothing divine resides in them. Unlike the real reliquaries, they are empty inside. Precisely the empty will be highlighted in Kopljar's work *K20 Empty* (2015), when models of those same buildings, i.e. institutions, are now cast in solid concrete, giving them only an external impenetrable outline, during which Ivana Mance will note: "The artistic subject is not only he unengaged but openly admits its impotence".³²

Let us remember that in the work *K2* (1997), Kopljar demolished the walls of a gallery with a sledgehammer, having previously destroyed the paper which said: "I am an artist who wants to change the world". Žarko Paić comments: "In his new work *K20*, Zlatko Kopljar focuses on the question of arranging the space of art performance as exhibiting-in-space".³³ Paić is actually talking about a *spatial turn*: "When in the idea of contemporary art we are not anymore able to find God, nature, man, or the world in the metaphysical sense, we face empty signifiers". Museums of contemporary art are totems of their own godlessness, as Paić calls them. According to him, they are only hypermodern cathedrals on the edge of the city, and the only spaces left for contemporary art, without

31 Cvetnić, "The power and vulnerability of the firefly", 20-21.

32 Mance, "Empty", sp.

33 Paić, "Empty in-between: Closing Time for Art?", sp.

which it would cease to exist. With the development of technological science, art was left without an object because there is no longer a subject that would produce something new, so it was left with no other option but staging the “events” as media image creation.³⁴ These staging of eventness, upon which I would refer later, are precisely what Kopljar began to do from his earliest works. Besides closing the door of Zagreb’s

34 Paić, „Empty in-between: Closing Time for Art?“, sp.

Zlatko Kopljar, *K9 Compassion+*, 2005 © Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb



Museum of Contemporary Art with a concrete block that weighed 12 tons in *K4* (2002), he started making his, possibly most notable work, *K9 Compassion* (2004). In performances around New York, Kopljar humbly kneels before the symbols of “the world capital” of the 20th century and everything it represents – American capitalist imperialism. Namely, in front of the Brooklyn Bridge, in front of the main building of the United Nations, on the busy, vibrant and smoky streets of the city,

Zlatko Kopljar, *K9 Compassion*, 2004. © Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb



on Wall Street in front of the Stock Exchange building, and finally in front of the Guggenheim Museum. The series of performances will continue through 2005, when Kopljar humbly kneels in front of the headquarters of the world's most famous institutions of power: Capitol Hill and the White House in Washington, as well as the British, European, Chinese and Russian parliaments.

Sanja Cvetnić approached Kopljar's work through the analysis of body gestures through the work *L'arte d'cenni* (1616) by the Italian jurist and historian Giovanni Bonifacio. Bonifacio provides a list of about 60 gestures of the human body, the language of which is natural, a part of human nature, temporally and spatially universal, self-sufficient, and finds confirmation for each of the gestures in the Old Testament and ancient literature. According to Bonifacio, kneeling is a gesture of humility, respect and honor.

Kopljar's work is defined through the gestures in relation to the institutions he kneels before, among which is the museum whose entrance he had previously closed. In contrast to the temple, which would be the abode of the divine and art, or the ruler's court, which, also sacralized, would be the abode of the idea of the state, which is manifested through art, by the end of metaphysics and dividing the world and life into autonomous spheres of activity and thus into the autonomous artistically, art has become deaf to man and stands before him like an ivory tower, emanating untouchable power and inaccessibility. Now the man kneels before it as he would in front of other institutions of power. He asks himself – what do I have to offer, and what can I trade it for? Kopljar abandoned Isaac's sacrifice because art, which tried to assume its role of the divine, took it only as a deceptive external cloak in the form of an aesthetic one, posing as a shiny reliquary but empty on the inside, a gesture of sacrifice in which the divine is missing. No matter how hard you try to look outside the box:

you will not meet the angel you suspect. Therefore, Kovač and Križić Roban ask themselves: why stage the scenography of the sacrifice when the desacralization of art had already happened, why, when it actually seems that art is slowly disappearing, and fragility has replaced heroism? Now, the body is left outside in the wide dystopian spaces, alone and unprotected. In front of it are the dehumanized spaces of architecture that clearly separate the outside from the inside and vice versa. Those who live in these areas now are deaf and mute. It is clearly stated who belongs where, and the areas of porticoes and atriums surrounded by columns as spaces of interplay between divine and human, ruler and subject no longer exist. Neither do their protagonists. The temples were abandoned by gods, palaces by princes and rulers. Attempts to re-establish a relationship through the cry of Duncan's gesture of raising her hands to the sky and Orsato's pathetic gesture of begging-kissing-crying were reduced to the kneeling gesture of an anonymous character in a plain black suit whose face we no longer see.

Iphigenia's Greek tragedy, replaced by Isaac's agony in Christianity, is now just that – a non-expressive index – as Kopljar is defined by Miško Šuvaković: “An indicator of the totalizing wave of globalism, who transforms the planet (large world metropolises) into a testing ground for biopolitical indexation of the representatives of power. He uses “erased traces of Christianity”... By employing a seemingly neutral but rhetorically indicative body he tests his audience's complex symbolic-political reactions toward realistic, current, fictional historical, geopolitical or potential social powers”.³⁵ Paić states: “The very spaces of theaters and museums exist in modern times as spaces for the exhibition of bodies interacting with other bodies (participants or spectators of the performance), and not as spaces of presentation and display of body art. Par-

35 Šuvaković, *Mapping of the Body/with the Body. On Performances of Rhetorical Figures of the Body* by Zlatko Kopljar, 127.

adoxically, by allowing the freedom of an artistic event to be performed in basically all possible spaces because they are all already under the control of the technosphere, the second biosphere, second life of global capitalism, its 'subversiveness' is also monitored".³⁶

Thus, Kopljar's protagonist is proof of complete surveillance both inside and outside the institution of power – Big Brother is everywhere and he is watching you. The autonomy of any space, museum or theater, as a space of freedom, is an illusion. Not only that, but the museum also becomes a space of archiving events, only a memory instead of the living moment of the happening of art. This is where the power of visual representation of performances steps in, and on Kopljar's work it was explained by Krešimir Purgar: "What Kopljar initially imagined as a performative-political gesture with a basic belief in the social responsibility of the artist turned into a photographic *tableau vivant*, into an artistic image with narrative ambitions that exceed the elemental intention of the author, and furthermore the ephemeral temporal dimension of the performance in the narrower sense. ... Kopljar's performance shows that today we can no longer emotionally identify ourselves according to the content or the deepest reason of its already metapolitical act, because we no longer perceive the represented reality as an idea of the real world, but as a media-mediated fetish-image. In other words, we once again believed in the power of the image and once again surrendered to its seductive powers. The hermeneutics of visual representation prevailed over the drama of the performative gesture, no matter how much the potential of the latter seemed to be more devastating and stronger. We intuitively feel that Kopljar's ethical position is completely justified morally;... ..but, at the same time, we cannot and do not want to resist the seductive energy of the photographic *tableau*".³⁷

36 Paić, "Dogadaj i razlika", 16.

37 Purgar, *Preživjeti sliku*, 20-21.

Conclusion

These three examples show the efforts of modern art to gesturally capture the exceptional moment in which the possibility of re-establishing the forgotten relationship between art and life would open up. The space where it would be established is usually the space of the past, in which it is already too late for taking any action. Whether we look back nostalgically at the impossibility of gods' return, like Heidegger, or dream of the days of yore like Vojnović. The latter, so poetically and thematically similar to Giuseppe Tomasia di Lampedusa and his *The Leopard*, will be translated into a film by Luchino Visconti. The most important element for that film, as well as Visconti's entire *oeuvre*, is, as Gilles Deleuze says, the discovery that something comes too little too late: "The too-late conditions the work of art, and conditions its success, since the perceptible and sensual unity of nature and man is the essence of art par excellence, in so far as it is characteristic of it to arrive too late in all other respects except precisely this one: time regained".³⁸

The found time in which it is too late for us to act, both for Orsat and Prince of Salina, as well as for Duncan and Kopljar, remains as the time of modern art and its trace. It is between the divine time of Iphigenia and Abraham in which it was not too late for the gods to freeze the hand holding the knife, and the present time, where *kairos* merges into one single frozen moment in which past, present and future are one. The winged god of moment was once both close and distant, sometimes graspable in front of us, sometimes elusive behind us, as Posidippus wrote in the epigram about Lysippus' statue: "Once I fly with my winged legs, no one will catch me from behind, no matter how much he wants to". However,

³⁸ Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 97.

now through the camera, *kairos* can be captured and frozen. In a time in which, according to Jean-François Lyotard, there is no art, because there are no objects, we are left with a transformation in which the performer is a complex transformator. He becomes the engine of the machine's metamorphosis, and he, as Duchamp, must be one of the many apparatuses and continue changing himself over and over again: "There are only transformations, redistributions of energy. The world is a multiplicity of apparatuses that transform units of energy into one another. ... Machination opens a capricious temporality, made of opportunities, discontinuous and ephemeral ones, a temporality that the Greeks named *kairos*".³⁹ According to Lyotard, *kairos* is a moment of possibility created by temporality, which opens up transformations and becomes more important than division in the materiality of the object. And the record that remains in a photographic or film image is simultaneously both memory and forgetting, approaching and moving away from the moment of the event. The techno-image has an advantage because, unlike memory, it automatically archives the event and becomes its memory. Museums of contemporary art are full of such examples and vivid memories. For that reason, they are not living spaces of art. The space of art becomes an apparatus itself. And when we have a image posing as an event, the question is, where is the exceptionality of the moment? Can it be inside the camera that creates and archives the same moment at the same time?

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³⁹ Lyotard, *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, 36-43.



REWIND

Margherita Maselli

Yugonostalgia on screen: the case of *Crno-Bijeli Svijet*

This paper explores the notion of *yugonostalgia* in order to apply it to the field of popular television and film culture. With focus on the analysis of *Crno-bijeli svijet*, a Croatian TV serial created by Goran Kulenović (author and writer) and aired on the Croatian national television HRT from 2015 to 2021, we aim to determine through which elements it manages to convey a feeling of nostalgia to its audience. I will moreover use Svetlana Boym's definition of nostalgia to assert whether *Crno-bijeli svijet* can be considered as predominantly engaged to a restorative or reflexive type of nostalgia.

1. Yugonostalgia

*There was a land
A land of Champions
A land called Yugoslavia
(Magnifico 2007)*

1.1 Definition and origins of the term

Yugonostalgia can be described as “nostalgia for the fantasies associated with a country, the SFRY (Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia), which existed from 1945 to 1991” (Lindstorm 2005). The term Yugonostalgia was used for the first time in the December 1992 issue of the Croatian weekly magazine *Globus*, when five Croatian journalists (more specifically, Slavenka Drakulić, Rada Iveković, Vesna Kesić, Jelena Lovrić, and Dubravka Ugrešić) were labeled as “Marxist feminists, communist and post-communist profiteers, daughters of communism and ‘Yugo-nostalgics’” (Kesić 1993, 16).

In her book *The Culture of Lies*, Ugrešić expresses how, in the aftermath of the war for independence, new truths were established through two strategies: the “terror by remembering”, that is, the vision of national identity as a continuum, and the “terror by forgetting” (Ugrešić 1994), which enables the first strategy by having as its focus the removal from people’s memories and identities of the common Yugoslav past. Following this theory, it can be argued that, after the wars, there was a will to (re-)establish a more decisive patriarchal order, as it “represented the only continuity between the old regime and the new one and the main framework for transition, facilitating a basic and unproblematic consensus between the old and the new elites” (Iveković, Mostov 2002, 13). The fact that Yugonostalgia acquired, since the beginning, a negative feature is emblematic of the rejection of the socialist past, which also implies an enhancement of its patriarchal character.

1.2 The role of the 1990s wars and transition

After the collapse of socialism, nostalgia about that past, and the past itself, were rejected and attacked in all the former communist countries. However, this criticism became especially strong in the post-Yugoslav

space as a consequence of the violent dissolution of the Federation and the nationalist tensions that characterized it. Indeed, the abruptness and the brutality that marked the '90s wars and the harshness of the transition period caused a definite break with the communist past and “marked an abrupt turn in the system of values, bringing along unpredicted necessity for the redefinition of identities, and finding ways of dealing with collective and individual memories” (Spaskovska 2008). The experience of the Yugoslav period was (and in some aspects still is) removed from the public discourse, and “everything connected with Yugoslavia and communism became bad and [...] black” (Klasić 2020, 08:21). People were then deprived of a part of their past, and, even more, of a part of their identity, while the construction of the new states came to be based on the ideals of a new sovereign nation-state. To describe this phenomenon Dubravka Ugrešić talks about “confiscated” memory, as people living in this area were not only deprived of their homeland and possessions (as a consequence of the wars and the dissolution of the country) but also of their recollections (Ugrešić 1996), while Mitja Velikonja uses the expression “imposed amnesia” (Velikonja 2009, 547).

Nonetheless, it is precisely because of the war and the consequent period of transition that Yugonostalgia could develop and become a widespread phenomenon. Indeed, nostalgia proliferates in times of struggle and uncertainty, as it is especially in those times when people look back at the past in an attempt to find relief from the present situation. In Davis' words, “nostalgia thrives on transition, on the subjective discontinuities that engender our yearning for continuity” (Davis 1979, 49). Indeed, not only the '90s wars brought about tremendous emotional and material losses to the population, but also the transition to the market economy did not fulfill the promises as expected. According to Spaskovska (Spaskovska 2008), the memories of the communist past did not ever really disappear but remained in the people's unconscious

so that, after the stabilization of the political situation, they managed to come back by reincarnating into symbols and recollections.

The topic of the 1990s is still, under many aspects, an unresolved issue. In particular, the causes of the conflict that led to war violence are still debated. As stated by Glaurdić, one of the main obstacles in exploring this historical chapter resides “in the difficulty of evaluating the credibility and comparative value of the increasing number of extremely diverse sources” (Glaurdić 2014, 25). Moreover, the facts and events are on some occasions manipulated on the basis of ideological beliefs. As previously mentioned, this topic is dealt with by Dubravka Ugrešić in *The Culture of Lies*, where she talks about the strategies of “terror by remembering” and “terror by forgetting”. An example of the latter is the policy of linguistic purity pursued in Croatia after the war: indeed, the official languages of Yugoslavia were “Serbo-Croatian (or Croato-Serbian), Slovenian, and Macedonian. Serbo-Croatian was the primary language in Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia-Herzegovina and it served as *lingua communis* in Yugoslavia” (Hromadžić 2016, 183). At the same time, this language also presented some regional variations. During and after the war, these differences were “strengthened, amplified, and further politicized by nationalist regimes in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina” (*ibidem*, p. 184), so that Serbo-Croatian was officially replaced by three languages: Croatian, Serbian and Bosnian. The official institutionalization of these linguistic differences has had a crucial role in the discourse by the premise of “the idea that ethnic registers of language indexed (“essentialized”) what kind of (ethnic) person you were had been used to create linguistic, cultural, and political distancing in order to reorganize the social and political relations between groups in the Balkans” (*ibidem*). In this process, the media had a fundamental role. As a matter of fact, Ugrešić also underlines the crucial role that the media had in the escalation of tensions and the reproduction of the *Culture of Lies*. Indeed, the elites that took power after the first democratic

elections proceeded to take control of the media apparatus and started a proper propaganda war (Štikš 2015), which helped to mobilize the population according to the different ideological stances.

Important factor that led to the resurfacing of memories and, in general, to the spreading of nostalgia, was the disillusionment about the results of the post-socialist transition process.

Related to that is the consequent loss of geopolitical and international status (Lindstorm 2005; Maksimović 2016; Spaskovska 2017). Moreover, with the collapse of the SFRY, they also experienced the collapse of the common cultural space (Kolanović et al. 2020; Petrović 2007; Volčić 2007), some of the main aspects of which were “rock’n’roll, Pan-Yugoslav news media outlets and film, distinctly Yugoslavian consumer products, and sports” (Volčić 2007, 23), and a consequent loss of their cultural identity. Related to this is also the loss of a common literary space and the commonality of educational curricula, a complex and sensible topic even in the present day, especially concerning the teaching of this area’s recent history, which in each former republic is shaped according to the discourse of the power elites. Finally, tied to the loss of a common cultural identity is also the loss of everyday humor and satire.

In general, according to the surveys conducted in the post-Yugoslav states, people regret a higher standard of living, job security and the protection of workers’ rights and dignity, and a climate of safety (Maksimović 2016; Spasić 2012; Spaskovska 2017), and the Yugoslav educational and health care systems (Petrović 2007; Todorova 2010). They also lament the growing social inequalities, compared to the warmth and closeness among people that they recall from socialist times (Maksimović 2016; Spasić 2012); the implicit nationalism, as opposed to the Yugoslav principles of brotherhood and unity (Kolanović 2011; Maksimović 2016); and the heterogeneous and multicultural character of

Yugoslav society (Kolanović et al. 2020; Velikonja 2021). Emblematic are Maša Kolanović's words:

But very soon, [...] in the like, early 2000, nostalgia for socialism appeared, because [...] people just were remembering their own youth or their own self in that period. And also, since capitalism didn't [...] fulfill these promises of [...] bright future, which will now come to present after [...] we get rid of socialism, people were starting to remember all those good things in socialism [...] such as [...] secure health system, free education, [...] steady jobs... (Kolanović et al. 2020, 33:09).

Of course, as noticed by Spasić (Spasić 2012) and Todorova (Todorova 2010), these memories cannot be considered objective. In fact, they are characterized by a selective nature, meaning that people tend to retain especially the positive aspects of the past and to idealize them, in particular when compared to the tough present. Also, in general, people tend to feel nostalgic for their youth (Halbwachs 1992; Todorova 2010). Still, they are indicative of a sense of discomfort experienced by people of the former Yugoslav space, which may also embody a political potential that can be used to advance a critique of the present and to attempt at reaching solutions to bring change to it.

1.3 Nostalgia as a proactive force

As previously mentioned, nostalgia is not only connected with the past but also with the present, as it is often from the harshness of the current situation that this phenomenon develops. Some scholars have identified this tie as a connection to a possible political and proactive feature of nostalgia.

On that note, Velikonja is one of the main promoters of this concept. Indeed, the Slovenian scholar underlines how nostalgia “can also be a strong social, cultural and political force, producing practical effects in its environment” (Velikonja 2008, 28). This means that from people’s nostalgic recollections, it is possible to understand, on the one hand, which are the present’s flaws, and, on the other, which positive aspects of the past can be exploited to change the current situation. Tanja Petrović (Petrović 2020) emphasizes Yugonostalgia’s complexity and the potential that its legacy can have on the present, as people recall their experiences from the past and thus know in what way things can be different. She also underlines the importance of not talking about the socialist period in a completely abstract way, but rather focusing on the concrete experiences of the people, as it can help to individualize which concrete aspects of the Yugoslav past were positive and could be used to bring changes to the current situation. In other words, both scholars argue that nostalgia should not be seen merely as a paralyzing force, but as a proactive one. Examples of how the nostalgic experience can to offer a critique of the present can be observed in social media, e.g., in Facebook groups, in which people show their common memories and recollections of the Yugoslav period, and in many instances, they also voice their disappointment for the present situation (Maksimović 2016, 8).

Indeed, some scholars (Lindstor 2005; Spaskovska 2008) see in Yugonostalgia a possibility to come to terms with the past and react to the present. Also in this case the world of the Internet comes to hand: there are several examples of web communities in which “yugonostalgics of all generations, nationalities, and from all the republics and diasporas “meet,” tell personal stories, refresh memories of various anniversaries, or share pictures, famous songs, and video clips from the former Yugoslavia” (Maksimović 2016, 5), such as Cyber Yugoslavia¹ which al-

1 <https://web.archive.org/web/20000302085331/http://juga.com/>

lows all those that wish so to become citizens of this cyber version of Yugoslavia (Petrović 2007), *Titoville*,² a website entirely dedicated to the Yugoslav leader (Velikonja 2008), or *Sećanja*,³ focused on Yugoslav pop culture and also endowed with a Facebook page in which users can share their memories of that period (*Yugoslavia Online*, n.d.), etc. Other examples can be observed in the cultural and artistic sector, such as the *Lexicon of YU mythology*, a volume (and a project online) consisting of 800 short narratives of Yugoslav popular culture, which originated from the idea of Dubravka Ugrešić, Dejan Kršič, and Ivan Molek to create a “collection of elements of the local popular culture”⁴ in order to answer “questions about the Yugoslav identity”⁵ (Arsenijević 2004). The Lexicon was also made into a theater play directed by Oliver Frlić. Another instance is the Yugoslav New Wave music, which developed in the late 1970s-early 1980s and which can be seen as a unifying force. Nostalgia does not necessarily have to be political. Especially in the case of its materialization and commodification, nostalgia loses its subversive feature.

1.4 Yugonostalgia in Croatia

After the breakup of Yugoslavia, “the change of the social system itself went hand in hand with a thorough and accelerated metamorphosis of the collective identity, both at the institutional level and in different micro-segments of everyday life” (Kolanović 2011, 86). The necessity to create a new national identity was pursued through two main strategies

2 <http://www.titoville.com>

3 <http://www.secanja.com>

4 “zbirka natuknica o domaćoj popularnoj kulturi” (the translation is mine)

5 “pružiti odgovor na “pitanje jugoslavenskih identiteta”” (the translation is mine)

“one leaning on the (almost pre-)historical roots of Croatian nationality; and the second one erasing any connection to the Yugoslav state” (Popović 2021, 191), through the strategies of “terror by remembering” and “terror by forgetting” discussed by Ugrešić in *The Culture of Lies*. Further, the Yugoslav experience is not separated from the socialist one, so they came to represent a negative whole. This undermined the flourishing of left-wing politics, as they get linked both to communism and Yugoslavia and in this way discredited (ibidem).

Finally, while the concept of Yugoslavism is rejected by the mainstream discourses, the one of Yugonostalgia tends to be denied even by those who aspire to go against the official views. Indeed, on the one hand, people refuse to be identified as Yugonostalgics due to their interiorization of the anti-Yugonostalgia stances, which dominate the public discourse (ibidem). On the other hand, they also believe that only by getting over the Yugonostalgia label, which is used to discredit the Yugoslav experience as a whole, it will be possible to consider this experience in its specificities and to have a productive debate about it, in this way opening up new potentialities concerning the possibilities of reconciliation in the area (ibidem). An approach to Yugoslavism headed in this direction is the one adopted by Croatian historian Dragan Markovina, who sees Yugoslavism as “a plural and heterogeneous group of ideas, friendships and contacts” (ibidem, p. 230), putting in this way a focus on the level of culture and people’s experiences.

Nonetheless, in Croatia some instances of Yugonostalgia can be found, which are mainly tied to the artistic and cultural sphere and linked to a precise period, the 1980s. Nostalgia for the Eighties is not a specific Croatian phenomenon, but rather it has acquired a widespread, global character. It can be observed that what is mainly being revived of this period are its aesthetics, music genres, and styles. In this, the post-Yugoslav space is not an exception. The 1980s in Yugoslavia were a period of extreme cultural and artistic activity. Some instances are the blossoming of New Wave music or the proliferation of youth magazines

(such as *Polet* in Croatia). According to Maša Kolanović, the discourse about Yugoslav socialism is dominated by the Eighties as a consequence of the fact that those people, who had the role of culture makers (singers, musicians, journalists, photographers) in the 1980s (those that Spaskovska (Spaskovska 2017) refers to as the “last Yugoslav generation”), are still very much active and resourceful in these fields and are now monopolizing the public discourse about the socialist period.

An example of this type of nostalgia in Croatia is Zagreb’s 80s Museum, created in 2017 by the Brandnewretro company (Kolanović et al. 2020) that consists of a reenactment of a typical 1980s Yugoslav apartment, in which visitors can interact with the various object and feel as the protagonists of that era; another instance is the 2015 exhibition *The Eighties: Sweet Decadence of the Postmodern* at the exhibition space of Croatian Association of Artists (ibidem), or the Facebook group *The Eighties in Zagreb*, created in 2014 (ibidem), in which people can share their memories of that era. The cases of Yugonostalgia observed in Croatia are more related to a specific period of the socialist past, namely, the 1980s, and are thus in part determined by its aesthetics. However, they still can be considered Yugonostalgic instances in what is considered to be one of the least nostalgic countries of the former Yugoslav space. In the second part of this paper, I will use the Croatian TV serial *Crno-bijeli svijet* as a case study of the representation of Yugonostalgia.

2. *Crno-bijeli svijet*

*My name is Davorin Bogović
And this all around me, it’s a black and white world⁶
 (“Crno-bijeli svijet”, Prljavo Kazalište 1980)*

⁶ *Moje ime je Davorin Bogović / A ovo sve oko mene, to je crno-bijeli svijet* (the translation is mine)

Crno-bijeli svijet is a Croatian TV serial created by Goran Kulenović (director and scenarist) and Igor Mirković (co-scenarist), and aired by the Croatian public television channel from 2015 (Hrvatska Radiotelevizija 2015) to 2021. It is composed of four seasons that revolve around the everyday lives of two families. The TV serial is set in the country's capital, Zagreb, from 1980 to 1986, although the first episode of the third season quickly showcases the protagonists' lives during the early war years.

I will now briefly introduce the main characters in order to make further explanations easier. They can be divided into two households: one of them is made up of Ksenija (Jelena Miholjević) together with her two sons, Želimir (Karlo Maloča), usually called „Željko“ or „Žac“, and Voljen or „Kipo“ (Filip Riđički), and, occasionally her father, Rudy (Otokar Levaj). Ksenija is also living with her second husband, Dominik (Franjo Kuhar), whose sister, Dunja (Elizabeta Kukić) lives in the upstairs apartment together with Đermano or „Žungul“ (Slavko Sobin), Kipo's best friend. The other household is composed of Ksenija's former husband, Jura (Sreten Mokrović), his second wife Jagoda (Anica Dobra), and her daughter Una (Kaja Šišmanović).

Before getting into details, it should be underlined how *Crno-bijeli svijet*'s author Goran Kulenović stated during one interview with the Croatian newspaper *Jutarnji list* that the aim of the serial was never to evoke Yugonostalgia in the audience:

Some people today tell me that these were “golden times” for them, others the exact opposite. Neither me nor Igor wanted to go down that path. There is no nostalgia. Simply put, those are stories of people who lived in that time. Those are old songs, old clothes, old cars... but we do not try to encourage nostalgia. It is just a realistic representation of that time 35 years ago (Silobrčić 2015).

Subsequently, their “ambition [was to] present a TV serial about which no one can say: no, it was not like that” (ibidem). This faithfulness was achieved through two different strategies: on the one side, Kulenović decided to base some of the characters/events on his direct experiences or those of people around him. For example, the character of Ksenija is built on his mother, while the representation of the mandatory military period is based on his and Mirković’s personal recollections (Kulenović 2022). On the other hand, behind every historical aspect/event presented in the TV serial, there was accurate archive research, followed by interviews with people, who have actually experienced them (ibidem). However, even if the plot and characters are not created with a declared nostalgic aim, while watching *Crno-bijeli svijet* the feeling of nostalgia is hard to escape as the focus of the TV serial is “a relatively recent past, which is far enough to evoke feelings of sadness and nostalgia, but at the same time close enough for the memories to still be “clear” and pronounced” (Ajduk 2016). Indeed, those times are still very much alive in the memory of those who can be considered part of what Spaskovska (Spaskovska 2017) defines as the last Yugoslav generation that is, “individuals born between 1954 and 1969, who belonged to the category of youth (16-28) at some point during the 1980s, born to parents who belonged to the ‘first Yugoslav generation’” (Spaskovska 2017, 4), many of whom are still involved in the culture-making process. For example, one of *Crno-bijeli svijet*’s actors, Sreten Mokrović, argued that “it is not possible to look at those times without nostalgia; it was the time of our and mine youth” (Munjin 2019).

2.1 *Crno-bijeli svijet* and Yugonostalgia

Now, I will discuss some of the features that encourage a nostalgic reaction in the audience. First of all, I will present the way historic events are narrated in the tv serial; then, the characters and their lifestyle, followed by the soundtrack and, finally, I will deal with its setting.

2.1.1 Narration of historic events

Crno-bijeli svijet is set in a specific time and place, more precisely from 1980 to 1986 in Zagreb, Yugoslavia, and includes the portrayal of some of the main events of that period. These events are both of a political and historic nature (Tito's death, Kosovo riots, economic crisis...), but also of a cultural one (football and basketball matches, Olympic games, concerts...); usually they are shown as being lived in first person by the characters, also through the use of real television footage. According to Radović, the use of "authentic archive recordings (news, videos, music performances in previous shows and photographs)" (Radović 2015, 20) has a crucial role in evoking nostalgia in the audience, as, in opposition to photography, television series do not limit themselves to show something in the past, but actually present it as something happening, helping in this way the spectators to identify themselves and recall their personal memories connected to a particular historic event.

One example of this is the portrayal of Tito's death, who died on May 4, 1980, preceded in 1979 by his right-hand man Edvard Kardelj. In *Crno-bijeli svijet* the death of Tito takes place in the first season, more precisely in episode four; however, already in episode one, the characters learn from the TV that the president is sick, while in the second one, his condition is said to have improved. All the announcements are shown in the serial through real television footage, including Tito's funeral (episode six), which will be recorded by Jura on his video recorder. The characters are shown to have different reactions to the news: while the parents are crying, the younger generations also appear to be in shock but seem more confused than desperate, or even indifferent. Further, the topic of the economic crisis that hit Yugoslavia throughout the decade is also very present, as it is a common topic of conversation among the characters throughout the seasons. For example, in the first

episode of season three Dominik, Ksenija, and Dunja have a conversation in which they mention how everyone knows that Yugoslavia is bankrupt; in other episodes, the characters are shown waiting in line outside of shops to buy products, while in others is presented the deficit of electricity, fuel, coffee, oil or sugar.

Among events belonging to the cultural kind, some of them are related to sports. For example, in the fifth episode of the first season Jura, Žac, and Nenad (Žac's best friend, played by Ivan Validžić) go to Belgrade's Red Star Stadium (today's Rajko Mitić Stadium, aka. Marakana) to attend the Crvena Zvezda (from Belgrade) – Dinamo (from Zagreb) football match. Concerning events related to the field of music, the characters belonging to the younger generations go to several concerts of Yugoslav bands, while in the third episode of season four, they gather to watch Live Aid on TV (with archive footage of the YU Rock Mission making their contribution to the Live Aid). Finally, another example of a cultural event is the 1983 Miss Yugoslavia pageant, whose participants Kipo and Žungul go to interview in Zagreb's Westin hotel (season three episode six).

2.1.2. Characters and lifestyle

*Those were good times
All on credit, all for commons, buddy
We loaded soup in the car
And we went to Trieste to shop for jeans
Those were good times
We went on trips, or sometimes to the sea
Lots of laughter in the house
In the garden – a Yugo 45
("Jugo 45", Zabranjeno Pušenje 1999)*

As previously mentioned, *Crno-bijeli svijet*'s main characters can be divided by households. However, they may also be grouped by generations. The generations of Kipo and Žac temporally fall into Spaskovska's definition of the last Yugoslav generation, as the first season begins with Kipo being enrolled in the People's Army of Yugoslavia (Jugoslovenska narodna armija – JNA), from which it can be supposed he is around 18 years old, as that was the age in which the mandatory military service started, while in the fifth episode of the second season, Žac celebrates his sixteenth birthday. Another important feature that Spaskovska ascribes to this generation is their belonging to the so-called intellectual class, their participation in the cultural-making process, and in different youth organizations and bodies. Indeed, all *Crno-bijeli svijet*'s characters that are part of the younger generations are involved in this kind of activities: Kipo and Žungul work in some of the most important newspapers of the city at that time (*Studentski List*, *Polet*, *Start*, and *Danas*), the first as a journalist and the second as a photographer; Marina (Kipo's girlfriend, interpreted by Sara Stanić) works as lector for *Start*; Una plays the bass in a band and will later become an actress; in season four Nenad will become a technician for the legendary Zagreb *Radio 101*, of which Kipo is going to become the editor (while Una will be a speaker in it for a short time); finally, even if Žac is not directly involved in the cultural production process, he always appears to be updated on the latest music and cultural trends.

Crno-bijeli svijet's younger generations can also be ascribed to Mišina's definition of "leisurely" youth, meaning a youth that "was in general decidedly urban in that it followed fashion trends, focused on sex and personal relationships, spent most of its time in coffee shops, and had an allowance that enabled it to indulge in leisurely pastimes and pleasures" (Mišina, 2016, 50). All of these features do belong to the TV serial protagonists, as they are all part of the urban environment, and throughout the seasons we observe them in everyday life situations in-

volving friendships, love, and fashion, while the setting is oftentimes that of bars and clubs.

As previously stated, the lifestyle of that time, the 1980s in Yugoslavia, is accurately represented in the serial, together with the everyday life situations and features of the period. In particular, the lifestyle being shown is one of “the socialist equivalent of the middle class” (Đorđević 2018, 27) people living in the city, that is to say, in an urban context. The characters’ appearance (clothes, hairstyle) and the environment in which they live (houses, cars) are all faithfully represented keeping in mind the temporal and spatial setting.

This of course has an important role in evoking nostalgia, especially in those who have lived this particular period, as it allows them to identify with what they see on the screen while, at the same time, associating their personal memories with it (Ajduk 2016; Daković 2018). What happens then is that the spectators are not merely passive, but have an active role as they re-elaborate the show and create their own narrative, which inevitably becomes personal. This mechanism can be set into action also in the case of younger generations who have not actually lived through these experiences, but can still relate to it as part of their collective memory (Radović 2015).

Other elements of life in the 1980s in Yugoslavia are being reproduced in the TV serial; one example is the representation of consumerism in Yugoslavia. Indeed, due to its proximity and openness to the West, the country was permeated by consumer values, although “[t]he local consumer culture had its limitations determined both by the socialist ideology and the level of economic development” (Duda 2014, 61). In this respect, going to nearby countries for shopping was quite a common activity. Thanks to the previously mentioned opening to the West, people could (relatively) easily travel abroad. Shopping trips across the borders became widespread starting from the early 1970s; according to Mikula, the most popular destinations were “Italy, Austria, and Greece

[...] closely followed by Turkey and Hungary” (Mikula 2010, 216), although only the first one would be visited by people coming from all the republics, while the popularity of the others usually depended on the geographical location of the shoppers and their interests. People would usually go on these shopping trips twice a year, but even more often in case they lived close to the border. They were motivated to do so not only to cope with the shortages of some products in Yugoslavia, but also by the higher quality and variety of products, and by “the considerable appeal of anything that came from the “West”” (ibidem, p. 220). However, due to the entity of the economic crisis that hit Yugoslavia, in the early 1980s abroad shopping became less frequent, also because of the government’s decision to “restrict the country’s outflow of private money by introducing heavy deposits for cross-border travel” (ibidem, p. 220), and cheaper destinations like Istanbul started to be preferred to others, as Italy. In *Crno-bijeli svijet* this phenomenon is shown in the tenth episode of the first season when Ksenja, Dunja, and the Kipčić family all go to Trieste for shopping (although the latter will be stopped at the border due to Jagoda’s old photo in her passport). Indeed, the Italian city of Trieste was a popular shopping destination, also due to its proximity to the Yugoslav border (Ajduk 2016; Ugrešić 2011). Other examples of the consumeristic tendency that permeated Yugoslav society can be observed in the characters’ possession of different gadgets, such as video recorders, as, in the third episode of the first season, Jagoda gifts a video recorder to Jura, which was at that time something new and marvelous (Ajduk 2016); telephones (in the ninth episode Dunja gets phone connection); and televisions. Indeed, from the 1970s on, more and more people owned a television set. This represents a relevant phenomenon as the TV “allowed large numbers of people to participate in the same events at the same time, offered access to debates and cultural experiences previously accessible only to few, and fostered a sense of belonging to modern forms of community

such as nations and classes” (Mihelj 2014, 69). Television also favored “the formation of new, modern forms of publicity and collectivity” (ibidem). For example, it can be said that a form of collectivity was created around the US TV serial *Dynasty*, which started to air in Yugoslavia in 1984 (Mrenica 2021). Indeed, it was so popular that on Mondays at 9 P.M. no one would be on the streets, as everyone would be in front of the TV screen to watch it (ibidem). In a way, this created a sense of community since everyone would know what was happening on the show. Moreover, this community also possessed a “physical” feature, as families would usually gather together to watch it. This can be observed in the first episode of season four, when Marina and Kipo come back from Switzerland (where they were living) just to find the whole family completely addicted to the US TV serial, in the same way as Žac and his companions in the JNA (at this time Žac was completing his military service), who will be scolded by their supervisor who finds them watching it.

2.1.3 Soundtrack

All of Yugoslavia is playing rock and roll
(Električni Orgazam 1988)

This openness to the West also had an important role from the point of view of music, which constitutes another crucial element in the lifestyle of *Crno-bijeli svijet*'s characters. Indeed, music works as a solid reference point and common ground for the audience to connect and identify with, but it also sets the mood for the time and the place of its story, and within that story provides viewers with a wide range of audio associations that connect different elements of the portrayed socio-cultural context (Đorđević 2018, 26). In particular, *Crno-bijeli svijet*'s soundtrack is mainly made up of the music belonging to the so-called

New wave (*Novi val* in Croatian and *Novi talas* in Serbian). The beginning of *Novi val* is considered by many to be group Pankrti's⁷ concert in Zagreb in 1977 (ibidem). However, according to some (Ajduk, 2019; Žikić 2020), *Novi val* started to become a widespread and popular phenomenon after Tito's death. Indeed, this event signaled "the demise of central authority" and "the decline in the cult of personality and artificial social tranquility" (Žikić 2020, 69-70), which relatively allowed oppositional voices to come to the surface.

Even if *Novi val* became the most popular and mythologized music movement, the rock scene in Yugoslavia was quite developed and diverse already before its emergence. Indeed, after the Tito-Stalin split in 1948, Yugoslavia became more open to certain Western influences, which also reflected on the music and allowed US and British rock to reach Yugoslavia during the 1960s (Perković 2018), in opposition to the strong censorship enforced by other countries in the Eastern bloc. According to Mišina, the spreading of rock music had a role in the concretization of the Yugoslav idea of "our youth", as a concept of youth that "was interpellated as a subject without (cultural) identity and as a position without (social) location – ultimately as innominate" (Mišina 2016, 46). Thanks to rock and roll music the Yugoslav youth finally gained a concrete voice, and this problematized the fact that the authorities ignored the youth's actual needs and aspirations and that "the conventional ways of understanding were not only severely lacking but that, in all of their abstract realism, they obscured more than they revealed" (ibidem).

Novi val's main features can be considered to be "local identity, urban character, supranational feeling" (Ajduk 2019, 92). These are characteristics that apply to what Perković calls the Seventh Republic (*Sedma Republika*) of Yugoslavia, which he defines as "a spiritual, cultural

7 Pankrti is a punk band founded in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in 1977 (Janjatović 2016)

space, something that is not territorial nor limited by borders, which appeared in the second half of the 20th century and lasted until the breakup of Yugoslavia” (Perković 2018, 179). According to him, the Seventh Republic reached its climax with the development of the Novi val movement during the 1980s, but then it was completely damaged by the wars. However, in his opinion, this cultural space did not disappear completely and is slowly coming back to life.

Novi val’s main centers of production were Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Belgrade as these cities possessed more resources. Moreover, they were also closely tied, which means that intensive cultural exchanges between them was possible, while at the same time, this also explains Novi talas’ unquestionable urban character (Ajduk 2019). Indeed, it has to be noticed that Novi val music was mainly listened to by the young urban population (Jurković 2017). This “new rock’n’roll generation” is defined by Mišina as “decidedly urban, overwhelmingly middle class, and conspicuously subcultural. Its socio-cultural sensibilities were informed by a cosmopolitan outlook and a sense of being connected constructively to global popular-cultural developments while, at the same time, maintaining its own” (Mišina 2016, 57).

New wave music also had a crucial social and political role, as it allowed (urban) young people a space in which they could finally make their voices heard; it became a bridge between the youth and the official society (ibidem). When it came to criticizing the Yugoslav system, however, Novi val’s musicians would not attack it as a whole, but only the aspects that in their opinion had to be changed. In other words, they did not want the system to be abolished, but to be fixed (ibidem; Pogačar 2008). In addition, even if New wave bands would not usually sing about big political themes (Mišina 2016), but more about those concerning everyday life, this also meant “singing about and exposing taboo topics – oppression, corruption, homosexuality etc.”, which had as a consequence the fact that “the public space was gradually being

extended, enabling more social action and giving room for expressing otherness outside the official institutions” (Pogačar 2008, 823). In other words, thanks to Novi val music the youth finally was given a concrete voice through which it could express its problems and aspirations. Novi talas music is an intrinsic phenomenon of the 1980s in Yugoslavia and constitutes a large share of this period’s cultural production. As affirmed by Ajduk, “today every story about the Eighties is connected to New wave music to a greater or lesser extent” (Ajduk 2019, 89).

It is the music belonging to the Novi talas scene that makes up the serial’s soundtrack. As I have already mentioned, the title itself is taken from Zagreb band Prljavo Kazalište’s hit *Crno-bijeli svijet*, which can also be heard in the opening theme.

Moreover, every episode gets its title from a song of the music groups that were part of the Novi val scene. Some examples are *Odlazak u noć* (episode one of the first season) by Azra;⁸ *Ne pitaj za mene* (episode one, season two) by Patrola;⁹ *Skriiven iza lažnih imena* (episode one, season three) by Haustor;¹⁰ *U pobjede nove* (episode one season four) by Paraf.¹¹ Further, some characters are also named after popular Novi val hits, for example, Kipo and his girlfriend Marina got their names from the titles of Azra’s songs.

Already from this it can be noticed how in *Crno-bijeli svijet* music is not merely something that can be heard in the background, but it actually has an active role in the serial. The characters that belong to the younger generations are all engaged in this field, both in a passive

8 Azra was a rock band founded in Zagreb, Croatia, at the end of the 1970s (Janjatović 2016)

9 Patrola was a rock band founded in Zagreb, Croatia, in 1980 (Janjatović 2016)

10 Haustor was a rock band founded in Zagreb, Croatia, in 1979 (Janjatović 2016)

11 Paraf was a punk band founded in Rijeka, Croatia, in 1977 (Janjatović 2016)

way, as listeners, and most of them also in an active one (Una plays bass guitar and even has the chance to play on the stage with Prljavo Kazalište¹² during the last episode of the first season; Kipo, first as a journalist and later as editor of *Radio 101* is often involved in the music environment; as a photographer Žungul multiple times takes pictures of famous singers/groups, as, for example, Električni Orgazam's¹³ first bass player Marina Vulić, interpreted by Dinka Vuković). Moreover, throughout the seasons, several personalities belonging to Yugoslav Novi val show up in the serial. On some occasions, they are one-time appearances. For example, already in the first episode, Žac meets Psihomodo Pop's¹⁴ future leader Davor Gobac (Toma Medvešek) at a party, while in the second one, Bijelo Dugme's¹⁵ founder Goran Bregović (played by Petar Cvirn) meets Žac in a gas station's restroom in Niš while the latter is on his way to see his brother Kipo, who was at that time doing military service in the JNA (Bregović will gift Žac a cassette of Bijelo Dugme's new song *Pjesma mom mlađem bratu (iz Niša u proljeće '78)* (A song to my younger brother (from Niš in the spring of '78)) after saying that he went through the same experience with his little brother). A band that appears frequently in the TV serial is Električni Orgazam, of which Kipo and Žungul meet the first bassist, Marina Vulić, at Lapidarij, before the band's concert, while Una meets her in Belgrade (episode five season one). As mentioned, due to his work as a journalist Kipo often meets famous personalities involved in the music

12 *Prljavo Kazalište* is a punk-rock group founded in Zagreb, Croatia, in 1977 (Janjatović 2016).

13 *Električni Orgazam* is a rock band founded in Belgrade, Serbia, in 1980 (Janjatović 2016).

14 *Psihomodo pop* is a punk band founded in Zagreb, Croatia, at the end of 1982 (Janjatović 2016).

15 *Bijelo Dugme* was a rock band founded in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 1974 (Janjatović 2016).

world, such as the internationally renowned Croatian piano player Ivo Pogorelić (episode nine, season one), while he will later (attempt to) interview Serbian singer Slađana Milošević (episode five, season one). Moreover, in the tenth episode of the third season, he plays the drums for *Zabranjeno pušenje*¹⁶ while he was on a work trip to Sarajevo on the occasion of the 1984 Winter Olympics. The band's leader Nele Karajlić (Feđa Zahirović) will come back later in the fourth season in *Radio 101* office (episode five). Other Novi val personalities are, instead, recurring characters in the serial, as, for example, Haustor's leader Darko Rundek (interpreted by Filip Sertić), who even has a short flirt with Una during the first season, or Prljavo Kazalište's leader Davorin Bogović¹⁷ (Ivan Ožegović).

All in all, the music in *Crno-bijeli svijet* serves the function of allowing the audience to project themselves better in the spatial and temporal setting covered by the serial, but it also has a fundamental role in evoking nostalgia in the audience as it helps to create a bridge between the “fake” reality (the one that appears on the screen) and the “real” one (the one experienced by the audience) by filling it with emotions and remembrances. According to Pogačar

[t]he song becomes a “world” of its own, a space to be invested with mediatized images and personal renditions of realities, past and present, creating an audio-visual landscape. Consequently, the song is inscribed into the memory of the listener. As a remnant of the past, with its malleability and openness to interpretation, the song transgresses from the individual level of the performer or

16 *Zabranjeno pušenje* is a rock band formed in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 1974 (Janjatović 2016).

17 The real Davorin Bogović appears in the seventh episode of the first season as Žac and Nenad's boss.

the listener to the level of a more common social experience (Pogačar 2008, 818).

In other words, thanks to its evocative power, music, in this case the one belonging to the Novi val movement, has a crucial function in the spectators' identification with it and in their nostalgic response.

2.1.4 Setting

I dream of Zagreb town, all day, all night
(Električni Orgazam 2009)

The setting has an important role in the serial. In general, the city of Zagreb can be considered one of its protagonists, if not the main one. Indeed, it has an omnipresent feature as the city and its iconic places are always involved in the events that take place and in the characters' actions. As already mentioned, starting from the opening theme, different views of the city during the '80s are shown, as, for example, the main square, Ban Jelačić Square, some of the main streets such as Ilica, several views of cafés and buildings, as Zagreb's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Moreover, many of the places that are mentioned and/or shown in the serial are considered to have been icons of an era. The fact that several of them have been closed or do not exist anymore only contributes to the further development of their myth and, consequently, the feeling of nostalgia. Indeed, according to Boym, "[n]ostalgia is an ache of temporal distance and displacement. [...] Distance is compensated by intimate experience and the availability of a desired object. Displacement is cured by a return home, preferably a collective one" (Boym 2001, 44). In other words, the fact that these places still exist in the serial, in opposition to the present reality, and, most importantly, that they exist as they were in the 1980s, makes them gain a

second life and awakens the personal memories of the audience.

An example of this is *Zvečka*: this café was once located on Masarykova street and, together with *Kavkaz* and *Blato*, made up the so-called “Tobacco path” (Duhanski put) of Zagreb’s social life (Mirković 2019). Thanks to its crucial location, next to the Croatian National Theater, the editorial office of *Polet* (one of the most popular youth newspapers), the Faculty of Law, the School of Applied Arts and Design, and the Croatian Graphic Institute, *Zvečka*, became the meeting place for Zagreb’s “in” people, those who would later become musicians, film-makers, actors, writers, photographers... (Ivanjek 2006). Unfortunately, this café only worked from 1978 to 1987 (ibidem).

It should also be mentioned that some of the settings shown in the TV serial are the original ones, as, being abandoned, they could be used for the shootings; this is the case of the *Studentski list* and *Vjesnik*’s headquarters, *Lapidarij*, and the exterior parts of *Saloon* and *Vodovod*, the town water supply (Kulenović, “Interview”).

Aside from Zagreb, other cities are also being shown throughout the serial, namely, in order of appearance, Belgrade (as already mentioned, in episode five of season one), Sarajevo (Kipo, Žungul, and Una go there in episode ten of the third season), and Split (as Žungul’s father, major Kurtela (Stojan Matavulj) goes to this city to convince his wife Milica (Doris Šarić-Kukuljica) to go back to Zagreb).

2.2 Restorative or reflective?

In this section, I will discuss whether *Crno-bijeli svijet* can be ascribed to Boym’s definition of restorative nostalgia, or whether it better fits in the category of reflective one. I have decided to use her paradigm as I believe it is, among the several definitions of nostalgia that have been given by different scholars, the most fitting for describing the TV serial. Svetlana Boym envisioned two types of nostalgia: restorative and re-

flective, which have distinctive features, but, at the same time, tend to overlap on some occasions and cannot be considered to be completely separated. On the one hand, the first type puts the focus on *nostos*, which means to return home. And, indeed, the main aim of restorative nostalgia is to reconstruct the past exactly as it was. However, since this, for obvious reasons, is not possible, the product of restorative nostalgia is always an attempted reconstruction, which is by its nature a selective one, as only some aspects (that is, those, which are the most convenient for those who are engaging in this type of nostalgia) of the past are chosen to be remembered. For example, a typical manifestation of restorative nostalgia is the use and revival of former symbols and myths (from religious rituals to music and films), which are inevitably taken out of their historical context and artificially integrated into the present, often for political purposes (for instance in the case of national and nationalist revivals). As Boym notices, this phenomenon is related to Hobsbawm's concept of "invented traditions" (Hobsbawm 1983, 1), which signify "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (ibidem). The function of these rituals and symbols, then, is not to offer a critique of the past, but to create a sense of cohesion and community among people, to offer them something to believe in. Indeed, restorative nostalgia's main aim is to revive some aspects of the past without really analyzing or reflecting on them.

On the other hand, reflective nostalgia puts the focus on *algia*, which means a painful condition. Its focus "is not on recovery of what is perceived to be an absolute truth but on the meditation on history and passage of time" (Boym 2001, 49). Thus, reflective nostalgia does not uncritically surrender to the past but rather invites reflection on it. As Boym observes, contrary to the restorative one, this type of nostalgia

is more focused on the individual experience, and can also act through humor and irony. In conclusion, the main feature, which differentiates these two types of nostalgia is the absence, in the case of the restorative one, or the presence, in the case of the reflective one, of a critical and constructive reflection on the past.

Throughout the second part of this paper, I have shown how *Crno-bijeli svijet* aimed at reconstructing a particular time and space, namely the one that goes from 1980 to 1986 in Zagreb of the former Yugoslavia, in the most faithful way possible. The representation of the past in *Crno-bijeli svijet* is created through the accurate reproduction of some aspects of it, from the historic events to people's lifestyle and cultural aspects, and the setting. And indeed, as declared by the director himself, Goran Kulenović, the main aim of the series is to reproduce life in 1980s Yugoslavia in the most faithful way possible, and not to offer a political critique or analysis of the Yugoslav socialist reality. Based on this, it would be logical to suggest that *Crno-bijeli svijet* engages with a restorative type of nostalgia.

However, another aspect of restorative nostalgia, as suggested by Nadkarni and Schevchenko (Nadkarni 2004), is the reproduction of a perception of the past that makes it appear as if everyone shared the same living conditions, notwithstanding the differences concerning their class/status, regional origin, or other life aspirations and identities. I do not believe this to be the case of *Crno-bijeli svijet*, as, although its characters appear to share the same lifestyles and conditions, this can be attributed to the fact that the TV serial portrays the everyday lives of two Yugoslav families, who belong to the same social stratum in an urban context, and, consequently live in very similar conditions. In addition, some differences in the characters' lifestyles can also be found. For example, in the contrast between Jagoda's and Ksenija's families, the first one being better off financially than the second.

In addition, some examples of criticism against the Yugoslav socio-po-

litical system can be observed, which make the serial also fall under the category of reflective nostalgia. This may not come as a surprise because, as stated by Boym, restorative and reflective nostalgia cannot always be separated and in some cases tend to overlap, as in this occasion. I will now enlist some examples: the character of Ksenija's father, Rudi, is presented as "an anti-communist, pre-war bourgeois retiree that openly comments on and criticizes the Yugoslav communist system" (Đorđević 2018, 27) and, although Ksenija is not very open about her political views, it can also be observed that she does not really go against her father's remarks; Ksenija's ex-husband, Jura, in several occasions also appears critical towards some state and party policies, notwithstanding the fact that he is openly politically active (ibidem); moreover, Ksenija's son, Kipo, is not a party member. However, on multiple occasions, the characters are also shown to have a pro-Yugoslav stance when it comes to life in the country. For example, in the ninth episode of the first season Jagoda's ex-husband Radan (Zoran Cvijanović), wants her to consider the idea of Una going to live in London with him, which Jagoda opposes saying that they do not lack anything ("We live good. We have a car, we have a country house, a passport... we go to Trieste as often as we want to. Tell me, when was the last time you went to the beach for two months?"). Another example is the conversation between Kipo and Marina, who would like to go live abroad (episode five season three), to which Kipo answers, "I don't understand. What's wrong with the way we live now?", while in the eighth episode of the third season, Jagoda's boss advises her against opening up a boutique as in his view capitalism was close to collapse. Further, on several occasions, Yugoslav censorship has interfered with some of the characters' work (e.g. the fact that Žungul and Kipo were prevented from publishing the article about Kosovo riots or during the *Radio 101* broadcast). Moreover, as already mentioned, in the first episode of the third season the characters' lives in the early 1990s are being portrayed. According to the author, this choice was dictated by his will "to remind people of

it and to show that those colorful Eighties wouldn't be looked upon so colorfully if it wasn't for the bleak and gray Nineties" (Kulenović 2022). Indeed, as discussed in the first chapter, the war had a great impact on the collective perception of the Eighties. In my view, this decision can be interpreted in an anti-war and anti-nationalist optic, as the contrast between the "colorful" Eighties and the "bleak" Nineties invites the audience to a reflection on what stands behind the frequent idealization of the 1980s. For this reason, I believe also this aspect can be ascribed to a reflective type of nostalgia.

Finally, *Crno-bijeli svijet* also showcases the potential to be ascribed to the definition of proactive nostalgia. Indeed, by dealing with everyday aspects of life in Yugoslavia, it helps younger spectators to construct their idea about this collective past that they did not have a chance to experience; through this, they can potentially find a way to heal the divisions and traumas that the post-Yugoslav experiences as a consequence of the violent breakup of the federation. In this regard, I believe is relevant to report an extract of Kulenović's interview with the Montenegrin newspaper *Vijesti*:

Interviewer: Do you believe it can be possible for younger generations to create a sort of new Yugoslavia, in terms of cultural and other kinds of cooperation, which will bring them together and erase borders, inspired by the stories of those good, old times, even if they were a myth?

Kulenović: [...] I have to agree that it would be amazing if the future generations in the whole region could get closer and find primarily cultural, but also other common interests, thanks to the memory of some beautiful similar collaborations and friendships of the past, and, if *Crno-bijeli svijet* can help in that, no one would be happier and prouder than me (Strugar 2020).

Naturally, the main entity of this potential resides in the audience, as it has the assignment to re-elaborate what is portrayed in the show and produce its own narrative. For the reasons I have just enlisted, it is not easy to ascribe *Crno-bijeli svijet* to one particular type of nostalgia, as features belonging to both Boym's categories of restorative and reflective nostalgia can be observed. However, although the main declared aim of the TV serial is to faithfully reproduce people's lives in 1980s Yugoslavia, which would lead to a definition of restorative nostalgia, the presence of critics moved to the Yugoslav system, the portrayal of the characters' lives in the early 1990s, and the serial's potential for proactive nostalgia induce me to ascribe it mainly to the reflective type.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

The notion of nostalgia is quite old, the first academic mention of it being in the late seventeenth century. Initially conceived as a full-fledged sickness, during and after Romanticism the term was "demedicalized" (Davis 1979, 4) and began to be associated with the field of feelings and emotions, as it is understood in the present day.

The focus of this study was the configuration that the phenomenon of nostalgia assumed in the post-Yugoslav area, known as Yugonostalgia. I have discussed the origins of the concept of Yugonostalgia. In this context, I have also claimed that the violent breakup of the federation had a crucial role in the development of nostalgia and, at the same time, in its denial or repression. Indeed, during and after the war a new narrative was created by the political elites which rejected everything considered "Yugoslav". The mechanisms involved in this process can be individuated in what Ugrešić (Ugrešić 2011) defined as "terrorism by remembering" and "terrorism by forgetting", meaning the establishment of continuity with the pre-Yugoslav order and simultaneous era-

sure of everything that came after it. This is especially visible in Croatia, as I argue at the end of this paper's first part.

The purpose of this study was to discuss how, through which elements, the Croatian TV serial *Crno-bijeli svijet* managed to evoke nostalgia in its audience and which kind of nostalgia, among Boym's definition of restorative and reflective, can be considered as most fitting for its description. Indeed, although the aim of the TV serial was not a nostalgic reaction in the spectators, as declared by its author, Goran Kulenović, but rather a faithful reproduction of the era it concerns, I argue that this claim for faithfulness has a crucial role in the evoking of nostalgia in the audience, especially in the case of those who have actually lived through that period, as it stimulates the association of their personal memories related to it. In this way, they are not merely passive spectators, but rather they become active subjects, as they identify with what they see and re-elaborate it by intermixing it with their personal recall. Indeed, *Crno-bijeli svijet* is set in a precise temporal and spatial setting: the 1980s in Yugoslav Zagreb. The Eighties are often the main focus of Yugonostalgic narratives, due to several reasons. First of all, they were a time dense of historical events, including Tito's death, and are the period, which precedes the outbreak of the war. As previously mentioned, this contributed to their idealization as the last "golden age". In *Crno-bijeli svijet*, the historical period is not only rendered through the recurring historical events, which are mainly presented as lived in first person by the characters, but also through the reproduction of more cultural aspects: the lifestyle, views of the city and its iconic places, and the music. Indeed, the 1980s in Yugoslavia were also a period of extreme cultural and artistic prosperity. The main cultural phenomenon which appeared in this period was the *Novi val* music movement. This phenomenon was not only relevant from the perspective of artistic quality, but it also became crucial from a social and political point of view. As a matter of fact, it finally allowed the younger gener-

ations a concrete space in which they could speak their minds, creating a bridge between the youth and the official society (Mišina 2016). After having examined the various elements through which *Crno-bijeli svijet* allows the evocation of nostalgia, I used Boym's framework to discuss whether the TV serial can be said to belong to the restorative or reflective type of nostalgia. Finally, I also argue that *Crno-bijeli svijet* can be potentially interpreted by the audience as a source of proactive nostalgia. By distancing itself from the negative narratives produced by the mainstream official discourse about Yugoslavia and by reproducing instead a narrative concerning everyday lives in that period, it can help people to re-appropriate their narrative concerning the past. In this way, a space can be found to fight the nationalistic stances adopted by the official discourse and to potentially find ways to heal the divisions and traumas originating from the violent end of Yugoslavia.

I believe my study, even if to a small extent, will contribute to the broader discussion on the topic of Yugonostalgia and showed a concrete way in which nostalgic feelings can be evoked, namely through the analysis of the Croatian TV serial *Crno-bijeli svijet*. I am convinced that *Crno-bijeli svijet* can have a relevant role in the production of a new narrative in the post-Yugoslav area, as through the portrayal of people's everyday lives in 1980s Yugoslavia, it can help the audience to re-appropriate their collective past outside the framework of the official discourse. On this note, I argue that, for the purpose of future studies, more focus should be put on the notion of Yugonostalgia and especially on its potential as a proactive force, meaning the role it can have in the overcoming of divisions and traumas, which characterize the post-Yugoslavia period.

Nika Petković

Vacations in Yugoslavia: approaching the home movie archives

Light flickers on the edge of the frame indicating the film is rolling. Out of the silent blackness appears a vivid blue sea. A slow panoramic shot discovers a crowded coast with people sunbathing and sitting on the cliffs. The camera moves and we are faced with a monumental building, probably a hotel, with officers and guards impatiently waiting for someone to arrive. Suddenly a motorcade rushes through the street in front of the hotel. We notice a big Cadillac, passing by the camera with Yugoslav flags attached to the front. As the camera moves to the right, we discover a street full of people, standing and waving to the motorcade. A few seconds later the camera enters the hotel and we discover its modernist interior, a lounge bar and a restaurant, opening on a big terrace with a swimming pool. From the terrace, an impressive view discovers the old town on the coast.

1. to 2. Home Movies - Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia, Amaterski fond Ermanno Acanfora (8 mm)





The footage described is only a fragment of one of hundreds of home movies entitled *Vacations in Yugoslavia* (*Vacanze in Jugoslavia*), found in the Amateur Film Archive (Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia), located in Bologna, Italy, whose primal goal is that of preserving and exhibiting amateur and family cinema, consisting of films, particularly small and medium gauge works. The scenes from a home movie described above are without doubt a peculiar visual gem, as they show most probably the visit of the former Yugoslavian president, Tito (even though we barely notice his figure in the car), to the city of Split. Moreover, the modernist building, in the style of an ultra-large cube high-rise, appearing in the footage, is that of hotel *Marjan* (1965), one of the countless resorts and tourist facilities built down the Adriatic coast, from Croatia to Montenegro, that helped revolutionize and develop Yugoslavia's tourism industry at the time.

3. to 4. Home Movies - Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia, Amaterski fond Ermanno Acanfora (8 mm)

From a purely visual perspective, this kind of footage is similar to the hundreds, if not thousands, of home movies depicting personal memories of families in the second half of the twentieth century. Today these are mostly stored in private collections, amateur film archives, or inhabit the cyberspace.¹ Yet, what undoubtedly triggers our curiosity and imagination is the title written in the opening shot of this particular home movie – *Viaggio in Jugoslavia (A Travel to Yugoslavia)*. Before continuing this essay on the role of amateur films representing the holidays in Yugoslavia and its interconnections with the sense of place and nostalgia, I will briefly focus on the definition of home movies and their value as documents in the depiction of social history.

During its golden age, spanning from the late 1940s to the mid-1980s, 8mm film emerged as the favored method for numerous families to capture their lives through moving images. With reduced-gauge formats, 8mm and Super8, cinema in the post-war period became progressively a favourite form of self-representation for families around the globe and undoubtedly the most low-cost form of cinema.

5. to 6. Home Movies - Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia, Amaterski fond Ermanno Acanfora (8 mm)

1 In the past fifteen years, we are witnessing a growing number of websites and online databases that together with YouTube channels offer us an impressive number of amateur footages, including home movies.





In fact, the year 1965 marks a decisive moment in the history of amateur cinema with the introduction of Super8 film (Simoni 2005). In common usage, the term *Super8* is used to refer to what is more accurately called a *home movie*.

In the mid-sixties, we witnessed plentiful discussions on the role of amateur cinema, including the subgenre of home movies, published in specialized magazines. In one of the editorials, authors propose creating a “structured” home movie, not “a sequence of photographs, often excellent, but without a constructive purpose”. This contradicts Roger Odin’s fundamental definition, which states that the family film should not imitate the classic cinematographic form, but rather that of a photographic album.² While the subject of the home movie is, in most cases, the family, these films exhibit features of completeness: they are shot following a precise shooting plan, carefully edited, with titles and captions, and in some cases, even a soundtrack is added.

7. Home Movies - Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia, Amaterski fond Marino De Vecchi (8mm), 8. Home Movies - Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia, Amaterski fond Guido Giorgi (Super8)

2 “The home movie should be deliberately made in a way that may seem poorly structured and non-narrative in order to function correctly in its own space. In other words, the amateur nature of the home movies, with its lack of traditional cinematic qualities, contributes to its effectiveness and authenticity within the context of portraying personal memories and experiences“ (Odin 2001).

These works showcase small chronicles of everyday life, distant travels, ceremonies like weddings, birthdays, friends, and family gathering. Amateur footage, as a visual source, serves a distinctive role as a witness to history (Burke 2001). Its authenticity is undeniably strong, as it relies on basic techniques and remains detached from the complexities of professional film production. The direct gazes of individuals – mothers, fathers, and children – captured in these home movies instill persuasiveness among contemporary viewers. The essence of home movies lies in the portrayal of genuine, real-world scenarios, uncontrived and unaltered, depicting people in various settings – their homes, public spaces and in destinations they visit (Simoni 2015).

When focusing our discourse on the amateur tourist gaze, the camera often exposes how leisure holiday footage conjures a distanced vision towards the strange and the familiar. In a certain degree, the camera shares qualities of anthropological and ethnographic observation (Neumann 2014). Coming back to the subject of this essay and to the various scenes appearing in the home movies made by foreign tourist in Yugoslavia, in the period between the early 1960s and 1970s, we can use as an example those filmed in Bašćaršija, in Sarajevo.

9. Home Movies - Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia, Amaterski fond Guido Giorgi (Super8), 10. Home Movies - Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia, Amaterski fond Ermanno Acanfora (8 mm)





The scenes showing close-ups of Bosnian women, dressed in traditional clothes, wearing a headscarf, somehow mimic the conventions of the ethnographic film. However, they are clearly filmed from a distance, what suggests a social discomfort in making them. These scenes point toward stereotypical representations, but they also illustrate two main impulses of the amateur gaze: it is a gaze towards the past that looks for evidence of tradition, sharing almost the same motives as those of an anthropologist while creating images that testify the cultural difference.

Furthermore, what also plays an important role while interpreting amateur films, is the specific historical moment and context in which the journey was filmed. The home movies shot by the families during their travels to Yugoslavia in the 1960s were made in a moment when progress and life in “brotherhood and unity” were one of the milestones of Yugoslav socialist ideology. Yugoslavia was the fastest growing socialist economy in the post WWII era and in fact, one of the fastest growing countries in Europe during the 1950s and the 1960s. Additionally, while traveling through Yugoslavia in the 1960s, tourists arrive with preconceived ideas about the socialist state, having in their mind images seen on tv news, travelogues, commercials or read in tourist guides. The presence of the camera on their trips elicited surely a need for performance, which explains furthermore

11. Home Movies - Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia, Amaterski fond Maria Tiopia (Super8), 12. Home Movies - Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia, Amaterski fond Pietro Varin (Super8)

the frequent appearance of family members in home movies, happily posing in front of road signs “Welcome to Yugoslavia”, “Welcome to Jajce”, “Welcome to Belgrade” or in front of National Liberation Monuments built across the country. These kinds of scenes testify tourist’s need to document their encounter with the new and (un)familiar world.

Most home movies made by enthusiastic amateurs all around the world, in the past few years have witnessed a growing reuse in feature films and contemporary documentaries or have simply been uploaded on digital databases without additional context or information. According to found footage researchers and historians, this kind of approach cannot be identified as nothing more than anonymous vintage recordings, offering us some kind of visual experience of pastness (Baron 2014). From another point of view, home movies shot specifically during travels through Yugoslavia can be considered *triggers of mechanisms of nostalgia*³ or *generators of remembrance* as they represent fragments of visual evidence, made by tourists who once used to film on their camera a country that today no longer exists.

13. Home Movies - Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia, Amaterski fond Guido Giorgi (Super8), 14. Home Movies - Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia, Amaterski fond Maria Tiopia (Super8)

3 “The home movies are suggestive of nostalgia by their subject matter (depicting people or places that no longer exist), by the way they are processed (slow motion), and by the visual quality of the celluloid itself (deteriorated footage)” (Zimmerman 2008).





In concrete, what home movies of this kind depict is not a place that in a geographic sense no longer exists, or which has been erased from the map of well-known tourist destinations. Besides showing a vast number of locations and rituals filmed while traveling through Yugoslavia, home movies also depict sites that today have lost their cultural and historical value. For example, in one of the movies filmed during the holidays in Yugoslavia, we see a family visiting the Kosmaj Monument, dedicated to partisans and fighters from the Posavina region, who died during the National Liberation War (World War II). Another home movie shows the Monument to the Uprising of the People of Kordun and Banija at Petrova Gora, in central Croatia, today one of the most notorious derelict Yugoslav-era monuments.

The country that no longer exists, filmed by the foreigners during their holidays, from today's perspective is a *place in a memory* for those who lived in former Yugoslavia and who after its collapse found themselves having *two lives and one biography* (Ugrešić 1996). On the other hand, scenes represented in home movies, showing landscapes, interiors, monuments, and rituals, will probably be considered, by the post-Yugoslavs and new generations, like nothing more than “souvenirs”, dispersed fragments and splinters from the past, serving to satisfy their Yugonostalgic appetite.

15. Home Movies - Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia, Amaterski fond Maria Tiopia (Super8), 16. Home Movies - Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia, Amaterski fond Pietro Varin (Super8)

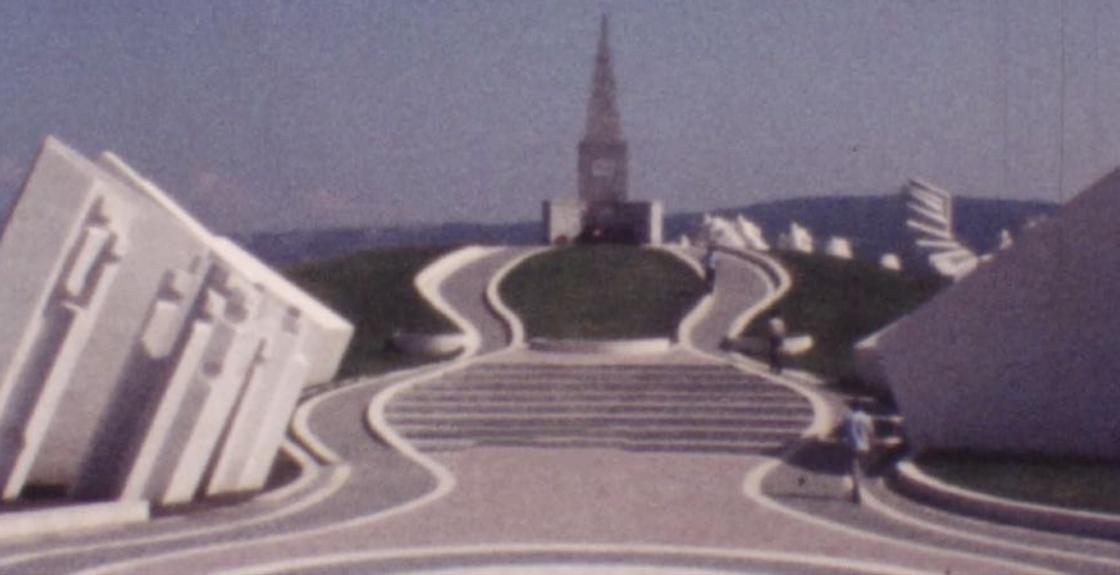
While in the nineties Yugonostalgia was a term coined by the Croatian media and politicians, in order to publicly punish and reprove those who grieved the death of the former country, today, Yugonostalgia has become a consumer's good. All over the Internet we can find video clips, popular TV shows, advertisements, design concepts, chairs we used to sit on, cookbooks with meals we used to eat, haircuts we used to wear. Today, the term is far from being what in the wake of the nationalism actually was: a sort of personal feeling of resistance, towards the brutal confiscation and erasure of collective memory.⁴ With this in mind, if we consider a Yugoslav collective memory as a *confiscated memory*,⁵ or in other words an incomplete body, whose parts have been rearranged, rewritten and reconstructed, during the transition from one political system to another, we cannot disagree upon the fact that home movies show us what has been indefinitely lost – a sense of place in collective memory.

17. Home Movies - Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia, Amaterski fond Pietro Varin (Super8), 18. Home Movies - Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia, Amaterski fond Slobodan Fazlagic (8mm)

4 “Yugonostalgia has today become a mental supermarket, a list of dead symbols, a crude memo stripped of emotional imagination” (Ugrešić and Williams 2015).

5 “For many inhabitants of former Yugoslavia, along with the war and the disappearance of their country, many other things have been confiscated: not only their homeland and their possessions but also their memory. (...) For collective memory can be erased and rewritten, deconstructed, constructed and reconstructed, confiscated and reconfiscated, proclaimed politically correct or incorrect. With the collapse of the multinational Yugoslavia the process began of confiscating the Yugoslav collective memory and its replacement by the construct of national memory” (Ugrešić 1996).

HM



HM





For a long time, amateur film remained confined within the realm of its social use: within families, private clubs, associations. However, today, with the growing number of amateur film archives and initiatives, home movies of this kind have the potential to become a valuable archival research source. Practices of collecting, preserving, along with the interest shown by scholars, can contribute to elevating the significance of amateur film as an essential aspect of our cultural heritage. Finally, today, when nostalgia has lost its subversive quality and the Yugoslav collective memory has successfully been for three decades reorganized in new constructs, what use can we get from amateur footage like a home movie?

The question is, besides being a harmless *memoir*, able to trigger personal nostalgia, can home movies filmed during the holidays in former Yugoslavia, become a source for serious research and understanding of Yugoslav socialism or act like interrogators of dismantled collective memories. No matter its intrinsic nostalgic essence, can a home movie footage become a starting point for real and enduring settling between the old and the new?

19. Home Movies - Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia, Amaterski fond Marino De Vecchi (8mm), 20. Home Movies - Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia, Amaterski fond Marino De Vecchi (8mm)

неприменя
спонент



inappropriate
монитор



неприменя
спонент



неприменя
спонент



Tihana Pupovac, et al.

Inappropriate Monuments – From Project to Phenomenology

Inappropriate Monuments is a project initiated in 2015 by a platform of the same name, bringing together institutions and organizations from the territories of the former Yugoslavia. The platform was established to foster long-term collaboration among entities dedicated to the reevaluation and protection of monuments related to the People's Liberation Struggle (NOB), as well as Yugoslav cultural and artistic heritage in general.

The project's activities and associated research from 2014 to 2017 described the conditions (economic, political, social, ideological, etc.) under which NOB monuments were erected, consistently examining their contemporary reception. Since its inception, *Inappropriate Monuments* has highlighted revisionist trends in the successor states of the SFRJ, addressing historical revisionism surrounding World War II through a multi-year research project. One of the platform's objectives is to lay the foundation for the reevaluation of the NOB and the partisan movement. Additionally, the platform critically reflects on the "post-socialist" and "post-Yugoslav" conditions.

The idea of developing a collaborative network emerged from the SF:ius initiative, whose members previously investigated the destruction of NOB monuments in Croatia. The poor state of commemorative monuments prompted research, with approximately half of the estimated 6,000 monuments in Croatia being either demolished, removed, repurposed, or vandalized. The dissolution of the SFRJ made the status of NOB monuments a subject of debate and revision. Despite limited data availability during the initial research period (2010-2012) and reluctance from relevant state authorities to provide necessary documents, the SF:ius initiative garnered increasing interest in the topic within the research, activist, and artistic communities.

This interest expanded internationally, especially following the release of the photo-monograph by Belgian photographer Jan Kempnaers, turning NOB monuments into internet sensations. Through his book *Spomenik*, Kempnaers recontextualized and globalized the issues surrounding the preservation and new valorization of the National Liberation Struggle's memorial heritage. Labeled as "mystical objects" captured in an atmosphere of "melancholic beauty", these monuments became a stimulus for further exploration of their socio-political significance. The book also catalyzed the development of an internet phenomenon and visual aesthetics that quickly stereotyped the entire memorial heritage of the anti-fascist struggle in the Balkans.

It became evident that a space needed to be created, open to all interested parties for sharing and presenting their works, both among themselves and to a wider audience. This need gave rise to the Inappropriate Monuments platform, envisioned as a tool to overcome challenges faced by institutions, organizations, and researchers dealing with NOB monuments. It aimed to provide a space for exchanging research and data through a publicly accessible project website database.

The platform was formally established in 2014 through collaborative agreements, setting common goals, missions, and strategies for joint action. With the support of the Kultura Nova Foundation, the first meeting was held in Zagreb, attended by SF:ius, Architects' Group, Modern Gallery, Artemost, Museum of Yugoslav History, Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and SCCA. In its first year, the platform's formal participation continued with SF:ius as the conceptual initiator, joined by the Architects' Group, MG MSUM, and HMBiH.

During this period, the platform's work primarily focused on initiating the project and securing funding. In 2015, support from the Balkan Arts and Culture Fund enabled the realization of a two-year project. The continuous operation was ensured with support from Allianz Kulturstiftung and the Kultura Nova Foundation for regional platforms in 2017.

Significant efforts were also invested in expanding the platform and attracting new members. One of the platform's goals was to include members from each successor state. This ambitious plan saw fruition in 2016, as the platform welcomed two new members: KUD Anarhiv from Slovenia and Leftist Movement Solidarity from Macedonia.



Given the diverse structures, interests, and fields of activity among platform members, the platform maintained a functioning approach accommodating these differences. This allowed members relative autonomy in selecting research themes and directions, as well as devising accompanying activities. Consequently, the platform gained rich and diverse content, bringing together participants from various disciplines, from social and humanities sciences to architecture, art, and design. This working model facilitated the highlighting of local and national specificities and issues, facilitating a comparative analysis of NOB monuments in successor states.

One of the initial project themes that emerged was the issue of protecting and managing monumental heritage, a direct response to the state of monuments and their treatment. Research on the demolition of monuments proved interesting in examining the laws protecting them, how specific monuments were included in the registry of cultural assets, and how they were removed from it. The project partners, from 2015 to 2016, gathered relevant documentation and examined legislative bodies' attitudes toward this heritage. In addition to protection issues, they also explored heritage management models then and now.

In Zagreb, SF:ius researched the development of the monument registry and legislative changes, while the Architects' Group established a fruitful collaboration with the Conservation Institute, gaining insights into its operations. The Modern Gallery embarked on a comprehensive effort to organize and digitize the archive of art historian Dr. Špelca Čopić, posthumously bequeathed to them.

Research activities were complemented by public formats primarily aimed at students, scientists, and researchers. Workshops were conducted in Niš (2015) and Zagreb (2016), culminating in research on protection presented at an international symposium in Zagreb in early 2017.

The Museum of the Revolution and memorial collections dedicated to the NOB were another complementary theme emerging from research on monument protection. As the successor to the Museum of the People's Revolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Historical Museum devoted significant time to researching this topic. Besides organizing their archives, considerable efforts were directed at investigating the state of memorial collections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially those once under the jurisdiction of the Museum of the Revolution.

In 2015, one of the addressed topics was "City Hero". The platform aimed to mark the 70th anniversary of the victory over fascism by commemorating the liberation anniversaries of specific cities. Alongside continuous research and content publication on the platform's media channels, this initiative initiated the mapping of monuments and the creation of a digital monument map. Each partner studied five monuments in one of the cities awarded the Order of the National Hero (Belgrade, Cetinje, Drvar, Ljubljana, Novi Sad, Prilep, Pristina, and Zagreb). The selection of monuments was guided by questioning how memories of historical events are inscribed in urban space and whether it is possible to encapsulate them through the erection of a single monument. How visible are these monuments today, and do they convey a message?

Complementing this theme, a workshop titled "Commemorative and Anti-commemorative Practices on NOB Monuments in Zagreb" was held in collaboration with the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the Faculty of Philosophy. The question of monument management led to research into the realm of tourism, specifically the tourist exploitation of NOB monuments. The partners explored how monuments were integrated into Yugoslavia's tourism structure, particularly for domestic tourists, in 2015. This research culminated in the exhibition *On Revolution Roads*.

Among the early advocates and activists highlighting the state of monuments and their controversial nature were undoubtedly artists. From 2000 to the present, many of our artists created works and installations either on monument sites or using material related to monuments, sometimes even incorporating actual monument material. The reception of NOB monuments from the perspective of contemporary art was extensively explored and presented as part of the Ljubljana exhibition *On Revolution Roads* at the Modern Gallery. The photographic work of artist Dejan Habith was also integral to the exhibition. All artistic works, in various ways, pointed to the issue of historical revisionism, a theme consistently threaded through all our research and thematic focuses.

In 2001, the Association of Anti-Fascist Fighters of Croatia published the monograph *Destruction of Anti-Fascist Monuments in Croatia 1990-2000*, based on extensive research conducted during that period. In the preface to the second edition, editor Juraj Hrženjak notes that about 6,000 commemorative monuments were erected in Croatia, of which “damaged, defiled, or removed...2,964” (Hrženjak, 2002:XII).

Apart from the SABAH monograph, which, until the early ‘10s, was the only comprehensive source on the destruction of NOB monuments in Croatia, literature was mainly limited to photo monographs, tourist guides, or historical accounts from the time of their construction.

As described on the official website of the author: <https://www.jankempenaers.info/publications/6/> (2.1.2024.)

(To be continued)

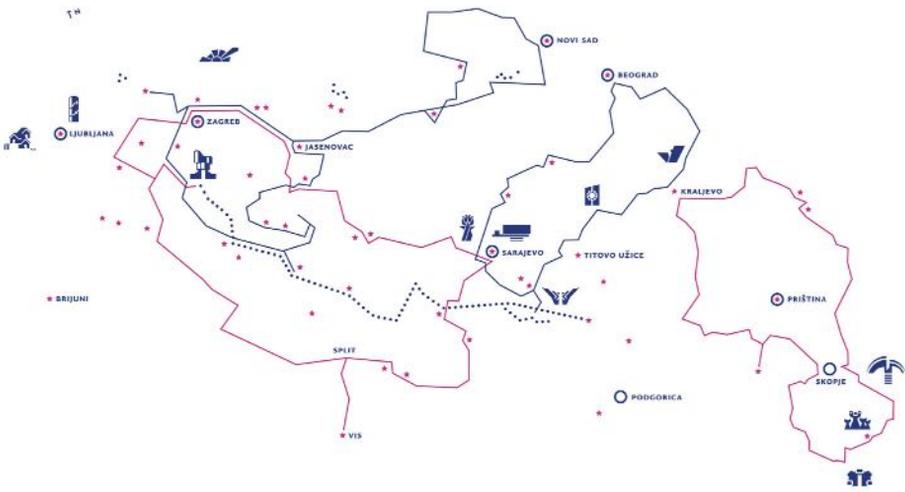
On Revolution Roads – Memorial Tourism in Yugoslavia

[excerpts from the exhibition catalog and interpretation panels]

The exhibition *On Revolution Roads: Memorial Tourism in Yugoslavia*, examines the position and function of National Liberation Struggle (NLS) memorials in the tourist segment of the economic and socio-economic system of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ).

The introduction of memorial tourism as a part of the overall SFRJ tourist scheme/industry from the late seventies and early eighties of the 20th





century to the present day is an under-researched phenomenon of the post-war development of Yugoslavian tourism. The inauguration of NLS memorials as a tourism product and the consequent commercialization of the symbolic and historical-political dimension of NLS cultural heritage impacted the mechanisms of managing existing monuments and the concepts of building new NLS memorials, as well as the methods of their financing. The term memorial tourism is taken with a certain grain of salt since this statement implicitly emphasizes the commercial functions as the main characteristic of memorial areas and NLS facilities in Yugoslavia, which to some extent ignores the complexity of the historical and political significance and symbolic and socio-economic function of NLS memorials.

The idea of introducing the memorial heritage of the NLS into the tourist industry system and the possibility that the symbolic memorial, and socio-economic potential of memorial sites (memorial parks, memorial areas) and facilities (memorial homes, museums, authentic objects) could be used as a complete tourist product for the whole country, is rooted in the fact that the network of NLS memorials in SRFY was conceived and built as a functionally equipped system, to carry out several important functions in the system of self-managing social relations of Yugoslav socialism.

Since the late forties, a series of commemorative activities have been held at the memorial sites: from the simple raising of memorials (memorial plaques, sculptures, etc.) and holding annual commemorations, to the development of memorial sites with pronounced educational training in the content of sculptural exhibitions and memorial parks and museum collections with the creation of accommodation, catering and recreational facilities for different groups of visitors (hotel and motel accommodations, workers' holiday homes, scout camps, and recreational facilities).

In the mid-sixties, the cultural, educational, sports, and recreational functions of the NLS memorial sites were used as resources and incorporated into a tourist offer with the potential of generating economic growth and social development of local communities. Under the organization of the local branches of the Association of Veterans of the National Liberation

From the exhibition *On Revolution Roads - Memorial Tourism in Yugoslavia*, Ljubljana





War (SUBNOR), workers' and socio-political organizations, trade unions, educational institutions, and cultural, artistic, professional, and recreational sporting associations (the Scouts League, the Scout Association, mountaineering clubs, scouts, etc.) about two and a half million SFRJ citizens visited commemorative ceremonies, cultural, educational and artistic events, partisan marches, excursions and picnics in the mid-seventies.

The strategies and plans of the mid-term development of continental tourism in Yugoslavia recognized the catering and accommodation facilities and complimentary facilities for NOB memorials, as an untapped potential to enrich the tourist offer of local communities by combining the memorial, mountain, marine, and thermal spa tourism. The biodiversity of the natural environment, the beauty of the landscape, and the “coexistence” of different types of tourism have attracted increasing numbers of visitors and in the eighties, the number of visitors rose to about four million a year. Ultimately this was an attempt to direct the economic benefits of the tourism industry to the devel-

opment of local economies in economically underdeveloped areas, through the creation of local employment, the development of infrastructure, and the organization and maintenance of the memorial area.

The process of incorporating NOB monuments into the diversity that the tourist industry of SFRJ could offer, from the mid-seventies until the disintegration of the country, is shown through twelve examples of memorial sites from all over the former state, and in addition to archival and family photographs, the exhibition also displays travel guides, maps and plans, and artwork by the Slovenian artist, Dejan Habichtin.

The exhibition was first opened in November of 2015 in Zagreb and it subsequently traveled throughout the locales of the former Republic (from Sarajevo, Kraljevo, Ljubljana, Belgrade, etc.)

The exhibition was the joint activity of the members of the international platform *Innapropriate Monuments* and their external collaborators.

From the exhibition *On Revolution Roads - Memorial Tourism in Yugoslavia*, Ljubljana





From the exhibition *On Revolution Roads - Memorial Tourism in Yugoslavia*, Ljubljana

The members of the platform are SF:ius – Social Fringe: interesting untold stories (Zagreb), Group of architects (Belgrade), Modern Gallery (Ljubljana), and the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Hercegovina (Sarajevo).

Concept: Lana Lovrenčić and Milan Rakita

Design: Oleg Šuran

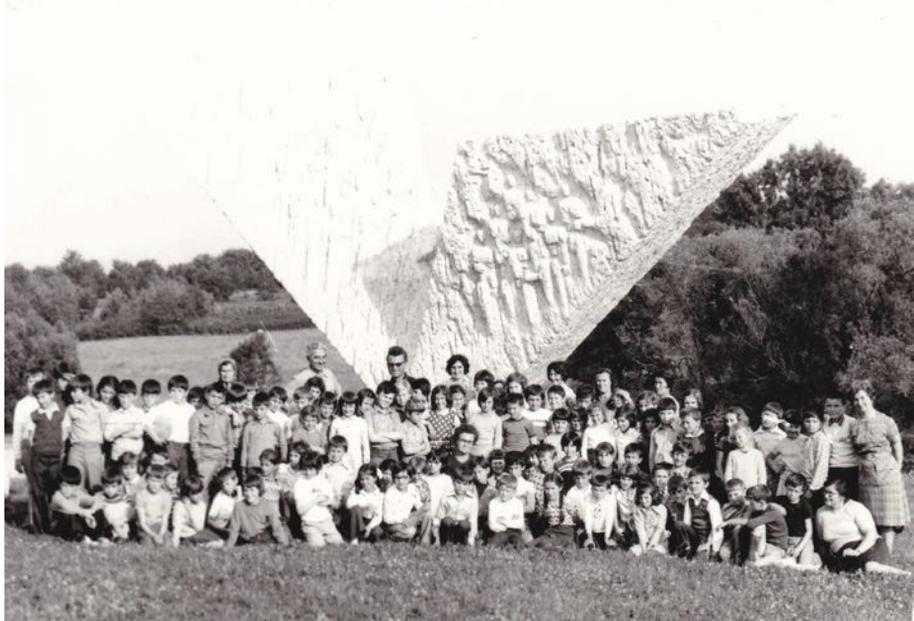
Research associates: Mateja Kuka (SF:ius), Nikola Puharić (SF:ius), Tamara Buble (SF:ius), Jelica Jovanović (GA), Jelena Grbić (GA), Marko Jenko (MG+MSU), Elma Hodžić (HM BH), Barbara Drole, Vladana Putnik, Nenad Lajbenšperger and Goran Janev (the Leftist movement of solidarity, Skoplje).



From the exhibition *On Revolution Roads - Memorial Tourism in Yugoslavia*, Ljubljana



From the exhibition *On Revolution Roads - Memorial Tourism in Yugoslavia*, Ljubljana



Memorial sites and tourism

Annual commemorations and educational-commemorative trips to the WWII memorial sites of NLS began to be organized in the 1950s and soon became destinations for a large number of citizens of the SFRJ (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). Depending on the level of development of accommodation and hospitality capacities, infrastructure, and the type of accompanying facilities, individual memorial sites allowed various types of purposeful use of capacities for tourist purposes. In the mid-1960s, this was recognized as a specific form of cultural-educational tourism with the potential for mass development with relatively small investments.

At memorial sites, a type of cultural-memorial tourism was developed, complementary to other types of tourism (excursion, recreational, etc.), through the organization of trips and related educational-publicistic

activities. By publishing promotional publications, the aim was to present, in addition to the historical dimension, the comprehensive offer of tourist values of individual locations and thus segment the tourist offer. Accommodation and hospitality facilities were built to encourage visitors to stay for several days, and the opening of job positions had a positive impact on the employment of the local population.

Priority was given to the development of the memorial component, taking into account the political-ideological significance of the site. Hospitality and accommodation capacities, along with complementary tourist facilities, were developed as a supplement to the symbolic-memorial component and to diversify the tourist offer.

The protection and conservation of monuments and memorial sites, as well as the tourist development, were reconciled through the concept of active protection. The purpose of this concept is to arrange a protected historical or natural object for organized visits, stays, and recreation, aiming for “integration into the continuity of contemporary life” (A. Marinović-Uzelac, “Guidelines for the Improvement of the Petrova Gora Memorial Area”, 1968). The system of active protection, along with the development of tourism and the economy in the protected area, was observed in line with the goals of general socio-economic development, guided by development studies and long-term plans. It can be said that the introduction of the memorials of the People’s Liberation War onto the map of tourist destinations in Yugoslavia emerged as a logical attempt to redirect the strong economic stimulus of the tourism industry toward the development of local economies, especially in underdeveloped continental regions of the SFRJ. This economic activation of the areas aimed to provide the necessary financial resources for the permanent implementation of measures for the protection of People’s Liberation War memorial sites.



Unknown author, Tjentište, from *Inappropriate Monuments* archives

Typology of the memorial sites

The erection of simple memorial markers in honor of significant events or individuals who marked the National Liberation Struggle can be systematically traced back to 1944. After the war, memorial plaques and simple markers (columns, pyramids, etc.) were installed to quickly commemorate memorial sites.

The late forties and early fifties mark the transition to self-management. In the memorialization and erection of memorial markers, this is manifested by the proliferation of erected markers, caused by the emergence and growing role of SUBNOR (Association of Fighters of the People's Liberation War) and the local community in the process of their establishment. Generally, realistic sculptures of partisan fighters and peasants are erected, and a series of commemorative activities are held at memorial sites (laying wreaths, cultural and educational events, and sports activities). Abstract sculptures were mostly erected in the sixties, as part

of existing or new memorial parks, selected through republic and state competitions.

The development of complex memorial sites, such as large memorial parks or memorial areas, is observed after the second half of the sixties. This implies a conceptual shift from individual sculptures towards the formation of complex spaces that encompass multiple memorial monuments and multiple (commemorative) functions. There is a difference between memorial parks and memorial areas in terms of the concentration of memorial content and location: while memorial parks are usually located in the city or its immediate vicinity and are physically smaller, memorial areas encompass authentic spaces and environments where mass murders, significant battles, breakthroughs, or free territories occurred. They often include large and mostly natural areas.

The size of these complexes necessitated collaboration between spatial planners and historians and dictated the economic development of the area where they were located. The frequency and number of visitors conditioned the creation of accommodation, catering, and recreational facilities for various groups of visitors (hotel and motel accommodations, workers' resorts, scout camps, and recreational areas).

In the seventies, special attention was dedicated to the reconstruction of authentic structures within memorial areas. During this period, a large number of partisan hospitals and bunkers were restored. The emphasis on the educational role of the NLS memorials during these years manifested itself through the construction of museum buildings and memorial homes and the arrangement of memorial collections.

Memorials as a part of recreational tourism

Sports and recreation played a crucial role in social standards and had an educational role within the educational process. The development of tourist recreation in Yugoslavia was significantly influenced by the Trade Union Alliance, and various initiative-based tourist and social organizations were also very important – tourist and vacation societies, mountaineering and scouting societies, hunters, fishermen, and others.

The social significance of youth organizations and associations, along with their abundance, organizational structure, the content of social activities, and the potential for mass mobilization of schoolchildren, youth, and student populations, aligned with the program activities of organizations managing the memorials of the National Liberation Struggle (NLS), especially since the late seventies when tourist societies expanded local tourism offerings. Activities such as trips, expeditions, camping, or memorial marches involved the organized use of the capacities and content of NLS memorials that were insufficiently developed as a tourist product, recognized in new tourism development strategies as the untapped potential to enrich the tourism offer. In the educational process, through the actions of the Vacation Alliance, the Scout and Pioneer Alliance, the youth became acquainted with the historical traditions of the NLS and the natural beauties of Yugoslavia.

The memorials of the National Liberation Struggle (NLS) became part of expanded tourist visit programs to excursion sites, and the excursion sites themselves, due to recognized economic and tourist potentials, became the subject of urban planning and additions to prevent haphazard construction, preserve environmental resources, monuments, and landscape-ambient entities, and thereby improve conditions for the development of

mountain, rural, and health-resort tourism in local communities. NLS memorials became points of intersection for hiking trails, mountaineering routes – transversals, day trips, or multi-day excursions, and other forms of tourist activities that, in addition to their symbolic-memorial and cultural-educational dimension, also possessed a sports-recreational aspect.

Tourism in Yugoslavia

The development of tourism as an economic sector in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ) began shortly after the war. Although the strategies and medium to long-term plans for tourism development in the SFRJ implied balanced territorial-economic development of the tourism industry, including the balanced development of tourist capacities and diversification of tourism offerings at the national level, from the early 1950s, especially from the late 1960s, the development of mass tourism in the SFRJ significantly focused on investments in the development of tourist capacities along the Adriatic coast. Foreign tourism was treated as an export product crucial for collecting foreign currency, while domestic tourism and its development were linked to the standard of living.

Unknown author, Pristina, from *Inappropriate Monuments* archives



Initiatives for more significant development of continental tourism emerged in the seventies as a strategy to extend the tourist season, increase the physical volume of foreign tourist traffic, and achieve greater foreign exchange earnings by enriching the existing tourism offerings. Through the institutional system of tourism organizations at the level of republics, regions, and local self-governments, a series of development initiatives are launched, and tourism activities are conceived with the aim of economic activation, emphasizing underdeveloped areas. Medium-term tourism development plans are developed and implemented, assigning tourism the role of an economic driver for cities, municipalities, regions, republics, and the entire country.

The construction of accommodation facilities creates conditions for both short and long-term stays for visitors and serves as a base for the development of additional tourist amenities. The opening of job opportunities acts as a developmental component in the development of surrounding settlements.

Hotel Sutjeska was part of the Sutjeska Youth Center, offering 60 beds distributed among single, double, and hunting rooms.

“As this is an extremely economically underdeveloped area, tourism is the most favorable means by which, using existing limited natural resources, economic activation can take place. Opening up this area to tourism simultaneously signifies its economic regeneration” (Boro Pavlović, 1975, in *Architecture* no. 155, 1975.)

Filip Tanay, Untitled, 2018., digital photography, the sign says “Warning! The monument is collapsing”

Issues of Historical Revisionism and the Protection of the Memorial Heritage of the National Liberation Struggle Today

By incorporating the memorial sites of the People's Liberation War into the tourist offer of the SFRJ, on a political-ideological level, the aim was to reevaluate the People's Liberation War and ensure the transmission of its achievements to new generations.

In terms of protecting the memorial sites, the goal was to secure the necessary funds for maintenance and further development. From an economic-touristic perspective, the aim was to enrich the existing tourist offer and stimulate economic development through it. The current situation differs in that the political-ideological component has changed. There is no longer a coordinated interstate strategy toward the heritage of the People's Liberation War, and the approach to existing memorial sites varies from place to place, depending on local development policies.





Patterns of societal valuation of the memorial heritage of the National Liberation Struggle in the post-socialist period involve the analysis of ideological and political functions of historical revisionism, which in recent decades decisively shaped the valuation of the monument heritage of the National Liberation Struggle in its ideological, historical-political, and symbolic dimensions.

(continued)

Every extensively envisioned project encounters various problems and challenges, and Inappropriate Monuments was no exception. However, what potentially set this project apart from similar ones was its consistent openness to criticism coming from various perspectives. This criticism was, on one hand, a direct (sometimes intentionally provoked) reaction to our confrontations with historical revisionism. Still, there were moments when the project itself was accused of revisionism. We never dismissed

this second criticism lightly, as we were aware from the beginning that any engagement with history is primarily a political and ideological positioning. However, what alarmed us was the apparent impossibility for our positioning to be recognizable to those we considered political allies. This became particularly evident in communication with the generation that experienced World War II and actively participated in the partisan movement. Often, the objection was directed at the name of the platform and the project, initially called “Inappropriate Monuments”. The name, chosen to emphasize the unacceptable state and perception of these monuments today, eventually came to be perceived as negative. We faced criticism suggesting that there was nothing inappropriate about this heritage and that we should highlight it as appropriate.

We questioned how to control the reactions we received and whether we wanted to control them. The conclusion was that, on one hand, we neither wanted nor could influence public reactions. On the other hand, we aimed to better communicate our goals and motives.

Therefore, we decided to rename the project to *(In)appropriate Monuments*, preserving linguistic ambivalence to demonstrate our stance that any valorization of this heritage must be based on questioning and breaking away from revisionist tendencies.

The inappropriateness in the title is, on one hand, a reference to their alarming status today. They are inappropriate because not only do they refer to historical events and figures that do not align with the political and ideological demands of today, but their appearance also does not meet its aesthetic requirements. The dominant historicist aesthetic regime of today is possible through the simultaneous demonization of this heritage as totalitarian, stylistically regressive, etc.

Aware that a monument itself is never a bearer of a message that should be found at its core and be self-evident to those encountering it with some transcendental transparency, we use the attribute “inappropriate” to emphasize the symbolic dependence of the monument on its environment and, even more so, its recipients.

Despite the increasing popularity and visibility of this topic in the public eye in recent years, many collaborators and narrators still exhibited fear of public exposure or public discourse on the subject. Although people were always willing to privately discuss their experiences and work with us, finding those willing to be recorded or even quoted was challenging. This especially applied to employees of state institutions and the older generation of experts. These individuals were often subjected to various forms of pressure, violence, and discrimination due to their work on this topic (something we ourselves did not entirely avoid). Besides refusing to be recorded, one common reaction to these pressures was the unconscious revision of the theme itself and its depoliticization. We carefully sought to create a safe space for discussion, protecting our collaborators from attacks, while simultaneously not depoliticizing our topic but positioning ourselves in relation to all conservative, nationalist, and chauvinistic attacks. Nevertheless, we witnessed the self-revision of the left, manifested primarily through two ideas: the autonomy of art and the post-politics of the present. The former insists that the value of monuments lies in their pure aesthetic form, while the latter seeks to valorize the historical significance of the NOB through a depoliticized understanding of anti-fascism as a civilizational norm, not a specific political struggle. The idea of a post-political and post-ideological understanding of history is the point of surrender of the left to the conservative-liberal idea of linear world history, reaching its peak with the global dominance of capitalism and parliamentary democracy. In this way, any self-revision that attempts to avoid dealing with socialism and socialist heritage in its

conditions is just another side of anti-communism, contributing to the mystification and demonization of socialist past, as well as the mystification of economic, political, and ideological processes shaping the present.

In contrast, the *Inappropriate Monuments* platform critically reexamines both the reception of monuments today and the conditions in which this reception occurs:

- 1) Questioning concepts developed within memory studies, which dominate the research and explanatory field related to NOB monuments today.
- 2) Reflecting on the growing interest and fetishization of NOB monuments in the West, as well as the fetishization of socialist heritage in general.
- 3) Engaging in a debate on tendencies to perceive this heritage exclusively as modernist, articulating what modernism is and its relationship to our present.



4) Pointing out the political emptiness of some references to anti-fascism today, as well as its ideological function in daily politics.

5) Questioning models of revitalizing NOB monument heritage, its exploitation for tourism, and the structures governing this heritage.

6) Scrutinizing our own role in reproducing narratives of nostalgia and memory.

We view the NOB monument heritage as a product of complex socio-political processes of the construction and dissolution of the SFRJ. The meaning they communicate, as well as their memorial and aesthetic value, is also understood in close relation to recent political history – intimately connected to the transition processes in the former Yugoslavia. This approach allows us to step away from the aestheticization of monuments, their fetishization, and nostalgia for bygone times.

Postscript on *(In)appropriate Monuments*

Dario Vuger

The Inappropriate Monuments project was – as I became associated with it through my engagement with the NGO SF:ius in late 2021 – formalized as a regional cooperative platform between four partner organizations from the former Yugoslavia region: Grupa Arhitekata (GA) from Belgrade (Serbia), Historijski muzej Bosne i Hercegovine from Sarajevo (Bosnia

and Herzegovina), KUD Anarhiv from Ljubljana (Slovenia) and Social Fringe: Interesting Untold Stories from Zagreb (Croatia). People involved in the project were professionals (curators, architects, artists,...) and researchers (social scientists, philosophers, art historians...) interested in reevaluating and thinking through the difficult heritage left scattered throughout the territory of former Yugoslavian states in the form of commemorative plaques, memorial sculpture, and monumental plastic at the locations of historically significant wartime events from WWII and the partisan movement known as the People's Liberation Struggle – PLS (Narodno Oslobodilačka Borba or NOB, aka. National Liberation Struggle or NLS). With the dissolution of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 1990s, the one-party political system and the communist ideological heritage were swiftly replaced by democracy and a capitalist socio-economic environment in which yesterday's heritage was seen as today's troubled past irreconcilable with the prospects of the future development of the post-Yugoslavian states. This was further amplified by the somewhat gruesome way Yugoslavia was dissolved – in an almost five-year-long civil war that marked generations

Unknown author, Užice Kadinjača, from *Inappropriate Monuments* archives



and left them scarred, filled with prejudice and hatred towards their neighbors. Croatian territory was to a large extent ideologically cleansed throughout the homeland war as the Yugoslavian monuments were all of a sudden seen as the precursors to the Great-Serbian aggression. With one part of monumental plastic destroyed throughout the 1990s, the rest was left unprotected and without upkeep to slowly fall apart or was taken down within new urbanistic plans, and architectural restorations. The rest become one with nature.

However, not pursuing the issue of historical description of the subject around which the Inappropriate Monuments platform was formalized, this brief account wishes to explore the phenomenological nuances of the inappropriate monuments as a concept describing a set of artistic and political interventions spectacularly covering the whole territory of former Yugoslavian states. Beyond the well-known conceptions and



Unknown author, Tjentište, from
Inappropriate Monuments archives



deliberations of nostalgic attitudes, creatures, or even lifestyles I pursue to look towards the memorial sites of the struggle which constitute the origin of the former republic as objects nostalgic in themselves and thus constituting a specific phenomenology. This would suggest that the ontological founding of the state lies in nostalgia as its constitutive element and not ideology proper. This nostalgic turn is facilitated by the artistic qualities of the works, their spectacular outlook as well as by the ‘opening up’ of the Yugoslavian economy and ‘liberalization’ of Yugoslav Marxism after the break with Stalin and the foundation of the Unaligned movement. As stated already, the nostalgic element as well as the memorial one is to be defined as spectacular on several accounts. The implicit argument here is that nostalgia (was and) is always spectacular and that the two

concepts profoundly influence each other – spectacle presents a part of nostalgia’s fundamental ontology while nostalgia acts as one of the tools by which the spectacle reasserts itself as the dominating worldview.

We must distinguish, however, what kind of nostalgia we are talking about while we are talking about the spectacle as the grounding social (and epistemic) model and phenomena. In doing so, we should not be concerned with other – however relevant – typologies and systematizations of nostalgia as they were not coupled with the theory of the spectacle as proposed by Guy Debord nor were they critically applied to the social organisation of a certain historical territory as we try to suggest here. Namely, nostalgia is etymologically connected to the notions of home, return, pain, etc. The Greek word ‘nostos’ is in literature connected closely with the heroic return not only to one’s home, but to one’s society, and origin, to a place where one can exercise one’s own identity as the returned. Nostos implies the execution of a journey. In ancient times the word was never coupled with ‘algos’, nostalgia being thus a modern invention. Moreover, Algos is the name – according to Hesiod and others – given to the deity acting as the personification of pain, tearfulness, anguish, and distress. Historically, until the invention of the proper term to describe the specific feeling now known as nostalgia, a common association was made with depression or melancholy denoting a physical condition or even a predisposition for a certain personality type that holds pessimistic outlooks and might hold a certain pathos towards the past. This disposition was more closely connected to the spatial displacement which can nevertheless be physical or mental. It was, however, almost exclusively associated with negative overtones. Most commonly, nostalgia would in that respect be synonymous with homesickness and more literally a painful longing to return home. But what if the place we year for is not a location – physical or mental – but rather a (place in) time? While the nostos of Odysseus is the return to home as a hero, the modern

longing includes the return which aims to negate the journey. Thus it is not only intimately connected with the past but also has a lot to do with the present and establishment of our place within it – it has to do with our presencing, so to say, in Heideggerian terms.

One might observe a certain *nostos* in the monumental memorial sculpture of the post-WWII era in Yugoslavia. Moreover, monuments commemorating the PLS – just as the epic myths in ancient times – recreate this *nostos* in a profoundly spectacular way – the warrior's heroic return as the symbol of liberated people (who are) in turn constituting the new sovereign state. Algos might also find its place in some typologies of PLS monuments, especially the figurative commemorative sculptures depicting the struggle, comradeship, and the eventual triumph over nazism and fascism. This is also done spectacularly with pathos provoking and calling to attention, not only evoking piety. These nostalgic elements should be considered central to the intentions of erecting the commemorative and memorial plaques, sculptures, and monuments of larger scale throughout the territory of the historic PLS. This is how we should enter the task of phenomenologically engaging the memorial heritage of the PLS. Namely, in the memorialization of PLS, we observe the positive



engagement of nostalgia as a tool for political and social consolidation of the past with(in) the present in which the past is seen as the continuous augmentation of the present moment. Is this true of any memorial? It might be, but what we also need to take into account here is the scale of the memorial project, and indeed, just as the spectacle itself, the memorialization of PLS is stretched out over the territory in such a manner that it completely covers it, effectively historicizing the whole environment making present available to us only through the past, but not as a lens or a scopic regime, but as the actual grounding – environment – of the (only virtual) present and as the way of becoming present in one's society, by observing and understanding – with nostalgia – the social and political present of the past.

Thus, through spectacularization of the heroic past, as the nostos materialized in and throughout the environment, nostalgia becomes also a certain objectified worldview as suggested by Debord in his 1967. masterpiece *Society of the Spectacle*. The past becomes territorialized, re-presented in the environment, calling attention upon itself using words – literal descriptions on plaques – and visual aesthesis, emotional and social response to its presence, or the concrete spectacular presence of the past inside the actual environment of everyday life. Namely, as Debord describes it, one of the fundamental characteristics of the spectacle (in any of its derivative forms) is that it acts as the map that (completely) covers the whole territory. It is a somewhat iconoclastic way of restating that the spectacle is the objectified world-view and that in the spectacular social organization world is viewed primarily as a picture, or a system if we are to consider the image of the modern times to be a technical one (having the concept of information to be its essential property, as described by Heidegger in the essay “The Age of the World Picture”). Establishing – alongside the erection of the mentioned monuments – a culture of commemorative occasions and certain ‘pilgrimages’ under the

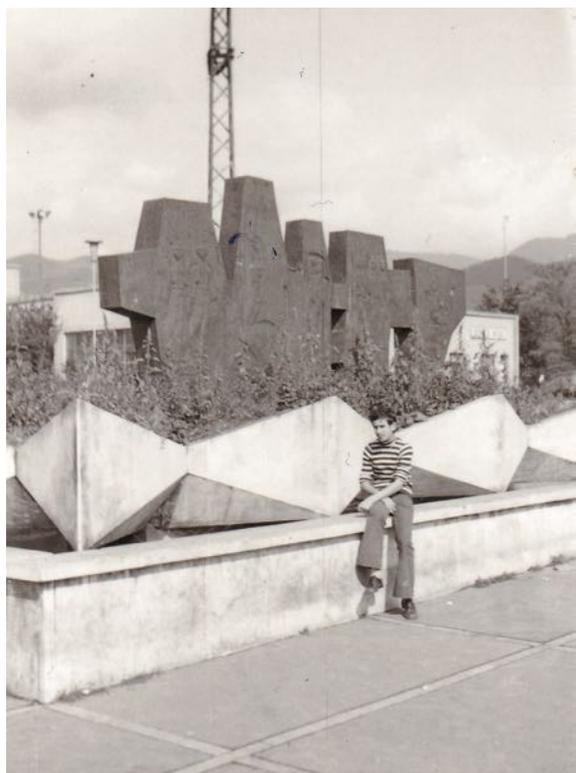


Unknown author, Tjentište, from *Inappropriate Monuments* archives





Jasna Šišić, from *Inappropriate
Monuments* archives



Zenica, from *Inappropriate
Monuments* archives



guise of recreation and tourism, the memorialization project achieves in effect – and increasingly so with the passage of time and exchange of generations – a sense of return. This spectacular nostalgia seems to aim to eliminate the past as a temporal phenomenon and re-establish it as a spatial category of contemporary being.

The phenomenological inquiry into the material heritage of the People's Liberation Struggle in Yugoslavia is thoroughly and essentially inspired by the efforts of the (In)appropriate monuments platform. From the name itself – the concept of “Inappropriate Monuments” – to a few key expositions – “On revolutionary paths” exhibition being one of the most provoking – as central motifs of this short exploration, we wish only to establish an environment for the future conceptualization of this part of history that is very much a part of our lived-world, even if only through monuments which tend to outlast not only people but also political systems and social constructions. In a rather short period, they have become artefacts blended with nature and a subject not only of archival investigation but also archeology. And through their political deterritorialization, they lend themselves to aesthetic contemplation and phenomenological inquiry into the phenomena of landscape itself. What we wish to establish, alas, is the idea that the nostalgic feeling is proper to the aesthetic experience of these monuments – a thesis that might have broader implications for future studies of spectacular heritage as well as the artefacts of contemporary visual culture as essentially a culture of visualization (for which the aestheticization projects – like the mentioned “Spomenik” book comes as a fine example). The academic approach in dealing with the memorial heritage of the People's Liberation Struggle is usually reduced to exploration of particular concrete problems – devastation, loss of memory, on and around a certain locale – and/or historical and artistic typology. Together they demonstrate a lack of interest in addressing the phenomena of these monuments from the ‘queer’ perspective of visual studies and phenomenology.

Ivica Baković

Yugo-nostalgia Through the Lens of Popular Culture

The article analyses the concept of so called Yugonostalgia (the nostalgia for Yugoslav everyday life) in popular culture in former Yugoslav republics. It focuses on the popular song about Josip Broz Tito (Everything is the same, but he is gone) by famous Serbian singer Tijana Dapčević. After short notes about the idea of nostalgia and the “birth” of the term, the author analyses how Yugo-nostalgia can be treated in popular music and popular cultures especially from the intercultural aspect.

There is a song of recent origin, of popular nature, in a lower mode, with a title that already conveys a certain attitude towards the past and present times, and perhaps, the state of being, society, etc., all through the lens of examining a historical figure, a myth – Josip Broz Tito. “Everything is the same, only he is missing”, sings Tijana Dapčević in a song titled after this line from the chorus. Of course, Tito is missing, yet everything remains the same as it was before. What has passed seamlessly merges with the present. If the song were not a kind of reflection of the state of a segment of popular culture in the post-Yugoslav period in former states, cultures, nations, and ethnicities of the SFR Yugoslavia (former), it would not be interesting.

Allocating each stanza to one of the countries that emerged after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the song provides a panoramic view of the phenomenon of nostalgia for Yugoslav brotherhood, unity, everyday life, i.e., the phenomenon of Yugoslav nostalgia. “Jugonostalgija” is a neologism, where the first part, “jugo-,” is related to the name Yugoslavia (popularly called “Juga”), and the second part of the word – “nostalgija” – is a concept that originated several hundred years ago. The term nostalgia was coined in the 17th century by Swiss physician Johannes Hofer for medical purposes. To understand the term, we need to go back to the very beginning of the concept of nostalgia, which dates back several centuries and belongs to a completely different field of science. In 1688, the nineteen-year-old Johannes Hofer, in his study “Dissertatio medica de nostalgia” (Basel, 1688), coined the term nostalgia from two Greek words: “nóstos” (Gr. return home) and “algia” (Gr. pain). The term indicated the pain resulting from the desire to return home. It served medical purposes since nostalgia was a common ailment among soldiers who, going to war, longed for the home they probably never returned to. The symptoms of nostalgia were, as described by Leopold Auenbrugger in 1761, very severe: the physician found the lungs of those suffering from nostalgia stuck to the chest, the tissue of the pulmonary lobe was thickened and purulent... Leaving home for an extended period meant risking death (Lowenthal 2002: 10). Treatment included staying in the Alps, but an even more effective remedy was intimidating and inflicting pain on patients to restore their threatened masculinity.

The development that the term underwent to find its place in the field of philosophy and various popular literary theories throughout the twentieth century will be skipped for this occasion, as it could be a subject of its own work. So, how was the term “jugonostalgija” coined, and what does it actually encompass? Just as after every revolution, there is nostalgia for those who survived the revolution and found themselves in

entirely different circumstances, after the recent revolution called the fall of communism, or the more recent revolutions in communist countries in the late eighties and early nineties, there was nostalgia for what remained behind. Thus, the Berlin Wall, from the political-geographical or cultural sphere, was actually transferred to the metaphorical realm, to the sphere of memory, to separate a very new era (contemporary democracies in national states) from the old, black darkness of communism in which we tread. Although borders and constitutions can be changed, memories and former lives (biographies) cannot be changed, so nostalgia for those past times will only now truly erupt when they are forever lost in the Benjaminian storm of progress. Millions of members of transitional societies have become a kind of new angels facing the ruins of their private pasts. All these nostalgias emerged after the fall of communism and are present in almost all former communist states, and indicatively, all are declared nostalgias for communism, even though communism is often not mentioned in these private longings for better times – or rather, it is mentioned only in the sense that the entire life unfolded under the curtain of such a political system and all the benefits and disadvantages that it brought with it. All these nostalgias for communism are, in a way, very similar and encompass almost the same inventory in different cultures throughout Eastern Europe. A special term has been given to the nostalgia of the inhabitants of the former GDR, a term that carries all the signs of the difference between East and West – “ostalgie”. “Ostalgia” is, of course, the pain for everyday life in East Germany, by Tom. A whole range of souvenirs has turned into fetishes for nostalgics, so various police badges, flags, pictures, jars, chocolate wrappers, candies, and other mass-produced items become triggers whose appearance evokes waves of nostalgia and melancholic laments for the good old times. A similar situation can be observed in other environments. Thus, a very interesting project was launched in Poland, the result of which was the collection “Nostalgia – Essays on the longing

for communism”, in which works by eminent culturologists, writers, and artists from all countries that were under communist regimes were published. The anthology includes works by, among others, Dubravka Ugrešić, Aleš Debeljak, Svetlana Boym, Simona Popescu, Thomas Brunsig, Fatos Lubonja, Paweł Smoleński, and others. In most of the works (mostly essays), the focus is on the portrayal of typical communist everyday life or places of cultural memory (such as popular-cultural signs, symbols of the past, etc.). The anthology confirms that nostalgia for communism is not only common across multiple cultures but also exhibits certain similarities among each version of nostalgia. This can also be inferred from Dubravka Ugrešić when, in her essays (and novels), she speaks about the connection she feels among Eastern Europeans walking in Western Europe with a kind of blush on their faces. The significant attention given to nostalgia for communism in most post-communist states is also evidenced by the activities of various institutes in this field. For example, in Bulgaria, a website has been launched for the study of communism in Bulgaria, titled “Българският комунизъм: Критически изследвания”¹ (Virtual catalog and information center for critical studies of communism). In Germany, there is the *Ostalgie-Museum*,² and similar initiatives can be found in Croatia and Serbia (in collaboration with other countries in the former Yugoslavia). In these regions, a collection titled “Lexicon of Yu Mythology” has been created, gathering signed and unsigned short comments related to various articles, i.e., souvenirs from Yugoslav everyday life.

Overall, nostalgias in all these environments, especially private ones, are rarely exclusively tied to communist ideology. In essence, street vendors

1 <http://red.cas.bg/>

2 <http://www.ostalgie-museum.de/>

and other sellers of various paintings, flags, and other inventory seldom know more about this ideology than the average person. The fundamental subject of nostalgia is the inventory of everyday life. Thus, on the pages of the Ostalgie-Museum, one can find various posters, advertisements, postcards, napkins, banknotes, old personal documents, and so on, not to mention various mass-produced items that were available in stores. Such inventories resonate with people who lived alongside them and serve as triggers for a return to the past, a past not exclusively colored by political ideologies.

When it comes to Yugoslav nostalgia, among all these variations, it holds a special place. The reason for this likely lies in the year 1948 and the significant deviation of our communism from the communism that affected other Eastern European states under the umbrella of the Soviet Union. This softened the image of communism in general, often compared favorably to the communism in Bulgaria or Hungary. The boom of Yugoslav nostalgic souvenirs occurred in the same nineties, but everywhere, the attitude towards this phenomenon was not uniform. This particularly refers to the attitude towards Yugoslav nostalgia in Croatia, which had its roots in the Homeland War and nationalist ideologies and propaganda.

In Croatia, any expression of longing for the time before 1990 was labeled as Yugoslav nostalgic, sympathetic to Yugoslav communism. Those who held such sentiments were often characterized in the rhetoric of the then-president as remnants of the Yugoslav communist system or the Yugoslav-Serbian state in almost every one of his speeches. In its beginnings in Croatia, Yugoslav nostalgia faced disapproval and assumed a subversive position, as evidenced not only by the attitudes of the current authorities but also by the treatment of those who attempted to express such sentiments publicly. This is particularly evident in the case of the so-called “witches” like Slaven Letica, among whom the exceptionally

Yugoslav nostalgic Dubravka Ugrešić found herself. Hans Robert Gauss also comments on this in his book, stating that a Yugoslav nostalgist in Croatia was perceived and declared as a parasite on the essence of the Croatian people, a parasite longing for the time when Croatia was helplessly left to Yugoslav bloodsuckers, and when the mythical substance of the nation was threatened with destruction (Gauss 2001: 63). In defense of this destruction of the mythical substance of the nation, nostalgia for mythical times arose.

Today, through an examination of popular culture, we can ascertain that Yugoslav nostalgia still exists and is thriving, not only spiritually but perhaps even more so economically. Yugoslav nostalgic items have found their place on the shelves in souvenir shops and stalls throughout the former Yugoslavia. Thus, one can come across an abundance of T-shirts featuring Josip Broz Tito or the hammer and sickle on Macedonian or Bosnian markets. Flags, badges, mugs, utensils, and other items from the former state are also readily available. Moreover, even large manufacturers, especially in the confectionery industry, recognize the profitability of nostalgic emotions among the people. Croatian producers, for instance, decorate their products to evoke nostalgia, aiming to draw a tear and a banknote from customers in Macedonia or Montenegro. Similarly, popular products such as Plazma biscuits or Manchmal-lows will encounter nostalgic responses, especially in Croatia, as these Serbian products were not available in Croatian stores for many years. As nostalgia has found its place on market stalls, it has also made its way onto small screens and entertainment stages. For this occasion, a particularly interesting song that we mentioned at the beginning of this work comes to mind – “Sve je isto samo njega nema” (Everything is the same, only he is missing). The song was first performed in 2005 at the festival in Budva by the Serbian pop star of Macedonian origin, Tijana Dapčević. In an interesting and ironic manner, the song incorporates

Yugoslav nostalgia with well-known stereotypes about the citizens of each of the former Yugoslav states.

Irony is not foreign to nostalgia, especially as emphasized by Linda Hutcheon, who argues that postmodern irony is inherent in nostalgia. In this way, the nostalgic subject today maintains a certain detachment from the object of their desire. Hutcheon suggests that perhaps there is not so much nostalgia in postmodernism as there is irony, but if it is already evident that everything around us is nostalgic, it is justified to claim that this nostalgia is largely shrouded in a veil of irony. In fact, nostalgia is the component of today's popular culture that has taken the throne occupied by irony in the 1980s. Nostalgia is an entire perspective on the past. As David Lowenthal asserts, nostalgia has become an obsession not only of popular culture but also of art.

In this context, we can mention Frederick Jameson's view on nostalgia. He introduces the category of the "nostalgia mode" to describe how post-modern culture turns history into pastiche. Jameson affirms nostalgia in the realm of culture and style. Today, history can be represented as dictated by established images, creating a simulacrum of that history. Jameson distinguishes three types of nostalgia modes: historical reconstruction of a lost period, evocation of earlier childhood experiences, and the presentation of a past period as a time outside history, a special form of past reality to which it refers (Jameson, 1991).

In Tijana Dapčević's song, we encounter multiple layers that can be distinguished when thinking about nostalgia. Firstly, there is the layer of irony that envelops the entire song – starting from popular old and new stereotypes that the Yugoslav nations and nationalities harbored about each other. Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian verses stand out in

particular, where national stereotypes are most evident. In the Croatian verse, the second one in the song, stereotypes related to language are emphasized, specifically the use of words typical of Southern Croatia and the Zagreb dialect (and beyond):

“I hear in Belgrade, people watch ‘Vila Marija,’ I just don’t get why everyone calls her that”.

Here, the use of language becomes a focus, reflecting stereotypes associated with Southern Croatia and the Zagreb dialect.

The hawk among the uncles.

And our beauty, they marry off to

Europe every day,

And at every party, it’s like we’re

Turks,

Oh dear, they’re playing folk music.

In addition to the mentioned aspects, there are typical signs of Croatian culture here (our beauty – “Lijepa naša” [our homeland]) and popular culture (Vila Marija – a popular Croatian soap opera of more recent date that is broadcast on Serbian, Slovenian, and Macedonian television programs). In the verse “Jastreb među ujčkama” (The hawk among the uncles), there is again a hidden perspective on Serbian-Croatian (un)friendship. Namely, one of the actors in the mentioned soap opera is Žarko Radić, who in his younger days played a character called Jastreb (Hawk) in the series *Kapelski kresovi*. Radić is of Serbian origin, so it is not difficult to interpret why Jastreb is among the

uncles, i.e., Ustashe, i.e., Croats, as perceived during the war in Serbia. In the Montenegrin stanza, stereotypes characteristic of Montenegrin mentality such as laziness are present, as well as newer stereotypes like the desire for independence, which, again, are ironized:

*But if I knew, I would divide
This country of mine into six republics,
But in a way that Podgorica
would be the capital
And every day would be a non-working day,
Except Fridays when we
would work
Preparing for the weekend getaway.*

Thus, the text incorporates not only the view of Montenegrins as a lazy people (as seen in contemporary oral culture, in small oral literary forms like jokes) but also their desire for independence, yet again, the political fragmentation that the desire for secession has brought along. Similarly, in this stanza, a global image of the entire Balkan region is visible, where the desire for particularization and the emergence of new, small states dominate.

In the Serbian stanza, there is a constant place for Serbian culture, particularly conducive to irony in this era, namely the idea of Greater Serbia, popularly expressed in the phrase “Serbia to Tokyo!” Also present is the equally popular aspiration for a Serbian sea, often invoked and ironized in oral culture.

*And we could have gone to Tokyo,
a nose like Pinocchio's.
Everyone lied to us so freely, but
he – lied the best.
We sang songs to him,
Waiting for him to come from
Africa,
We had the sea, and what would
it be without it, well, at least Ada
Ciganlija!*

The Macedonian and Slovenian verses have a special status, revealing a distinct attitude towards Tito, shared history, and separate present. For Slovenians, things will be good now, just as they were before, and they'll satisfy their nostalgia by having coffee in Belgrade and taking a stroll around the House of Flowers. However, going for coffee in Mercator represents a kind of detachment from everything, as Mercator belongs to the present. So, Slovenians, despite being nostalgic, might still maintain a more sober approach in their relationship.

*We were fine then and now.
We're always fine.
For the New Year, we come to
Belgrade, Take a stroll through the
House of Flowers, Have coffee at
Mercator, It's like we're at home,
Comrade old, you were a real dude
and a half...*

In the Macedonian stanza, we have a completely different attitude towards nostalgia compared to the Slovenian one.

*We all loved him
In the end, we all cried.
On every wall with pictures still
around the tavern, We keep him to
ourselves,
Everyone else gave up, But Skopje
remembered everything,
Now everyone else would like to
come, Well, no more, we won't wait!*

The attitude towards Tito is directly depicted here as a form of admiration for the person and deeds of Josip Broz Tito, which will also be noticeable, again, in popular culture in Macedonia, especially in markets and stands, thus reflecting Yugoslav nostalgia in its marketing form.

In the Bosnian-Herzegovinian stanza, the first place is occupied by Yugoslav popular culture represented by the character Valter, a popular figure from Yugoslav movies and series portrayed by Velimir Bata Živojinović. Additionally, there is a memory of popular labor actions, especially the youth labor actions when the railway Brčko-Banovići was being built.

*I remember when we were all Valter,
And mixed mortar for the Brčko-
Banovići railway. But now, when
even my buddy can wear a bra, I see*

*that this democracy,
Isn't working out so well for us.
Well, we all turned out to be fools!
In the chorus, which repeats twice
and at the end of the song two more
times, the focus is on the present,
establishing an ironic relationship
with it:
Everything is the same, only he's not
here, Dugme has gathered Brega
again, Hot summer, winter full of
snow, Everything is the same, only
he's not here!*

Here, there is also mention of the reunion of the members of the popular Yugoslav group *Bijelo Dugme*, which is again evidence of how nostalgia pays off in the so-called show business because precisely this phenomenon of reuniting the old popular group has brought/returned its members to their old fame and greater earnings.

Examining the lyrics of the song is not enough to gain a complete understanding of its meaning because the song is accompanied by a music video that will add or at least confirm some conclusions. In the video, the performer is introduced as the comrade Tijana Dapčević, accompanied by girls dressed as Tito's pioneers, wearing blue caps and red scarves, white shirts, and blue skirts. In any case, if the lyrics don't give this song a note of cheap and popular, the performance certainly does, where the audience is taken into account, if not Yugoslav nostalgic, at least male (girls with pronounced cleavage). All the actors in the music video are female, and Yugoslav generals are represented by girls dressed in suits and with mustaches. Irony is at play. Connecting the old, Yugoslav, even flirting

with the institution of the relay and Youth Day, and on the other hand, participants in the style of undesirable characters in communist films, especially those that somehow overturn the value system represented by the Relay ceremony, usually involves linking erotic motives and carrying the Relay. Such an attitude toward the Relay can be noted, for example, in the film “Ne dao bog većeg zla” by Goran and Snježana Tribuson. The video also evokes the atmosphere of Dnevnik – when the verse of a certain state is performed, it is done by the host, dressed in a characteristic way (we can single out the Slovenian host with blue hair in braids with a pronounced bust or the Montenegrin host with long mustaches and messy hair), while in the background, the coat of arms of each of the socialist republics and the flag of the SFR Yugoslavia are shown. The retro style of this video is indicative because it wants to achieve visually what is achieved in the text, be it irony, stereotype, or just nostalgia.

This song is based on a series of songs that dates back to the Yugoslav showbiz scene. Namely, even then, there were popular songs or commercials that emphasized the diversity of the peoples and nationalities of Yugoslavia, but also their connection with the slogan of brotherhood and unity. Thus, we could mention one of the more famous commercials that were shown on all television stations in Yugoslavia, an ad for Radenska water. In that commercial, Radenska connects, and at the end, the choir of Macedonian girls in traditional costumes will sing. The commercial is based precisely on the cultural diversity of Yugoslavia and on what actually connects all these diversities – brotherhood and unity. Each nationality in the commercial was given the right to express itself in its language (Slovenian, Macedonian, Albanian, Croatian-Serbian, but also in dialects – Kajkavian and Čakavian), wear its costumes, and sing a song in the spirit of its tradition. Even special attention was paid to the regions, so Southern Croatia, Čakavian, received a special frame, and Northwestern Croatia, Kajkavian (which significantly differs from the Slovenian part), and a special part for Kosovo, i.e., Albanians.

And while commercials promote brotherhood and unity in diversity, a kind of intercultural propaganda, popular songs sing about the similarity of Yugoslavs to rocks. Thus, Doris Dragović in the song “Hej Jugosloveni” will sing:

*Hey, Yugoslavs,
let the voice be heard, we are similar
to rocks because brotherhood unites
us!*

The metaphorical relationship between rocks and the nation is certainly indicative in this case (even ironic), as similar metaphorical expressions were established later, after the breakup of Yugoslavia. The same singer will perform lyrics that are, in a way, very similar to these, but in completely different circumstances:

*This is our blood in ashes and wine
in my veins, to the father, brother,
son, this is our blood in a heart that
boils. Say this to every traveler
wherever you go!*

Or these verses from another song:

*I give you my life, my land
and I'll be with you in good and bad
Sharing joy and sorrow with you
May God protect my Croatia...*

All three songs could be classified into the category that Ivan Čolović, without pretensions, names “wild literature” in his book

of the same name. These songs, in some way or another, rest on a close relationship with folk expression (in terms of the number of verses, motifs, and often themes). However, we cannot claim the same for Tijana Dapčević's song, which we discussed in more detail, because it does not rely on these principles and does not establish a connection with traditional oral lyrical forms. In the background of Tijana's song, we can also observe a similar song titled "Jugosloveni" from 1986, by the initial and not so well-known Belgrade band Jugosloveni. This song shares common characteristics with everyone who identifies with the ethnonym Jugoslo/aveni, and it politically coquettishly concludes with the lyrics:

*Ko je krvlju steko sve,
četere's osme reko ne
politiku svoju tera bez Rusa i Amera
Jugosloveni....*

In any case, Tijana Dapčević's song did not bring anything new to light; it simply awakened the old, and the ground for such nostalgic pathos and attitude toward the past was fertile. However, this song is not the only one in the realm of popular culture playing with (Yugo)nostalgia. We could also mention two more popular songs, one of more recent date and the other a bit older, but their relationship with the past is similar, although somewhat different from Tijana Dapčević's song. These are the songs "Nostalgična" by the Split group TBF and "Jugo 45" by the Bosnian group Zabranjeno pušenje. In these two songs, in addition to nostalgia, retro stylization is very emphasized, especially in the music videos.

"Jugo 45" is a song from the album "Agent tajne sile" (1999), and the cult

car – becomes a nostalgic trigger and object of memories. In line with the characteristic style of the Zabranjeno pušenje group, irony is at play, perhaps even stronger than in Tijana Dapčević's song. The intercultural dimension of the song is most noticeable in the following stanza:

*Uncle Franjo drove it to sell apples,
Neighbor Momo drove it to have his
wife give birth.
Uncle Mirso drove it when he went to
the brothels,
I drove it a bit too when I'd swipe the
keys.*

It can be noticed in the names Franjo (Croat), Momo (Serb), Mirso (Bosniak), but also in the appellations that accompany these names (uncle, neighbor, uncle). The central Yugoslav nostalgic article in this song, the Yugo 45 car, runs through the subject's life from the moment of buying the car until the moment when they had to flee because of the war, making the last stanza a typical nostalgic motif.

*But in my mind, there is always the
same picture, the same flash
Old house, small garden, and in it,
Yugo 45
But in my mind, there is always the
same picture, the same flash old
house, small garden, and in it,
Yugo 45.*

In the video, there is a kind of retro stylization of the environment, especially the interior (TV, radio, furniture), inventory like the pioneer cap and scarf. The retro atmosphere is enhanced by scenes on the television program covering history – from the time of Tito to the time of Tuđman-Izetbegović-Milošević. The purpose of this song, like the previous one, is to show the timeless: life was better in the past.

*It was a good time
Everything on credit, everything for the people, buddy
Pour some soup into the car, then off to Trieste for jeans
It was a good time
Sometimes for a trip, sometimes a little to the sea
In a house full of laughter
In the yard, a Yugo 45*

Not only in the realm of popular culture but also in the domain of everyday life, life in the era of Yugoslavia becomes idealized, as evident in frequent statements asserting that “it was better back then”. This sentiment often refers to the widely recognized generosity of the authorities at that time, manifested in the form of loans and similar benefits. In other former Yugoslav states, the idealization of the former country is expressed through a yearning for the infamous Yugoslav “passport” that allowed unrestricted travel, whereas today, many require visas to visit Europe. Regardless, such a shared perception of Yugoslavia in all these newly emerged (now not so new) states serves as the foundation upon which what we observe in popular culture, specifically in the music industry, is built upon.

This interweaving of inscribed desires, aspirations, and stereotypes in the lyrics could be viewed as intercultural entanglement, not only at the level of stereotypes and text but also on the stage, the focal point that attracts the most attention. This stage is where real stars perform, eliciting cheers from the masses and elevating their spirits – the stage of entertainment stars. Thus, Yugoslav nostalgia has shifted from the constructed political scene (constructed because the concept itself was initially understood primarily as political, and some still perceive it as such) to the stage that genuinely and rightfully belongs to it – the (popular) cultural stage.

Reana Senjković

Confiscated Memories (On Work and Unemployment)

Introduction

In the wake of political, social, and economic upheaval, citizens of European socialist countries found themselves navigating unfamiliar terrain. Social sciences and humanities emerged as guiding lights, illuminating the past of their daily lives.¹ Many researchers from the “West” encountered precisely what they anticipated or believed they knew: evidence of the pre-1990 era characterized by constraints and scarcity. This backdrop led to the development of survival strategies, ultimately fostering a deep, enduring yearning for the commodities of a market economy and the tenets of liberal democracy. Concurrently, a handful of local scholars shed light on a “subversive” culture thriving from the grassroots, often rooted in subcultures inspired by the popular ethos of capitalism. However, as time passed and the anticipated contentment from the political, social, and economic

1 This paper is an edited and expanded version of the article submitted and published in Croatian under the same title in the magazine *Studia ethnologica Croatica* 32/1, 2020.

transformations failed to materialize, discourse emerged. This discourse delved into the shortcomings of the transition process, privatization, the persistence of clientelism, and other remnants of socialist ideology. It also explored the widening social disparities, the advent of “wild capitalism”, and the shortcomings of the nascent democracy. Simultaneously, researchers documented the initial sentiments expressed by citizens of societies in transition, reminiscing about a more prosperous life in socialism. These sentiments found validation in public opinion surveys, revealing results that were both “astonishing” and “alarming”. In 1999, more than 40% of respondents in former East Germany claimed greater contentment in socialism. Similarly, around the same time, 56% of respondents in Poland asserted a higher quality of life in the 1970s. In 2002, over three-quarters of respondents in Bulgaria bemoaned their diminished social standing post-transition. A few years later, 65% of respondents in Romania echoed these sentiments (Velikonja 2009, 10-11). The emergence of “post-socialist/post-communist nostalgia” began to permeate the pages of scientific journals, collections of scholarly papers, and academic monographs.²

In 2004, Maya Nadkarni and Olga Shevchenko observed that the concept of nostalgia had firmly entrenched itself in scholarly and popular considerations regarding how citizens of “transitional” and “post-transitional” countries viewed their recent past. They questioned, “[w]hy [nostalgia] has become”, so widespread [...] both as a phenomenon and

2 This paragraph presents a simplified overview of one part of literature interested in “daily life in socialism” and the experience of transition “from socialism to capitalism.” It also reflects my experience of participation in scientific conferences dealing with those subjects. For a more substantial overview of relevant bibliography look for Larissa Zakharova (2013; compare, for example Petrović 2013: 129-130). A decade after the publication of her text on “the everyday life in communism”, the topic of “post-socialist/post-communist nostalgia” remains current, but the abundance of published texts no longer allows for any comprehensive overview.

as a conceptual category through which to unify disparate cultural phenomena across the region”, “[w]hat do these nostalgias have in common, and what makes them different from nostalgia elsewhere” (2004: 488). Six years later, Maria Todorova would paraphrase the first sentence of Marx and Engels’ Communist Manifesto, with which Nadkarni and Shevchenko began their discussion on the “politics of nostalgia”: “A specter is haunting the world of academia: the study of post-Communist nostalgia” (2010: 1). By that time, numerous authors had dissected this phenomenon into its variants, often categorizing them as “good” and “bad”, thus politically and morally hierarchizing them (cf. Bonnett 2020: 124). Many researchers noted and recorded, for instance, the benign commodification of communist symbols (essentially a practice seen as emptying the meaning of potent and significant communist symbols, thereby signifying the triumph of capitalism; cf. Ugrešić 2012, Koleva 2022: 223-224), while others recognized in the testimonies of nostalgic feelings a dangerous attachment to the culture (and politics!) of the preceding era (cf. Nadkarni and Shevchenko 2004: 490). However, regardless of their political convictions (which influenced and continue to influence the recognition of nostalgic feelings in the period after the “collapse of communism”), a significant number of analysts asserted that it is either a longing for longing itself (since its object is irretrievably lost) or a mourning for the “moral and political certainties of pre-1989 idealism” and desires that were unattainable anyway (ibid: 491 and 495-496).

“Nostalgia [...] is”, in the frequently quoted introduction of Svetlana Boym’s book *The Future of Nostalgia*, “a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed”. It is “a sentiment of loss and displacement”, but also “a romance with one’s own fantasy” that “can only survive in a long-distance relationship” (2001: xiii). However, for Boym, nostalgia can be not only barren but also productive; not only

restorative but also reflective (that “calls into doubt”),³ not necessarily retrospective but also prospective (“creative [...] memory” (2001: xvi, 50)). Over time, this contemplation of “red nostalgia” will garner a noticeable number of credible advocates. Daniela Koleva, a professor at the Department of History and Theory of Culture at Sofia University, saw it as a “backward-looking utopia, i.e., a longing for an idealized past pointing to the deficits of the present”, She decided to highlight its “potential for self-positioning, (re)establishing social bonds, and symbolic coping with the changes” (2011: 417-418), while Olivia Angé and David Berliner have come a step closer to establishing a balance in evaluating its qualities: ‘Far from only being an evasion towards an irretrievable past, or politically non-subversive [...], nostalgic laments can involve both moral critique of the present and an alternative to deal with social changes [...]. Sometimes, nostalgia is ‘a weapon’, [it can have] empowering agency’ and ‘critical potential’” (2016 [2015]: 5; cf. Palmberger 2008; Spasić 2012: 578; Petrović 2020).⁴

And even these seemingly ‘empowering interpretations’ of nostalgic sentiments in Eastern and Southeastern European countries have clear political implications. One of the first to alert to this was Dominic Boyer. According to him, it is a “civilizational discourse of the *longue durée* that offers the solid lump of Eastern European pastness as the base point from which Western Europe charts its lightness, its futurity, indeed its very ‘Europeanness’” (Boyer 2010: 22). In other words, Eastern Euro-

3 This is a term introduced by Fred Davis to denote nostalgia that “tests reality” (1979: 21). Davis’s insights, especially those presented in the book *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, are often cited in the works of authors discussing post-socialist/post-communist nostalgia.

4 Many other authors have joined this “conceptual project of reconfiguring nostalgia as an analytical tool” (May 2017: 405). Especially notable is Berdahl 2010, for instance.

pean nostalgia should also be regarded “as a post imperial symptom, a symptom of the increasingly manic need in Western Europe to fix Eastern Europe in the past” (ibid: 23; cf. e.g., Kovačević 2008: 20; Müller 2019: 541; Rabikowska 2013: 3 and 12).⁵ Viewing it in line with this proposal, post-socialist/post-communist nostalgia is not one of Eastern European identity anchors but a tool in executing the normalization model of Western European (and American) identity crisis caused by the end of the Cold War era (Wæver 1992; Hanhimäki 2014: 673). Furthermore, in this sequence of conclusions, the question arises about the role of local scholars who describe their observations using the same terms, those who are already entangled in the broadly set network of “epistemic power constellations” (King-Savić, Tošić, and Laketa, in press).

But it’s not just about the published results of scientific research: one of the conclusions of Sophie Gaston and Sache Hilhorst’s study on ‘nostalgia as a cultural and political force in Britain, France, and Germany’ pertains to the meaning of this term in public discourse, as well as in spontaneous everyday speech. Despite recording a large number of expressions about a “better past”, they noticed that the term nostalgia is used in a derogatory or mocking sense: ‘It is a relatively small tranche of citizens and politicians who will openly proclaim themselves to be nostalgic, [...] and the content analysis and focus groups reinforce the extent to which the term is used as a liberal slur’ in connotations of backwardness, narrow-mindedness, inflexibility, and pessimism (2018: 12; cf. Creed 2010: 33, Petrović 2020: 130). In other words, “within the realm of political rhetoric, of intellectual activity, of public life, nostalgia is routinely vilified” (Bonnett 2010: 5).

5 “[A]ttempts to create a common European memory”, as noted by Sabina Mihelj, “often involve difficult negotiations, in which eastern Europeans’ attitudes to the past are evaluated from the point of view of dominant Western narratives” (2017: 242).

In general, when it comes to the impulses that have shifted the conceptual frameworks of studying post-socialist/post-communist nostalgia, we could assume that some of these impulses followed, adopted, and adapted the theories through which Western science had interpreted observations about nostalgia in their own context. Scientific works that provide insights into nostalgia in the West often begin by reminding us that this term was first used by Johannes Hofer in 1688 to name a mental illness: a specific state of longing for home that Swiss soldiers experienced while fighting for various European rulers. According to Hofer, they suffered from despondency, melancholy, and the instability of emotions, along with bouts of hopeless crying, loss of appetite, and suicide attempts (cf. e.g., Starobinski 1966, Davis 1977: 414-415, Palmberger 2008: 358-359; Bonnett 2010: 5, De Vries and Hoffmann 2018: 7; Jacobsen 2020: 7; Koleva 2022: 214; Petrović 2010: 127 and 2020: 130). “Outbreaks of nostalgia often follow revolutions,” stated Svetlana Boym, citing the example of the French Revolution (2001: xvi; cf. Velikonja 2009: 3-4, Jacobsen 2020: 2). Some authors have even cited older examples, appropriate passages from Homer and Hippocrates, and even the Bible (Martin 1954: 93). Nowadays, nostalgia in Western Europe and the United States is most commonly blamed on “right-wing reactionary politics, in which the past is viewed through sentimental and mawkish emotions to construct a past, if not perfect, then certainly better than the present” (Smith and Campbell 2017: 612; cf. e.g., Schreurs 2021). Thus, nostalgia has (even before it was discovered in post-socialist countries) acquired the label of a “reactionary disease” (ibid: 614; cf. Jacobsen 2020: 1).⁶ Criticism of nostalgic feelings/

6 This is confirmed by an extensive bibliography, and here I provide examples from the anthology *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, edited by Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase after the History Workshop 20 held in Leeds at the end of 1986, with the theme “Uses of History”. In the introductory text, the editors described the idea behind their project as follows: “The sick man of Europe had taken to his bed, dreaming of a childhood that he had never had, regressing into a series of fictitious and cloudless infantile summers. Our understanding of nos-

statements that attributes their production and dissemination to right-wing reactionary intentions clearly reveals the critic's political position at or left of center. Therefore, it is necessary to draw attention to the assessments that suggest Western European leftist "urban elites" tend to stereotype the working class as nostalgically reactionary (Bonnett 2010: 131). Nostalgia, as Alastair Bonnett argued, is a "politically mobile emotion" (ibid: 3).

In her polemical article on the phenomenon of nostalgia published in 1988, Kathleen Stewart decided to understand nostalgia in the same way as later contemplations and reports from post-socialist territories by scholars such as Daniela Koleva, Olivia Angé, and David Berliner, using it as raw material for imagining and shaping the future. This article is interesting not only because it points to possible precedents for later "consoling" interpretations of the phenomenon of post-socialist/post-communist nostalgia, but also because it offers an example of "post-industrial nostalgia," the life of residents in the Raleigh district in the eastern United States after coal mines were closed and unemployment became "total and final". Former miners, Stewart noted, are nostalgic, but "not as tourists taking in framed scenes from a maintained and exercised distance but as exiles in their own homeland, painfully holding on to closeness in a world that has already deserted them" (1988: 235).

* * *

talgia was rather combative, therefore: we wished to explore a cultural phenomenon that told us about the present through its falsification of the past" (Chase and Shaw 1989: 1). The contribution by David Lowenthal already confirms such a view of the phenomenon of nostalgia with its title: "Nostalgia tells it like it wasn't" (1989).

In this text, I do not intend to discuss the “phenomenon of nostalgia” in the past or present, in the ‘East’ or the ‘West’.⁷ I will be interested in the justification of using the concept of nostalgia in scientific papers that are based on discussions about changes that have affected the status and understanding of work and employment. In doing so, I will rely on quotes from published studies by foreign authors and authors who have conducted research in the territory of the former Socialist Republic of Croatia, as well as a selection from 132 thematically oriented interviews conducted by the collaborators of the project “Transformation of Work in Post-transitional Croatia” (TRANSWORK 2017-2021) with respondents of various ages and different socio-economic statuses from all parts of the country, from Pula, Rijeka, and Čakovec to Ilok and Dubrovnik.⁸ More precisely, I will focus on those parts of the interviews in which the interviewees, similar to the interlocutors of Western researchers from post-industrial mental spaces/affects, domestic and foreign scientists who have conducted relevant research in Croatia, and the respondents in the research of the TRANSWORK project, expressed “nostalgic memories” (on work and employment) which, as Maya Nadkarni and Olga Shevchenko claim, “belong to the far less attractive and more politically dangerous restorative kind [nos-

7 In this text, I understand the terms “East” and “West” in accordance with the Cold War interpretation.

8 In this text, by presenting excerpts from the narratives of interviewees from Croatia as narratives of the “East” of Europe, I am certainly neglecting narratives that researchers have heard and recorded in other countries within the territory of the former Yugoslavia, as well as in other countries that identified as socialist during most of the second half of the last century. It’s not just about citizens of states that became independent after the “dissolution” of socialist Yugoslavia; citizens of Croatia, it seems, are the least inclined to be “Yugonostalgic”. This was observed by Daniela Koleva, without citing the source from which she learned that in Croatia, there is a “clearly-expressed anti-communist consensus, grounded in the perception of the communist regime as foreign and occupational”. So, for example, the “Yugoslav period is often labeled ‘Serbo-communism’” (2022: 45). Assuming this observation is correct, we will presume that memories of work and employment in Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Montenegro contain a greater degree of “nostalgia”.

talgic memories]” (2004: 507). Svetlana Boym noticed them, pointing out that they tend to “confuse the actual home and the imaginary one”, thus actually working on the rebuilding of “the ideal home”; “restorative nostalgia” Boym emphasized in the introduction to the first chapter of the book *The Future of Nostalgia*, “does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition” (2001: xviii).⁹ “Citing caution in interpreting nostalgic memories and practices in the “post-socialist context” Nadkarni and Shevchenko emphasize that nostalgia should be distinguished from other forms of “investment in the past” (2004: 504). They argue that it is not possible to clearly separate manifestations of “reflective” and “restorative” nostalgia (cf. Koleva 2022: 217) and that “the kernel of political significance of nostalgic practices is determined by the larger socio-historical logic of national post-socialist development, so that identical practices, or even identical intentions animating these practices, fulfill radically different social functions depending on the context in which they unfold” (Nadkarni and Shevchenko 2004: 507). However, despite this assertion, it seems that the authors intend to examine the “politics of nostalgia” in “post-socialist” environments within a framework that would be broad (or flexible) enough to encompass the diversity of “nostalgic practices” their interpretation offers, fundamentally yielding only two general conclusions: respondents over 50 years old who speak about their economic deprivation find themselves in a state that Pierre Bourdieu termed the “hysteresis of habitus”, “the unsettling lack of fit between one’s internalized dispositions and the new ‘rules of the game’ which constantly reminds individuals of their lack of agency and control”, while the “nostalgic practices” of younger individuals indicate “ironic distance”, simultaneously connecting with

9 Such an interpretation of nostalgia (which “rolls back the wheel of history”), as noted by Natali Marcos Piason, “haunts various currents of leftist thought” based on Marx’s definition of radical revolution, is actually a borrowing of the phrase uttered by Christ according to the Gospel of Matthew, “Let the dead bury their dead” (2004: 13).

an “imagined past” and dissociating from it (ibid: 492 and 503-504). Such explanations of “nostalgic” expressions and/or practices, especially those of older generations, people who grew up during the socialist period, but also those who became “redundant” due to the closure of industrial plants in the West, has become almost commonplace. Therefore, we might ask why, in cases where expressions depict the past as better than the present, they are not interpreted through a concept that is not marked with ideological value? Why is the possibility eliminated for the interlocutor to narrate about beautiful memories of work and employment before the “post-industrial era” from a position of authority? Is it a matter of mistrust in the authenticity of memories, or is it an effort leading towards historicizing collectively lived past (cf. Nora 2006: 25), the ultimate goal of which is the “inheritance” of only selected, less “dangerous memories” (cf. Ostovich 2020)? Certainly, the answer to these questions cannot be simple or explicit; therefore, I will attempt to propose a framework within which they can be considered, but within which it is also possible to pose new, different questions.

Memories of Work and Employment on Home Ground

Over the course of three years of field research, collaborators on the TRANSWORK project recorded 132 thematically focused interviews. Our interest lay in the changes that occurred in the field of labor after 1990, followed by the global financial crisis of 2007/2008, and Croatia’s accession to the European Union in 2013. To understand this, we needed to delve into the memories of living and working conditions during the late stages of industrialization that Croatia, then one of the republics of socialist Yugoslavia, underwent after the 1950s. Some of our interviewees spontaneously echoed a sentiment that one of Maya Nadkarni and Olga Shevchenko’s participants expressed, describing the

turning point of the 1990s: “I am not going to claim that the communists were not stealing”, explained Vera when commenting on corruption practices in the 1990s, “[y]es, they stole. But we did not know, did not have to see it” (2004: 506). “In that system, you could work, steal, and live, and in this system, they work, they steal, they live. We don’t live, work, or steal”, said a retiree from Zadar (June 2017). “It’s true, they stole, they took [...], but they gave to the workers”, said a retiree from Zagreb (March 2018). However, a noticeable majority of older interviewees opted for testimonies favoring a sharper contrast between life and work experiences then and now:

[...] I have a military pension [...] I was a waitress, serving drinks and meals to officers [...] my entire service. [...] It was the best for me when Tito was in charge [...], let everyone say what they want. These are all thieves. [...] today [...] I am starving, I collect bottles... Everything they drink at the [retirement home], I collect and take to recycle just so I can buy myself a kilo of fruit. Is that shameful? That’s shameful [cries] (Šibenik, March 2020, woman aged 80-90 years).

Our interviewee’s pension barely covers the costs of staying in the retirement home. She told us that her son gives her some money for basic hygiene necessities once a month. Another retiree we talked to, a former electrician in the shipyard in Trogir, managed to acquire property before retiring. He now shares it with his children and grandchildren. In his story, he touches upon several significant themes from documented accounts of work in countries whose names largely included the terms “people’s” and/or “socialist” during the latter half of the last century: the demanding labor, the pride in the company’s successful operations, personal achievements through work, and ultimately, the horizontal and vertical solidarity within the company (cf. e.g., Bonfiglioli 2020: 95-122 and 137):

I worked for thirty years in the Trogir Shipyard. [...] working in the shipyard, that's incredibly hard work, massive plates [...] Back then, they brought milk and [...] tea with rum to the workers; workers were respected. Boots, suits, protective gear... they had everything. I've been retired since '94. [...] I was an electrician; my time in the company was excellent [...]. There was money; houses were being built, one after another, apartments, everything with skillful hands [...]. Life was great for me, but with hard work. [...] We worked on docks, did all kinds of things; it was a celebration: on the twenty-ninth [of November, Republic Day] we got our pay, extra pay, on New Year's, pay, pay, on the first of May, extra pay! We lived. [...] They provided apartments [...]. They gave me an apartment because I had three children, but I was born in the countryside; I always liked having a little garden around [...]. One day, the president of the commission [...] said to me [...]: 'My young man, tomorrow we're distributing loans. Do you want a loan, or an apartment?' [...] I said, 'I'm a young worker; I've only been here for a year and a half, who will give me an apartment and a loan?' He said, "Don't worry about it" [...] (Trogir, March 2020, male aged 80-90 years).

In the story of a woman about twenty years younger, who worked at the *Electrode and Ferroalloy Factory* in Šibenik, elements of solidarity and a sense of equality among workers are particularly emphasized, regardless of their background or education. Furthermore, both her parents worked in the same company, and, like our interviewee from Trogir, they managed to build a house with their salaries. The relative ease of life, as revealed in this interviewee's story, was also due to the devaluation in the 1980s:

I started in '79. [...] My mother and father worked; they managed to get me in there [...] and that's how it was, at that time when you got

employed, it had to be for life. [...] So, there were all sorts of people, from illiterate folks to top intellectuals, from people [...] from the city center to villagers without electricity, water had just arrived by then, people who traveled [...] to work. [...] There were truly all sorts, but whatever you needed, whatever you needed, someone would make it for you, whether it was fixing an iron [...], or sewing something; there were people from all professions, all trades [...] but without confusion, disorder. And [...] another thing at the Electrode and Ferroalloy Factory [...], we had a Service. So, it was organized according to some work units, in divisions and work units, and that Service, it was somewhere towards the end [...] of the factory, before its collapse, there were 100 people. So, there were people who had been worn out for years, meaning they had either succumbed to alcohol or were incapable of work due to some private misfortunes [...], basically, these were people we paid for [...], we're talking about the '70s and '80s [...] these people were like: well, if you don't have papers for someone [...] these were the people they just left alone to wait for their retirement. At that time, socialist values were more present in all of us, or the opportunities were better [...] such things are lacking today. [...] Our union was strong [...] so, my mom and dad traveled: to Russia, to spas, [...] for skiing [...]. Preserves [...] Hams hung like cannonballs [...], a mutual aid fund [...], Samsung TVs [...], you wouldn't even notice it on your salary, there was still devaluation [...]. [My mother and father] used one salary for these necessities they bought, and they lived off the other salary and built the house (Žaborić, March 2020, woman aged 60).

The Ironworks in Sisak, a city whose development was primarily based on the industry for most of the last century, had its own clinic, kindergarten, barber and hairdresser salon, dry cleaner, laundry service, and even a flower shop. They bought or built resorts for their workers and their families in Rogaška Slatina, Malinska, Bakar, and on Pag Island

(Tadić 2017: 9; cf. e.g., Bonfiglioli 2020: 51, 96-97, 133). An especially extensive ethnographic study of the “post-industrial condition” of Sisak was conducted by Sanja Potkonjak and Tea Škokić. The authors of the book *Where Does the Factory Live? Ethnography of a Post-Industrial City* followed Sisak and its inhabitants from the war in the early 1990s, through the ‘transition’ period, and more intensively between 2017 and 2021 as part of the TRANSWORK project. The testimonies of their interviewees, they noticed, reveal “generational, but also transgenerational characteristics” (2022: 76). While some narrated how they found ways to “manage the present” most seemed to find themselves in a gap between the past and an (unpromising) future or have “stalled in the past” when people were ‘satisfied’ and didn’t have to worry “whether they’d have a job tomorrow or not, whether they’d get paid tomorrow or not”, when “no one was hungry, no one was thirsty” (ibid: 81-103).

Additionally to witnessing the possibilities of acquiring land and building houses with the income from work and favorable loans provided by the company (which in some cases required a lot of patience, or it didn’t happen at all, often depending on the company’s performance; cf. Bonfiglioli 2020: 78-80 and Musić 2021: 85-87), the stories about the past work also echo themes of job security and long-term employment in a single company until retirement:

I worked in a company [...], I worked there for 35 years and earned my seniority. All in one company. [...] It was easier back then because you got a job right away. For example, I came from Bosnia at the age of 17 and within two weeks went to the Employment Office and got a job immediately. I didn’t know anyone. [...] I didn’t have to go from company to company like people do now. [...] And my husband, when he returned from the military service, he also earned his living there.

*We both earned our pensions in the same company. So, no one can tell me it wasn't better in that system. [...] We came with nothing and bought a plot of land and built a house. [...] We had very good salaries. [...] We had a car (Zagreb, March 2018, woman aged 70-80).*¹⁰

For many of our interviewees, the change they felt in their social and economic status didn't start with the parliamentary elections in 1990. It was delayed by the war and its consequences, and the "epiphany" was marked by the definitive collapse of the "industrial giants". For the workers at the Uljanik shipyard, about which it was often said that almost every family in Pula had at least one person employed there, the change lasted for years, gradually phasing out production. A welder we spoke to in June 2017 faced its first signs shortly after he was employed:

I work at Uljanik as a welder [...] for 20 years now. [...] As for the salary, I remember my first month, I received 4800 kunas [...] and today [...] it's around 6000 [...]. And in terms of expenses, there are huge differences. We start with gasoline, it used to be three kunas and 30 at that time [...], cigarettes were seven kunas, six... [...] everything went up by 300%. Everything, milk, oil... [...] Before, when it was summer and warm and we could work at a slower pace, there was understanding [...], but in the last few years [...]. There's no more understanding. [...] They just cut, reduce, tighten... [...] Anyway, everyone is nervous,

10 Certainly, our interviewees were not unanimous in their assessments of the quality of life in socialist Yugoslavia. For instance, a 64-year-old retiree from Zadar told us that she and her brothers were unemployed for years, and she had been "on the dole since '77" after finishing Higher Pedagogical School. In the meantime, she "mostly worked in Maraska as a seasonal worker" and helped her family with agricultural work. Her father, grandfather, and even great-grandfather had worked in the Maraska factory. However, she told us, she couldn't find a job because "you had to have connections", and they only employed "certain people's kids... you know whose... who were up there at the top... doctors, directors, engineers... the slightly bigger ones... and us, peasants, well..."

everyone is tense [...]. There used to be 12,500 people, now there are 2000, maybe double the number of ships were built [...], and my father also worked at Uljanik [...]. Uljanik used to build [apartments]. Not anymore. Back then Uljanik could do it, they had surpluses, they had profits [...] it's different today. They had, and then they invested, built buildings [...] and then, if you had two or three children, they scored based on the number of children and the number of employees, and then you were on the list, in order, and that's how the apartments were allocated [...] so: this building has two rooms, three rooms [...] they probably had some minimal monthly installment for repayment, it was peanuts, it was nothing. [...] Today, we are in debt, there are no more surpluses. [...] If I didn't have a child [...] I would probably have been in Germany or Australia by now (Pula, June 2017, man aged 40-50).

A little over a year later when we returned to Pula, news of the imminent final closure of the shipyard could be read in the media. Our previous interviewee told us that almost every worker who can is leaving to work abroad. Leaving the country and searching for work overseas had become a common part of Croatian everyday life, for many, the only possible or acceptable solution:

My son is 44 years old... He has no prospects. [...] I tell him, 'Look for a job, run away abroad.' So, I'm advising him, and a parent shouldn't say that to their children (Zadar, July 2017, 65-year-old man).

In Slavonia, Baranja, and Srijem, the war and the displacement postponed the realization that a change had occurred in the work sphere:

I graduated in July '98 and if I hadn't returned home at the end of August, I think I would have died. I had to come back, but at the same time, I now know that if I left, I wouldn't look back. I mean, simply,

all the enthusiasm that was there until around 2004, until 2006 even, the return of the population, reconstruction, job opportunities, now there's nothing... there's nothing at all. [...] A man at the bank said to me the other day: '[...] you see, nobody cares about Ilok anymore.' But when you find yourself in such an environment where everyone is depressed, you can't escape it. You meet people in town, it's all gloomy. [...] In our town, 70% of the employed people are working for minimum wage. In Ilok, there are very few people who are not working now because those who wanted to work, who were capable of working and didn't have jobs, left a long time ago. [...] Germany and Ireland the most (Ilok, February 2018, woman aged 40-50).

Finally, our younger interviewees, especially those without children, have mostly internalized the norms of individualism, mobility, and competitiveness, ready to change jobs and work in positions that require different, sometimes lower qualifications than those they obtained through education.¹¹ They didn't mention social rights, emphasizing instead the importance of human qualities and the employer's managerial competencies. Often, this involves precarious work and low incomes, forcing most of them to rely on their parents' assets:

I socialize with a lot of people who are actually unemployed, or they are somehow employed like me. Something like, in between. They have their own businesses, or some kind of craft, or something, so they manage somehow. Most of them, after a few months of living and working like this, burn out and then they move away, stop working, and go back to their parents. [...] It seems to me that generationally,

¹¹ Additionally, according to some research, women have shown themselves to be more adaptable than men, more inclined to seek income through informal means (due to lack of better options) or change available temporary jobs (Potkonjak and Škokić 2022: 59).

people who had stable jobs and thought that the meaning of life was to have a stable job, actually provided for us. Somehow, it seems to me that this generation is now depleting that resource. Looking at all my friends who finished law school, became directors and work on TV, have freelance jobs, meaning in the sense that they don't... they actually go and eat at their parents' place and for major investments in their apartments... if their parents bought them apartments, the parents pay the loans or renovations, PVC windows, or whatever, so we all... my friends, we actually pretend that we are very mature and have our own apartments where we live, whether rented or owned, but in fact, we use the resources from our ancestors a lot. [...] Generally, there is no strategy. We don't deal with questions like where we see ourselves in five years. When that question was raised in society a few times, everyone, including me, became anxious. We need therapy immediately when that question is asked: 'Where do you see yourself professionally in five years?'" (Zagreb, March 2019, male, 36 years old).

If our younger interviewees, who have adapted to the new circumstances, have not embraced the practice of writing project proposals and applying for calls, most of them work in tourism, often continuing a family tradition. For instance, our interviewee in Dubrovnik has taken over the well-established business of her husband's parents. Similarly, a 45-year-old from Ugljan shared that her parents and even her grandparents were involved in tourism and hospitality. Now, her children are continuing the same profession.

* * *

Similar statements to these have been recorded by other researchers in Croatia. Former workers of Sinj Dalmatinka, mostly born

in the late 1930s, told Vedrana Premuž Đipalo that even during their schooling, they knew a secure job awaited them, and they didn't need to "have any connections" to get employed. Moreover, they could get smaller apartments initially, and later, larger ones "as the family expanded": "there was prosperity for everyone, there were opportunities, good salaries, everything was fine, houses were being built, we were creating a future for our children". "Dalmatinka", one of the interviewees said, "was the mother of all of us Sinj residents and people from the surrounding areas" (2017: 30, 41, 43, and 57).¹²

Chiara Bonfiglioli cited testimonies from former female workers in the textile factory in Osijek, *Varteks* in Zagreb, Arena textile factory in Pula, and *Kamensko* factory in Zagreb, where they compared work and employment conditions "back then and now". "In those times, which they tell us was Tito's 'dark era' and the like", said one of them, "you had more rights than today". "Back then, workers were respected, we progressed, received awards, and they never treated us inhumanely, but that doesn't happen anymore", said another. They all loved their jobs and were happy to go to work. Nowadays, "salaries are low, people have their worries, they are in debt, worry about how to cover expenses, salaries are not paid regularly, hundreds of concerns", "[you] go to work with some depression, fear, you don't know what to expect", "you can work from morning till night and not get paid for it" (2020: 105-106, 138-139, 172).

12 *The Dalmatinka* factory started building apartments for its workers in 1955. In the period until 1981, as stated by Jelena Pavlinušić, they constructed 224 apartments. Additionally, between 1963 and 1981, 670 workers utilized loans to build houses. Starting from 1965, Dalmatinka had its own healthcare service with ten employees: a doctor, dentist, nurse, four nurses, two administrators, and a cleaner. Dalmatinka's resort in Strožanac had 56 beds, and the full-board price for workers was just under a third of the commercial rate. Besides this resort, Dalmatinka also built a vacation facility near Lake Peruča with around 30 beds and a kitchen (Pavlinušić 2017: 17-19), along with its own Olympic-sized swimming pool (Bonfiglioli 2020: 144).

In a comprehensive study conducted between 2014 and 2021, Mirko Petrić, Inga Tomić-Koludrović, Željka Zdravković, Predrag Cvetičanin, and Adrian Leguina published two papers proposing a post-Bourdieu approach to the analysis of the “class structure of hybrid post-socialist societies in Southeastern Europe” (Cvetičanin et al. 2021; Petrić et al. 2022).¹³ They included excerpts from interviews with research subjects describing the consequences of changes in the labor market. Interviewees in Croatia informed them that employers now “look for people who are very obedient”, although workers, due to the scarce job opportunities in the labor market, “accept increasingly worse conditions” (Petrić et al. 2022: 58-59).¹⁴

* * *

Statements about the “better past” vary, among other factors, in whether they refer to the period immediately after World War II or to a later period. They also differ in how successful the company where the interviewees were employed was and what the personal and managerial profile of those who managed these companies was like. Additionally, although almost without exception, these statements compare the past with the present. Some of these statements contain claims related to the daily challenges faced by workers and assertions that suggest the

13 Similar research results in Serbia can also be found in Spasić 2012 and Kojanić 2015.

14 Many recent scientific studies have addressed these issues, including one whose results were published by Jelena Ostojić, Marko Lucić, Katarina Jaklin, and Teo Matković in the article “Scars of Precarious History on Working Careers: Relationship between Well-being and Working Conditions of Temporary Kindergarten Teachers in Croatia” (2021). In-depth theoretical considerations on the “transformation of (the idea of) work” and references to relevant qualitative research “in the Croatian post-transitional context” have been provided by Ozren Biti and Mislav Žitko (Biti and Žitko 2017).

benefits they enjoyed were unevenly distributed (sometimes as a result of populist measures or the struggles of the Yugoslav economy, such as cheap loans during a period of strong inflation). Despite this, and even with a relatively large number of recorded “non-nostalgic statements” (which in Croatian public discourse significantly outnumber “nostalgic statements”, although they are not the focus of this text¹⁵), it is evident that a significant number of former workers believe that working conditions and relationships among people in the companies were better before the 1990 change. Even if they did not approve of the idea/ideology of Yugoslav socialism, female workers from *Dalmatinka* interviewed by Chiara Bonfiglioli mentioned the factory’s significant role in the local community.

For example, Marija, a Catholic born in a village that was on the Ustaše side during World War II, claimed that workers had more rights and were better protected in the past than they are today. Although she was happy about Croatia’s independence and the “new system”, she recalled hot meals in the canteen, sanitary facilities for female workers, twenty-four-hour shifts of medical teams, the possibility of maternity leave, subsidized seaside resorts, frequent joint outings, offers of loans for building houses, but also the fact that the opportunity to work in the factory provided female workers with greater independence (Bonfiglioli 2020: 144-145). Tanja Petrović drew attention to the “nostalgic” memories of two former prisoners from Goli otok. She cited a statement made by one of them, recorded by the magazine *Žurnal* in 2010, that “it was much better in Tito’s time. Workers were respected and lived with dignity”. In the same year, for the documentary film *Kein Land*

15 About strikes/work stoppages in socialist Yugoslavia, for example, authors such as Jože Goričar and Neca Jovanov (1975), Zdenko Radelić (1988), Igor Stanić (2016), and Sven Cvek, Jasna Račić, and Snježana Ivčić (2019) have written.

Unserer Zeit by Aleksandra Vedernjak (opened by Svetlana Boym's interpretation of "Yugonostalgia"), Nikola Golubović, a prisoner on Goli otok since February 1950, spoke among others (cf. Petrović 2013: 141 and 2020: 132).

*[...] and the people were satisfied. They had free education, they had free healthcare, you understand? Factory workers had the opportunity to go on annual vacations at very low prices [...]. And all companies had their own hotels, some by the sea, some in the mountains, mostly they had. All these people now remember, they can't even imagine going, you know, to get what they used to get back then. Because of that, I have to say: yes, I am nostalgic for Yugoslavia [...].*¹⁶

* * *

Mitja Velikonja is the author who has written the most about "Yugonostalgia". His reflection on the "red nostalgia", and thus nostalgia for the former socialist Yugoslavia, is largely in line with the proposals and conclusions of the authors I mentioned at the beginning of this text. For him, nostalgia is "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 idealized projection of the past rather than its accurate reproduction" (2017: 8) or, in other words, "a

16 On <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9W1QmXkpfjk> (accessed on May 5, 2023), the author discussed "Yugonostalgia" with interviewees in Ljubljana, Kumrovec, Zagreb, Sarajevo, and Belgrade. However, it seems that only in Zagreb she couldn't find an interviewee who would admit to being "Yugonostalgic". Only one older woman shyly admitted that she "feels" that things were better before, while one girl said she was nostalgic "for her childhood in Yugoslavia".

complex, differentiated, changing, emotion-laden, personal or collective, (non)instrumentalized story that binarily laments and glorifies a romanticized lost time, people, objects, feelings, scents, events, spaces, relationships, values, political and other systems, all of which stand in sharp contrast to the inferior present”. In other words: “It is mourning for the irreversible loss of the past, a longing for it, and it frequently involves a utopian wish and even an effort to bring it back”: nostalgia is fueled by dissatisfaction with the present, which in turn “creates and feeds the image of the perfect past” (2009: 4).

In several texts, Tanja Petrović has explored post-socialist nostalgia as a more complex phenomenon. Starting from her early works on the “mental maps” of former Yugoslavia (2007), “nostalgic narratives” of workers in socialist Serbia (2010), and the “political dimension of post-socialist memory practices” (2011) – where she recognizes “Yugonostalgia” as “reflexive nostalgia” in line with Svetlana Boym’s proposal (2007: 270) and suggests an interpretation in which the socialist past can be “a source of emancipation, reflection, and resistance,” even “a call for collectivity and solidarity” (2011: 317) – she has turned her focus toward the “defense of nostalgia”, elaborating on this in her works on “mourning the lost modernity” (2014), “nostalgia for industrial labor in socialist Yugoslavia” (2017), and “emotions and political subjectivity after socialism” (2020). According to her, this narrative of modernization includes former socialist societies on the cultural and historical map of Europe (2014: 97; cf. Ugrešić 2012). Therefore, she highlights the features of “Yugonostalgia” as European values: the need for continuity, anti-fascism, solidarity, workers’ rights, and cosmopolitanism (2013: 131-137) and contrasts them with the prevailing attitudes that nostalgia for socialism is irrational, unpatriotic, reactionary, and immoral (same: 137-143). In doing so, she is aware of the risks involved in insisting that discussions about the discourses of memory and practices of industri-

al workers in socialist Yugoslavia be conducted within the conceptual framework of post-socialist nostalgia. This, she believes, necessitates re-defining the meanings of this “contaminated term” (2017: 25). As far as I know, Tanja Petrović has not proposed a new definition of the concept of nostalgia, and that is not my intention either. The problem I am addressing here arises from the fact that, in the words of Jean Starobinski (in his text on “the idea of nostalgia”), “as soon as the name of an emotion is brought to light, the word, through its very efficiency, helps to fix, to propagate, to generalize the emotion which it represents” (1966: 81), and sometimes, I would say, it spreads beyond the domain of emotions.

Memories of Work and Employment in the “West”

Authors who bring memories of working conditions and the emotions arising from employment in their texts (often feelings of satisfaction and hope for personal and family advancement), as well as the quality of social relationships in socialist Yugoslavia and in states belonging to the Soviet bloc, have rarely and, as far as I know, only incidentally mentioned similar memories and emotions in capitalist Western countries (cf. e.g., Kojanić 2015; Petrović 2014: 97 and 2017: 25; Velikonja 2009: 12).¹⁷ Considering the use of the concept of nos-

17 Gerald Creed offers an interesting perspective on the connection between “socialist nostalgia” and neoliberalism (in Bulgaria). His question about the justification of using the term nostalgia starts from the assumption that this term does not describe the feelings (and behaviors!) of those affected by the economic policies of banks, employers, or governments in the “West”: “Is it nostalgia to see the empty hull of a former factory workshop and wish that it were still productive and employing [Bulgarian] villagers? The absurdity of such conceptualizations is perhaps more obvious when we think comparatively: Would we call the outrage and disappointment felt by General Motors workers in Flint, Michigan [...] ‘nostalgia’? Would we call the rash of suicides that accompanied the flurry of farm foreclosures in the United States in the 1980s ‘nostalgia?’” (2010: 35). A more nuanced understanding of “nostalgia,” both in the “East” and the “West,” has been provided by Andrew Gilbert (2019).

talgia in the discussions of memories of work and employment in the latter half of the last century, I am also interested in testimonies from Western European countries and the United States. I acknowledge that I am stepping onto a slippery slope here, primarily because this area involves a much broader literature, as well as more diverse and nuanced memories, and ultimately, somewhat more nuanced interpretations. Therefore, I will select only a few examples from the extensive number of recorded and published memories in which research subjects in the “West” claim the same things as research subjects in the “East”.

Tim Strangleman, James Rhodes, and Sherry Linkon, in the introduction to the theme “Crumbling Cultures: Deindustrialization, Class, and Memory” of the *International Labor and Working-Class History journal*, selected testimonies illustrating how workers once felt like a part of a community, looked forward to going to work, and finding a job was not a problem: “You didn’t have to have a high school education... You could walk out and Philip Morris, Harvester, [the] railroad – you could get a job anywhere. Like at Harvester, it was something like this: I applied for the job, they called me the next day [...] you could just start right then and make good money...”. Today, their interviewees told them, shops are closing, “unemployment is tearing through”, and those who managed to keep their jobs have lower salaries than before (2013: 18-19).¹⁸ According to Strangleman, Rhodes, and Linkon, these and similar memories lead workers to reflect on “what work meant, the values that were created by industrial labor, the bonds and friendships that developed among workers, and the way in which being embedded in work allowed one to mature and grow”. Consequently, workers critically assess the current state of the job market

18 See also Dudley (1994), Linkon and Russo (2002), Cowie and Heathcott (2003), High and Lewis (2007), K’Meyer and Hart (2011).

(ibid: 19-20). Therefore, as these three authors caution, researchers recording workers' life stories must confront the "problem of nostalgia": they must avoid the trap of a sentimental interpretation of the past while also "should not dismiss the ideas and experiences of ordinary people caught up in the process of industrial change" (ibid: 18).¹⁹

In the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, Sophie Gaston and Sacha Hilhorst conducted extensive research on "nostalgic discourses", noting that "a substantial minority – or even majority – of citizens are gripped by a kind of malaise, a sense that something is fundamentally rotten at the heart of their societies" (2018: 11). They aligned their research findings with the assertion of Andreas Huyssen, who views contemporary nostalgic feelings as a continuation of the trend from the modern period, a constant lamentation about the "loss of a better past", which included a secure environment, stable life frameworks, domestic culture, a clear flow of time, and enduring relationships. "Perhaps such days have always been a dream rather than a reality", wrote Huyssen, and Gaston and Hilhorst reiterated this to understand "the receptiveness of citizens to a politics of nostalgia" in the conditions of "de-territorialising and destabilising tendencies of globalization and its economic, social, and cultural consequences", which enhance "the value and resonance of idealised visions of 'home'" (2018: 24). They categorized the accounts they collected into territorial and thematic sub-sections. For instance, the British participants spoke about the "great", "golden" times and the loss of identity, mentioning that there were "thousands of jobs; loads of different factories, shipyards, coal mines", whereas "now

19 Pierre Bourdieu and his twenty-two collaborators published the book *La Misère du Monde* in 1993 (The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society, 1999 in English), compiling extensive excerpts from interviews with individuals who experienced the consequences of the collapse of industrial facilities. Each excerpt was accompanied by a brief commentary. The book received both approval and numerous criticisms (see, for example, McRobbie 2002).

there's nothing at all" (2018: 89-90). According to their interviewees, in the past, "the employees had the power, 'cause they would start at a factory on a Monday, and if they didn't like that job, go and get another job on the Tuesday", but now "it's employers who've got the power and [...] they've got the pick of the crop" (same source: 94).

In France, according to Gaston and Hilhorst, the French, who, as they claim, are more nostalgic than their neighbors, often referred to the "Trente Glorieuses" (the Glorious Thirty), the period between 1946 and 1975 when the country experienced rapid economic growth, and workers' labor was supported by a comprehensive system of protection and social security. The authors also mentioned a study that revealed the "endemic level of nostalgia" among French women who lost their jobs due to the closure of the Moulinex factory. Despite the physically demanding and often grueling nature of their work, they loved "their factory" and nostalgically recalled "the conviviality and the camaraderie [...], celebrating birthdays together and taking care of one another when someone had trouble keeping up" (same source: 138-139; see also Clarke 2015).

Elsewhere in France, Gaston and Hilhorst recorded expressions of disappointment regarding the quality of change. Similar to the British, the French told them that "there were vacancies everywhere" ("In our day, you would quit a job on Friday and you would have a new one on Monday"), whereas nowadays, workers "have to work, and to work", wages are lacking, and employers don't respect them; they are only interested in "making profits and good margins" (same source: 154). One informant stated, "My father worked his whole life at Citroën. He [...] came in" as nothing, "and I saw him go through all this education and training, and he left as an engineer. That was possible then" (same source: 159).

“The world is marching backwards into the future”, noted Edoardo Campanella and Marta Dassù in their study on Anglo-nostalgia from 2019 (2019: 1). Their focus was on the campaign for the UK’s exit from the European Union, but they argued that it was a “global epidemic”, where nostalgia and nationalism of chauvinistic leaders go hand in hand (same source: ix), producing “false myths, unparalleled political miscalculations, and rising tensions between nations”, as well as regression and pessimism among ordinary people (same source: 3).²⁰ Examining political issues and global “nostalgic nationalism”, researchers only briefly mention the threats posed by globalization and the exponential growth of technological changes, which, in their view, make workers, “particularly in the West”, long for the economic security and social mobility enjoyed by their parents (ibid: 2). In a study based on a sample of 10,885 Europeans, Catherine de Vries and Isabell Hoffmann found that 68% of them believe life was better in the past – Italians proved to be the most nostalgic (77%), while Poles were the least nostalgic (59%). Similar to Campanella and Dassù, the authors were not interested in the nostalgic aspects of economic changes, except when they influence the political beliefs of “ordinary people”. However, the finding that the only country from the former “communist bloc” where

20 Sophie Gaston and Sacha Hilhorst asserted that nostalgic expressions serve as powerful political tools for populists: “Much of the rhetoric of populist parties conforms strongly to this restorative form, premised on an idealized memory of the ‘past’ and/or of ‘home’, and a conspiratorial narrative about the role of external forces in threatening this vision”. They found examples of such appeals in both political right and left: Donald Trump’s pre-election slogan “Make America Great Again” (accompanied by appeals made by the future president’s propaganda machinery to “deindustrialized communities” in, for example, former mining regions, promising the reopening of mines) was compared to a statement made by Bernie Sanders during the 2016 campaign: “Forty years ago, in this country, before the explosion of technology and cell-phones, and space-age technology and all that stuff, before the explosion of the global economy, one person in a family – one person – could work 40 hours a week and earn enough money to take care of the whole family” (Gaston and Hilhorst 2018: 32-35).

a more extensive study²¹ was conducted and ended up at the bottom of the list of nostalgic countries is an intriguing discrepancy with the claim made by Olivia Angé and David Berliner that scientific studies on nostalgia are “paradigmatically ‘Eastern European’” (2015: 1). The results of the mentioned study stem from the content of the questions that De Vries and Hoffmann included in their questionnaire: we could assume that Polish respondents mostly linked their “nostalgic feelings” to economic issues, such as unemployment or the family income being below the national poverty risk threshold (cf. Topińska and Chłoń-Domińczak 2019), rather than problems like terrorism and the outcomes of migrations, which constituted the main focus of the survey. Moreover, the socio-economic profiles of the respondents support this assumption: those who were more nostalgic were the unemployed, individuals identifying with the working class, and those concerned about their economic status (De Vries and Hoffmann 2018: 10).

* * *

During the 1970s, when unemployment rates significantly increased in Western Europe and finding a job after education became increasingly difficult, youth unemployment became a political issue and the subject of numerous studies in social sciences and humanities (Grimmer 2016: 40).²² In 1985, the *International Social Science Journal* published a the-

21 In the description of their methodology, the authors claim to have researched public opinion in 28 European countries, but in the results, they only highlight Germany, Italy, France, Spain, and Poland.

22 However, relevant research can be traced back to 1933 when Marie Jahoda, Paul Lazarsfeld, and Hans Zeisel published the study *Die Arbeitslosen von Marienthal. Ein soziographischer Versuch über die Wirkungen langandauernder Arbeitslosigkeit* (The Unemployed of Marienthal: A Sociographic Study of the Effects of Long-Term Unemployment).

matic issue titled “Youth: Ways of life, work and employment, research trends”, and sociologist Kenneth Roberts began his contribution to the theme by stating that young people were “[i]n most Western countries” more educated and unemployed than ever before (1985: 427). In 2010, researchers on the *Youth, Unemployment, and Exclusion in Europe: A Multidimensional Approach to Understanding the Conditions and Prospects for Social and Political Integration of Young Unemployed (Younex)* project conducted around 130 interviews with unemployed young people aged between 18 and 35 in Germany (Cologne), Switzerland (Geneva), Sweden (Karlstadt), Italy (Turin), France (Lyon), and Poland (Kielce) (Lahusen and Giugni 2016: 7-8). They continued a series of studies providing evidence that the problems extended beyond the immediate lack of income. In the publication’s introduction, the editors pointed out that “[p]rocesses of socialization and individuation [...] evolve within a social context defined by limitations, deprivations, and stigmatizations”, affecting the social position and status of young people, their social relationships and roles, their beliefs, values, behavior, and identity. In some cases, they warned, social isolation, difficulties in finding meaning in everyday life, feelings of uselessness and dependence on others occur, and “extended joblessness increases the risks of being exposed to mental health problems sooner or later” (ibid: 1-3). Putting these assumptions to the test, the *Younex* project collaborators encountered testimonies that unemployment could be experienced, for example, as an opportunity to engage in activities not compatible with full-time employment. However, their interviewees often spoke of feeling boredom, a sense of meaninglessness, discouragement, confusion, and shame, leading them to accept occasional, temporary, and low-paying jobs for which no qualifications were required. Over time, they lost their (professional) ambitions with which they initially started their job search. “What kind of work would I take?

Housecleaning, handling work, dishwashing, anything, working in a fast-food restaurant, you name it”, replied a 23-year-old French woman (Chabanet, Cinalli, and Richard 2016: 22). If, despite accepting any job offered to them, they fail to earn enough for independent living, they are left with no choice but to seek emotional and financial support from friends or return to their parents’ home. However, sometimes even parents, “who have lived the full employment, the glorious years”, cannot understand that finding a job is not “a question of willingness”: “and you tell yourself, shit, even my parents see me like that, like a slacker” (Grimmer 2016: 23 and 51; Lorenzini and Giugni 2016: 84-85; Monticelli, Baglioni, and Bassoli 2016: 156). One could argue that the sample of around 20 interviews in each of the six cities conducted as part of the *Younex* project is insufficient for comparison. Therefore, despite clear differences in economic conditions in Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Italy, France, and Poland, as well as the cultural heritage of these countries, it is necessary to approach the conclusion of Marco Giugni and Christian Lahusen with caution. They concluded that parental pressure on their unemployed children is strongest in Karlstadt and weakest in Turin, and that the stigma of unemployment is more palpable in German, Swedish, and Swiss cities than in Poland and Italy (2016: 215).

However, the statements I have mentioned, from a 28-year-old and a 23-year-old from Germany, a 34-year-old and a 20-year-old from Switzerland, and a 26-year-old Italian, confirm and further clarify findings from other studies. A recent study in Sweden, for instance, observed an increase in mental health problems among young people in “insecure” labor market situations: “Unemployment, unsafe working conditions, and precarious employment [...] are increasingly common among young adults with all levels of educational background”, and “[t]hese types of circumstances have proven detrimental to mental health in population-based studies” (Toivanen et al. 2020: 2). The study includ-

ed women and men aged 18 to 35, employed in hotels and restaurants, departmental stores, transport services, social and healthcare sectors, and academia. All subjects had completed high school or had a university degree, and most of the employed did not work in fields related to their education. Researchers found that these jobs prevented any kind of planning, their interviewees were worried about not knowing if they could “make ends meet” (ibid: 6), lived in constant stress, lacked energy for change, felt like second-class citizens, and were constantly on the verge of depression (ibid: 7). Their “adaptation strategies” varied: often, in an attempt to “stay sane”, they searched for someone to blame for their situation (ibid: 5), some actively resisted the situation by rejecting the jobs offered at job fairs and trying new methods to find jobs, or explored alternative opportunities for meaningful interaction with other people, and ultimately, they heavily relied on emotional and material support from family and other “significant others” (ibid: 8).²³ Finally, the results of a study by the Institute for the Study of Labor in Bonn, involving 52,411 respondents in 15 European countries, indicated an increase in mental health problems among workers (Cottini and Lucifora 2010: 27).²⁴

23 Based on data collected within the framework of the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) for the years 2007, 2013, and 2020, it has been observed that Sweden has the highest number of workers reporting that their job causes or exacerbates stress, depression, and anxiety. More information on these data can be found on the official Statistics Explained page titled “Self-reported work-related health problems and risk factors – key statistics” on the European website europa.eu (accessed on March 31, 2023).

24 The European Parliament adopted a resolution on mental health in the digital world of work on July 5, 2022, with 501 votes in favor, 47 against, and 85 abstentions. The resolution calls on EU institutions and member states to recognize high levels of mental health issues related to work across the EU and commit strongly to taking necessary measures to prevent mental health problems, protect mental well-being, balance work and private life, and enhance social protection rights in the workplace (European Parliament: New resolution on mental health in the digital world of work (ioe-emp.org); accessed on March 31, 2023).

Conclusion

For Dominick Boyer, an American cultural anthropologist who conducted research in the former German Democratic Republic between 1996 and 2004 and published two works on the topic of post-socialist nostalgia (2006 and 2010), this “phenomenon” is heteroglossic (because “nostalgia is by no means the kind of “unitary language” or stable and internally consistent discourse”), indexical (which is why “it can never be entirely separated from ongoing politics of identification and belonging both inside and outside Eastern Europe”; 2010: 20-21), allochronic (because it involves a “temporal displacement [...] of Eastern Europe into the imagined margins of the urban, industrial, and scientific centers of Western European modernity”; same: 22), and symptomatic. European fascination with “postmodernism” in the post-1960s era, he wrote while discussing the latter characteristic, is nothing but a “repressed sign that modernity has become significantly plurinodal”, indicating that the intellectual productivity of countries from the “former European empire”, such as the United States, Japan, China, and India, has surpassed Europe. Therefore, Boyer argues, Eastern Europe was vital to Western Europe; it could assume that Eastern Europe was still politically, economically, and technologically dominant, so “Western European obsession with Eastern Europe’s obsession with the past” after 1989 should be recognized as a sign of fear that some Eastern European countries might surpass them in the “liberal global future” (same: 23). Boyer’s perspective on post-socialist/post-communist nostalgia also inspired Gediminas Lankauskas:

Perhaps, the current supremacy of nostalgia in post-socialist studies can be attributed to the emergence of a kind of nostalgic scholarly industry that yearns for a well-defined temporal “other” as an object of study. After all, the “nostalgification” of Eastern Europe makes this

part of the world appear more culturally “exotic” and temporally out of sync with future-oriented visions of Western modernity. Nostalgia, thus, helps orientalize the European East (2015 [2016]: 40).

No, Lankauskas didn't resort to Boyer's argument to discuss “nostalgia”²⁵ but to show that nostalgia in the humanities obscures the complexity of social memory of the past period, primarily those memories that indicate it was a burdensome past. These are the memories that the public discourse in Croatia (but also a significant number of scholarly texts) does not question. Even though this goes beyond the scope of this text, it seems worthwhile to consider his and Boyer's view of the damage caused by the “conceptual domination” of post-socialist/post-communist nostalgia (same source). Moreover, it would be essential to at least take into account (if not question) the quality of scholarly policies followed by relevant research of domestic scientists. A good example of this practice is the work collected by Sandra King-Savić, Jelena Tošić, and Sunčana Laketa in the book *On the Possibilities of Knowing the Balkans Otherwise*. In the introductory text, they state that the contemporary neoliberal academic community nurtures an environment that encourages mechanisms of competition and the development of a scientific-entrepreneurial ego, but also colonial-imperial knowledge production. For this reason, “local” scientists often choose strategies for developing their careers that, in many ways (sometimes without a clear awareness), “exoticize, (self)colonize, and (re)balkanize” (in print).²⁶ This collection continues a series of insights that for more than

25 In the text, he analyzes an interactive performance in “an experiential-immersive theme park located underground in the vicinity of Vilnius” that features “mock KGB interrogations, torture sessions, medical examinations, Soviet-era shopping, civil defense training, and so forth” (Lankauskas 2015 [2016]: 36).

26 For a critique from a slightly different perspective, see Obad 2014: 34-35.

three decades, but more strongly²⁷ recently, warn of “uneven power relationships in knowledge production” (Müller 2019: 534). For this occasion, the discussion on the concept of postsocialism will be particularly interesting due to its connection with the idea of post-socialist/post-communist nostalgia. Some authors believe that the concept of postsocialism can imply that something remains of what made socialism (so that this remnant could support efforts for a radical change in the present),²⁸ while others suggest that it has already lost its object, and from the beginning, it had “problematic” political implications because it emphasized/indicated (epochal) rupture/change. Therefore, according to Martin Müller, adopting this concept also signifies the rejection of all aspects of the socialist project, including those that could become part of the idea of political and social future, such as “common ideas of fair wages, redistribution, social justice, family protection, and gender equality” (same source: 538 and 544). Moreover, according to Müller, this represents the imposition of epistemological domination: the concept of “postsocialism” was initially a tool of “academic capitalism” that “sought to understand” what was happening in European countries that “ceased to be socialist”. Later, it became a criterion for evaluating texts according to “journal rankings, impact factors, and citations of publications” (same source: 544; cf. Pobjłocki 2009: 226 and 229-230). Therefore, it would be about an incentive that produced the concept of “post-socialist/post-communist nostalgia”, or the concept of postsocialism/postcommunism only gained strength with the addition of the concept of nostalgia, which had already been in the service of ideological conflicts in the West.

27 The debate between Michał Bukowski and Chris Hann was particularly fierce (*Anthropology of East Europe Review* 23/1: 194-200; 2005).

28 For example, see the statement by Felix Ringel in Potkonjak and Škokić 2022: 65.

Speaking about the “better past of work and employment”, women and men interviewed as part of the TRANSWORK project consistently expressed discomfort similar to what Sophie Gaston and Sacha Hillhorst documented (2018). “I don’t want to sound like a nostalgist for Yugoslavia”, said an interviewee from Zadar in June 2017 after claiming that his life was good before the “change”. “I’m not a Yugoslav nostalgist, but in Yugoslavia, things weren’t done this way”, said a narrator from Ilok with whom we spoke in early 2018 (see Bonfiglioli 2020: 14 and 121).²⁹ However, many interviewees in Western research also made similar claims: although scholarly research, both in the East and the West, tends to view “nostalgia” as a phenomenon with the potential to stimulate social change, not just as a sign of weakness, a falsification of history, a dramatization of discontinuity, or a reaction to the irreversibility of the past, it is most commonly seen as selective memory, referring only to a (smaller?) fragment of the reality as it truly was.

The political quality of nostalgia in the West is described using terms such as populism, nationalism, or post-Cold War psychosis (see, for example, Jacobsen 2020: 15-17). When recognized in economic terms, nostalgic feelings are labeled here as (post)industrial, (post)fordist nostalgia/affection, “smokestack nostalgia”, or simply economic nostalgia, attributed to the consequences of globalization and rapid technological advancement. Most often, however, the “nostalgic longing” is not interpreted as the end of the era of the “social compromise between labor

29 That it is a response to the prevailing political and, at the same time, prevailing public discourse was demonstrated by Kinga Pozniak based on research in the eastern, formerly industrial part of Krakow (2014: 186).

and capital” that provided relatively secure and well-paying jobs but rather as benign and trendy, referring to phenomena in popular culture from a certain decade of the last century.³⁰ On the other hand, in interpretations of statements by citizens of former state socialist countries, the concept of nostalgia is further marked by precise reference to the spatial and historical framework, and thereby the ideological quality of this “longing”.

Regardless of the reasons, workers from failed industrial plants in formerly socialist countries, if they speak of a better life in the past, are often stigmatized as “spoiled by the privileges of the socialist period” and “lazy” (Pozniak 2014: 186). As Tanja Petrović noted, in these areas, the concept of nostalgia is tied “to any positive reference to the socialist period” (2011: 323 and 2017: 24).³¹ “As an analytical tool”, Gediminas Lankauskas observed, nostalgia is “a catch-all, feel-good (‘homey’) concept that can be conveniently bent and stretched to describe a wide

30 Among the components of the “wave of nostalgia” observed in the United States in the late 1970s, Fred Davis listed nostalgia for “‘the fifties’, ‘the preTV Hollywood musical’, ‘The radio serials of the thirties’” and “‘the clothes fashions of the First World War’” (1977: 416). Many authors eagerly note such “nostalgia” in former socialist European countries, and it seems that editorial boards of various publications readily accept texts dealing with such “nostalgia.” For example, Andrew Roberts published an article in the journal *East European Politics and Societies* (Sage Publications) in which he “definitively demonstrates that post-communist nostalgia in the Czechia of today is a nostalgia for the popular culture of this time period [1970s and 1980s], and not for the regime itself” (Koleva 2022: 222). Probably this is the reason (or one of the reasons) why Daniela Koleva in her book *Memory Archipelago of the Communist Past* (Palgrave Macmillan) cited the works of Mitja Velikonja and Martin Pogačar, and not, for example, English-language texts by Tanja Petrović. However, Koleva noticed that Velikonja “runs into difficulties” in his attempt to maintain “the empirical level of the differentiation he suggests” between the two nostalgic discourses: cultural production and individual/group attitudes (2022: 225). However, whether it is “nostalgia for popular culture” of earlier periods (in both the “East” and the “West”), it is interesting to note that such “nostalgia” is interpreted as ironic and subversive mainly when it comes to Eastern and Southeastern European countries.

31 The same argument is made by Manuela Marin in her analysis of Romanian “post-socialist nostalgia” (2013: 63).

spectrum of memorial practices, including those that have little to do with nostalgia”: in this part of the world, “nostalgia” has become “one of those totalizing blanket terms that mean everything and nothing” (2015: 40). It “totalizes and simplifies” and “it often conceals more than it reveals” (same: 40-41).

The loss of a job meant the loss of a significant aspect of personal identity, as well as a loss of status in the community (Pine and Bridger 1998: 8-9; compare Lane 2016: 18). However, this is just one of many reasons why authors following Maya Nadkarni and Olga Shevchenko’s warning – that it could be the case that statements like the ones I have presented here involve the use of mimetic techniques to conceal their “bias” (compare Nadkarni and Shevchenko 2004: 506) – should reconsider the question in a different way, as Chiara Bonfiglioli did: “Why is socialism, in the eyes of many citizens formerly employed in industrial jobs, consistently equated with ‘normality’, namely, with good working relations, job security, state sovereignty vis-à-vis of the global market economy and a functioning welfare state?” (2020: 2) The same question, as we have seen, could be applied in the consideration of post-industrial (post-Fordist) habits, practices, and effects in general: “Across the globe, people are mourning an era that carved its indelible marks upon the affective topographies of entire populations” (Muehlebach and Shoshan 2012: 317).³²

* * *

32 However, as explained by Andrea Muehlebach and Nitzan Shoshan, some people mourn the promises of economic security and attainable aspirations, the feeling of prosperity, while others mourn the strong state, robust unionism, and the normative order of the heterosexual patriarchy, etc. (2016: 317).

Many published results of scientific research on memories of the “better past” in the East and West often overlook, among other things, the fact that the fundamental definition of the concept of nostalgia lies in the realm of “bittersweet” emotions.³³ There is no doubt that most excerpts from accounts of the past and present work and employment that I have selected from research results in the West and in Croatia reflect feelings of satisfaction and pride in personal and communal achievements, evoke feelings of security, unity, and solidarity, and express dissatisfaction with the current situation. The expressions of these feelings sometimes indicate the political beliefs of the interviewees, which could have been shaped before or during the “transition”/deindustrialization period. In any case (even if they are negative), they are politically biased. Therefore, if we decide to assess the political “bias” of the narrators, we must first answer the question of what we consider political “impartiality”. Furthermore, even if we recognize the feelings in the narratives of our interviewees about the “better past”, and even if we decide to call them nostalgic, we would have to acknowledge the discourse about facts, about the past as it really existed.

If we overlay this discourse with the concept of nostalgia (however “productive” it might be seen), we would disqualify its credibility (cf. Gilbert 2019: 15). Hence, without questioning the instruction that statements about “remembered history [...] are to be understood in its totality, by reference to the antecedent experiences of the group, and to the challenge the new situation of the group presents if perceived

33 Here, I provide an example of the definition adopted by Vanessa May in her influential text, which she borrowed from Hilary Dickson and Michael Erben: nostalgia is “a bittersweet emotion that comprises ‘a personal contemplation of a valued experience in the past... that one does not expect to have again’” (2017: 404; cf. Jacobsen 2020: 18 and Batcho 2020). Stuart Tannock and Daniela Koleva view (post-socialist) nostalgia as a “structure of feelings” (Tannock 1995: 453; Koleva 2022: 220; cf. Williams 2006).

against this background” (Bauman 1982: 7 and 2), or the assertion that every memory is fragmentary, transient, changeable, and unstable (Assmann 2006: 212-213; cf. Berliner 2005; Wilson 2014: 38), we have no reason to doubt that the father of the narrator from France worked at the Citroën factory throughout his working life, progressing from unskilled jobs to engineering positions (realizing “the Fordist dream of secure, decently paid work and strong welfare provisioning”; Dickinson 2016: 270; cf. Clarke 1992: 28; Muehlebach and Shoshan 2016: 318). Nor should we doubt that there was a “Servis” in the Šibenik TEF factory, a strong social measure for those who were not old enough to retire but were no longer able to work (cf. Bonfiglioli 2020: 48). In this context, a proposal by Sue Nieland, Kesi Mahendran, and Sarah Crafter, psychologists from the British Open University, is interesting: based on research they conducted in Scotland, they offered an interpretation of memories that opposes the populist “political mobilization of nostalgia”. These are narratives of “the Silent Generation”, people over 75 years old, “who have a living memory of World War II and its aftermath”, thus, in the words of the authors, a “real”, not “fictional past” (2023: 67-69). In this case, the memories were about a difficult life, poverty, and treatment of Jews that, the authors believe, could be opposed to right-wing “idealized visions of the past” in Great Britain, the United States, and “parts of Europe” (ibid: 76 and 68).³⁴ Indeed, could the same thought apply to memories (of work and employment) in European countries that were not capitalist at that time? Finally,

34 The extent to which individual authors distinguish “pleasant memories” and “nostalgia” can undoubtedly complicate the understanding of this text, especially considering the selectivity implied by both concepts (Assmann 2006: 212-213). I will mention just one example: in the text “Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory,” Gayle Greene suggests that it is possible to recognize the opposition between liberating and progressive feminist memory and nostalgia, which is reactionary/regressive. Feminist memory, Greene argues, works by summoning the voices of the past, opposing them, and tempting them, while nostalgia obstructs this process (1991: 292-293, 297-298).

would we label as nostalgic the statements of two Goli Otok prisoners referenced by Tanja Petrović?

* * *

In the end, comparing statements about work as it used to be in the “East” and the “West” offers a somewhat different perspective from the idea that “nostalgia” after socialism is the result of “transitional” stumbles, but also in response to Boyer’s and Lankauskas’s answers to questions about why the study of “post-communist nostalgia” has become so interesting to the scientific community. Indeed, in line with the view of these two authors, we could assume that the Western perspective in “encounters with the past” in the “East” less often reveals the characteristics of what is seen and more often follows beliefs that will soothe frustration on the domestic front. Also, there is no doubt that the “transition from socialism to capitalism” in the “East” has left a deeper and more acute mark than the end of the so-called “golden age of capitalism” in the “West” (cf. Ost and Crowley 2001: 2; Bonfiglioli 2020: 95-122).³⁵ However, research subjects in the “West” describe the past of work and employment in the same terms as those in the “East”, although the process of deindustrialization they experienced was not “crowned” by a change in the political system. Both groups easily found

35 Furthermore, it could be argued that the difference in the socio-economic context of socialist Croatia and capitalist Western countries, as well as the difference in the socio-economic context of socialist Yugoslavia and other socialist countries, raises questions. For instance, unlike countries in the socialist bloc, Yugoslavia experienced high unemployment rates. Additionally, there were significant differences among the former Yugoslav republics, but these, as well as the differences between the former “East” and “West,” do not correspond to the relevant differences in the socio-economic context of former European socialist countries, or questions related to changes in the “class structure”/social stratification, the advent of post-industrial society, and so on. These factors do not impact the argumentative line of this text.

jobs, felt pride in their workplace achievements, salaries were good or sufficient, and they could work for the same employer until retirement. Today, they say, problems are mostly felt by “ordinary people”: salaries are irregular or non-existent, employers are only interested in profit and high margins, they just cut, reduce, tighten, they “have power, and they’ve reaped the cream”. “Deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision have been”, observed David Harvey, “all too common. Almost all states, from those newly minted after the collapse of the Soviet Union to old-style social democracies and welfare states such as New Zealand and Sweden, have embraced [...] some version of neoliberal theory and adjusted at least some policies and practices accordingly” (2005: 3). The result, as he saw it while writing the book *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, led him to recall Lyotard’s description of the postmodern condition as a state where “the temporary contract” replaces hitherto stable institutions in, among other areas, spaces of professional, emotional, cultural, and political life (ibid: 4). After new forms of work and production shut down industrial plants, followed by institutional structures and relationships that shaped the identities of workers, as well as understandings of work and employment, new configurations of the “normal” emerged. However, earlier social relationships, practices, and values of work and employment continue to shape the imaginaries (including socio-cultural adaptations) of the unemployed or those employed in precarious jobs (Kwon and Lane 2016: 11).

Furthermore, contemporary research on the mental health of workers and especially young people entering the job market provides guidance for considerations of memories of arduous, exhausting, and/or poorly paid work in the socialist period, and for considering statements like one recorded by Chiara Bonfiglioli, where female workers, despite being ill, came to work in an effort not to lose the reward for their produc-

tivity (“which represented a substantial addition to the basic salary”; 2020: 135): if work during the socialist period was difficult and if the duration of the socialist period was accompanied by rising unemployment, did the change that occurred after 1990 enable easier working conditions, better salaries, and lower unemployment? Moreover, this is not just about “the unsettling lack of fit between one’s internalized dispositions and the new ‘rules of the game’” (Nadkarni and Shevchenko 2004: 509), especially for older people and those with lower educational qualifications, but also about depression and anxiety felt by younger and “more qualified” individuals, those who have managed (or could have managed) to adopt the rules or even values of the new economic order.

These messages, as well as many studies concerned with “working poverty” and labor market segmentation, open up another interpretative possibility, suggesting that recognizing nostalgia in statements about work and employment in the past and present, both in the East and the West (even when “nostalgic feelings and practices” are interpreted as potentially productive, prospective, reflexive, or progressive) could work in favor of the neoliberal “ideological hegemonic project” (Ward and England 2007: 11).

Challenging the credibility, rejection, or even ridiculing (cf. Creed 2010: 42) the facts about the qualities of previous work and employment models, thereby normalizing and/or promoting the idea of individualized and competitive, flexible and mobile, unpredictable, insecure, and sometimes risky work, could be recognized as “a new type of imperialism”, in the words of Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant. This imperialism is not only promoted by “the partisans of the neoliberal revolution who, under cover of “modernization”, intend to remake

the world by sweeping away the social and economic conquests of a century of social struggles [...], but also by cultural producers (researchers, writers, and artists) and left-wing activists, the vast majority of whom still think of themselves as progressives” (2001: 2).

Victoria Mateos de Manuel

Totalitarian Nostalgia in Slovene Current Curatorial Practices

King Ubu,

the editor of this book, Dario Vuger, asked us to write a chapter based on the conferences we gave on December 15th and 16th 2022. It should be a text of maximal 12,500 words, and “it may have an open-ended structure, it’s possible to write an essay and not exactly a scientific paper”.

I am very obedient. On these pages, I am going to make a free review-essay that departs from two photo-exhibitions that I visited in Ljubljana during summer 2022 and arrivals to Berlin. They work as *Denkbilder*. This is a concept that the philosopher Walter Benjamin developed in, among other texts, his Habilitation, entitled *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (1925). Professor Cornelius, whose assistant back then was Horkheimer, and Professor Schulz decided that Benjamin’s work was not good enough, and they denied their Post-PhD. They probably took that decision, because they were not able to understand the text, or maybe because they could perfectly understand it, but they

were jealous. You never know. For this reason, also due to his Frankfurt School colleagues, Walter Benjamin was not allowed to teach in German universities. This situation left him in a precarious job-situation. Nowadays, Benjamin's next generation critical theory colleagues only remember that in 1933 Nazis forbid Walter Benjamin to write in the press and that in 1939 he was denied his German nationality for having written for the *Muscovite journal Das Wort* (see Mateos de Manuel, 2021). Maybe his Frankfurt School colleagues were thinking that belonging to a Berliner Jewish bourgeois family was enough for Benjamin to survive in such a period. Maybe they were unconsciously cashing some kind of despotic revolutionary class tax. Maybe they hated that he was sensual, pleasant, and a player. You never know. You prefer not to know. When you begin to do some historiographical research on the Pyrenees groupscape of Walter Benjamin, you find horrible silences not only about his life but also about the ones of some of his companions. The photographer Henny Gurland, Erich Fromm's first wife, was also in that group. She achieved to arrive to the United States of America, and his son Joseph Gurland managed to develop there a successful career as a professor. Nevertheless, she died in unexplained conditions on a trip to Mexico in 1952 and her photos have simply disappeared, there is no available archive of her artwork and graphic journalism, just two small references in the archive of the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek. Before this 1940 escape, Benjamin already left his country several times. In 1925, he came to Spain to do some cultural tourism. In search of Baroque traces, he visited cities such as Sevilla and Córdoba (see González García, 2020; Mateos de Manuel, 2021). In 1932 and 1933, Benjamin came back again to Spain. This time Benjamin decided that he had enough of culture and travelled to Ibiza to relax and enjoy life among artists and fishers. Therefore, the question of who killed Walter Benjamin seems quite stupid, when not cynical. It would be more factual to ask who did not kill Walter Benjamin.

King Ubu, I am not writing this text in Ibiza. I am not even writing it in Sevilla or Córdoba. Surely, I am not currently writing this text in Berlin or in Frankfurt, where Benjamin's Habilitation was denied. I am writing this paper in a city called Logroño, where I have lived since January 2020. The text that I am writing has the form of an anachronic iconological diary. I have developed it from the initial handwritten notes and the photos that I took during a two-month length Interrail trip in the summer of 2022. I did the photos with a Xiaomi 11 phone, which I still keep inside a pink cover, and I wrote those initial notes on a notebook of the Spanish National Ballet. Rubén Olmo, his current director, gave a talk at the Nuria Truco Dance School in Logroño on March 18th 2022. The notebooks were a gift for us, the dance students.

The name of the first exhibition was "Going East. A visual journey into the new Easter Europe" (Photon Gallery), curated by Slavica Veselinovic and Martin Vegas (see: <http> 1). The second one was entitled "Folk Art between home and the world" (SEM), curated by Dr. Bojana Regelj Škafar (see: <http> 2). Both try to be analyzed from the Soviet-exoticization and romanticization found in Spanish psychoanalytical imaginary background, which is still strongly attached to the Civil War. The questions that directed my visit to these two exhibitions were the following ones. Are totalitarian aesthetics recognizable? Is there an East imaginary pattern for the Spanish viewer that connects the exhibited artworks? What would make totalitarian Aesthetics attractive for the Spanish spectator? Is there something that may be called Spanish viewer?

1 <https://photon.si/pflevant/going-east/?lang=en>

2 <https://photon.si/pflevant/going-east/?lang=en>

Although images of these two professional exhibitions are going to be crossbred with my own amateur photos, none of the suggested questions are going to be answered in the following free review essay. No one cares any longer about the answer to such questions. No one even cares any longer about the questions. Nevertheless, this proposal brought me to the unveiling of a brand-new contemporary research field, the field of Easthetics, and its first possible concepts or trends: minimal electro-totalitarianism / micro-totalitarianism, totalitarian vaporwave, totalitarian historiography / dystotalizing reading (*entnazifizierendes Lesen*), just do nothing (passivism or negative activism), easttimacy, easttalgic sex (*ostalgotischer Geschlecht*).

With my inexpensive Xiaomi 11 camera, my ignorance, and my clichés, I felt like a post-romantic traveler (see Merimée, 1989; Gautier, 1985). It was a way of cultural re-appropriation against historical aesthetic French privileges. In queer theory, such an action is not called insolence but rather a performative iteration (Butler, 1999, xxiv; Derrida, 1988, 315). More than an East aesthetic ascertainment, you, dear reader, are going to find an East retrospective creation, a cultural product highly influenced by the West. Hence, this writing is an artificial post-creation of the East.

What I try to show with this writing is that, due to the spectator's hybrid cultural view and the artist's international training in both Western and Eastern universities, the East is nowadays more an artificial stylized, orientalized, and exoticized concept or retrospective projection than an ontological category strongly attached to the reality of the countries that fall into that categorial hodgepodge. I must confess that I laugh when North Europeans come to my country to do sexual tourism because they find us exotic. For me, there is nothing more exotic than an East

German whatever the categories of exotism, Germanism, and East may mean. However, King Ubu, it is very difficult to afford the allowance of a white page, even if that is a constitutional right called freedom of speech. Do you know that Walter Benjamin, when expelled from university, lived at Prinzregentenstrasse? It is a very nice street from Berlin.

Minimal Electro-Totalitarianism / Micro-Totitarianisms

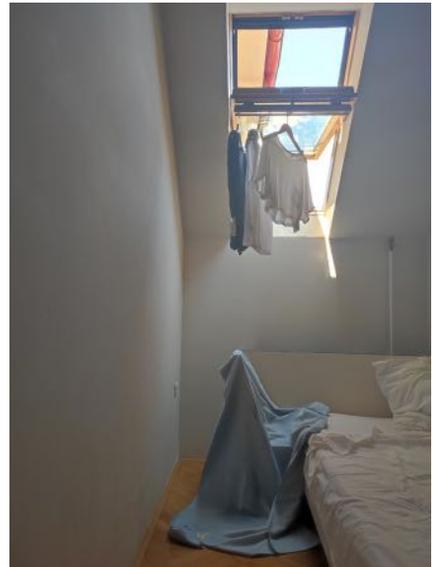
Ljubljana did not exist until July 20th 2022. Ljubljana began to exist on July 20th 2022. On July 20th 2022, I discovered Ljubljana on an interrail phone-map. I was sitting on a crowded train of backpackers, the kind of people who believe that freedom and discomfort are the same and only experience. They are, we are, not any longer existentialist in the original sense of the trend. Although freedom remains a negative value as it was in Camus, this negativity is not any longer understood as vacuum but as nuisance, as something that needs to be reminded through pain. People do not want any longer to practise freedom; they only want to experience liberation and to experience it for a while, to remember how freedom used to smell before going back to the cage. You can just be so anxious about liberation if you are constantly constrained. There are many people, who enjoy wearing very narrow but ostentatious shoes, such as high-heels, and they do it only for the sake of taking them off. Interrail made me realise that European backpackers are the kind of rational people who buy expensive ergonomic Japanese chairs to recover in winter by writing from how heavy and uneasy it was backpacking in summer. Ljubljana was therefore an event in the philosophical meaning of this term (*Ereignis*): Ljubljana was not there; an app brought it into life. It just appeared. It came to existence.

Google-searches and -results play the same role as the before/after Christ caesura used to do in historiography: events did not just exist; they took place before or after a religious subject. Nowadays events do not just occur; they come to Google's mind. Google is a materialized fantasy of the idealist primacy of the subject: if something does not exist for me, if it was not already depicted for me, that does not only mean that it is not there, it means that it has no existence. Example 1: a Tik-Toker has a higher grade of existence than your mother does, even if you physically see you mother every day and you have never met that Tik-Toker. Example 2: this electro-idealism causes that Gayle Rubin only exists if you live in Ecosia, but not if you live in Google. Example 3: something similar happens to



Victoria Mateos de Manuel (2022, December 10th).
16:39 [Screenshot of Interrail Pass]

Victoria Mateos de Manuel (2022, July 21st). 13:45
[Photo from a room in Ljubljana]



authors such as Pat Califia. Example 4: if you hate your father, you do not have to write him a letter like Kafka, you just need to browse all his photos from your Facebook and his grade of existence will decrease in this electro-minimal totalitarian system. Therefore, first symptom of contemporary minimal totalitarian experience: to remark that a small portable frame such as Internet works as a magic divine tongue that brings beings or entities into existence by placing them in a cyber-ontological space. Internet is not any longer a depiction or corroboration of reality; it is working as its creation. For example, I continuously ask myself if there are any feminists in the world and I see thousands of feminist webpages in internet. Is anyone there? Are you a bot?

Twitter is another good example of the social hegemony of this contemporary idealist perspective. Twitter is a Hegelian machine where people believe that they are changing the world not because they are doing something, but just because they are speaking it out. That is maybe the reason why everyone is nowadays a fifty-fifty ratio of laziness and loud-mouthedwriting. Democracy! (see: <https> 3); Chimichurri! (see: <https> 4); Estefanííííí! (see: <https> 5); Cállese, viejo lesbiano! (see: <https> 6). The tweetivist subjectivity seems as an idle that tries to hide his/her/its horizontal indolent vice through constant cyber-shouting. If you saw a guy lying down alone on the couch and shouting short sentences like “I want freedom”, “Coffee is expensive”, “My tailor is rich”, everyone would think that she/he/it is either tyrant or crazy. When people do the same on a mobile phone and they just change the gesture, the silent minimal

3 <https://photon.si/pflevent/going-east/?lang=en>

4 www.laylita.com/recetas/chimichurri/

5 www.youtube.com/shorts/70tgGfMOk4Q

6 www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5uqFk2EbLg

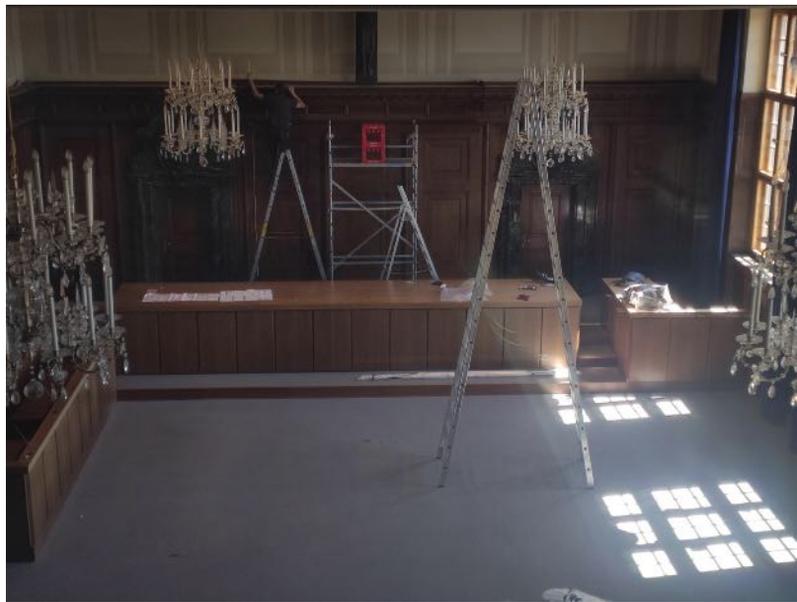
act of fingers sliding and tipping on a small screen, society thinks that that can only be activism. Insane or tyrant desire is nowadays performed technologically, what presupposes some sort of technical training and a supposedly democratic sphere where everyone has a voice and high culture (a museum) gets mixed with low culture (ravers). This technological training necessity and the apparently democratic exchange area that cyber social networks manage, make interventions in these networks seem reasonable and proper of high profile tasking, although this new activism would just be an expression of sophisticated tribalism.

On July 20th 2022, Ljubljana was the cheapest, nearest, and more practicable option to escape from Italy if you were trapped in Trieste due to a fire. “It is just going to last for a couple of hours”, said the security man at the Trieste train station on the previous afternoon. After a couple of hours, there were hundreds of confident tourists with their coffins and backpacks searching for an available hotel room in the city. I was one of them. 24 hours later, the problem was not still solved. Trieste showed a highly convincing method for hanging the poster “100% hotel occupancy rate”. Second symptom of contemporary totalitarian experience: when you are not able to grasp, who is in charge of a situation. Everything seems as a kind of conspiracy where you only have two options. You do not any longer expect justice; you can just decide if you leave, or you keep waiting in line. The first exhibition I visited in Ljubljana was a retrospective on the photographer Letizia Battaglia, curated by Francesca Alfaro Miglietti. A great exhibition, there was no queue to visit the underground gallery. This bureaucratic despair in Trieste was the same kind of experience I already had when I was trying in April to buy online an interrail ticket to escape from Logroño during the summer holidays. Spanish spring: I had bought a 60-day train ticket from July 1st until August 31st, not without having already argued before with an unseen bureaucrat who seemed hidden behind the computer screen. There was a half-price avail-



Karol Palka (2022, Polen). Untitled [Photography 40 x 60 cm]

Victoria Mateos de Manuel (2022, August 11th), 14:00 [Photo in
Memorium Nürnberger Prozesse]



able ticket, but the machine wanted to sell it for the complete price. In physical bazaars, where the bargain is openly accepted and it is even a compulsory tradition or a mandatory intersubjective structure, you are allowed to negotiate or even to complain when you feel cheated. Face-to-face swindle gives you a maybe absurd but also a small quantity of power. Following Friedan (2009), that is why women used to like going shopping when they could not do anything else. Shopping allowed them to change their uncomfortable and non-comforting political expectations into a visible attractive lifestyle or vital prêt-à-porter that was automatically gratifying and no longer dangerous. Maybe you cannot command, but you can always buy a 10-euro T-shirt where the word Power is written. The narcissistic capitalist restructuring of political struggles is quite effective in alleviating social discomfort and frustration. You can show off and get congratulations for a posted picture of yourself in a congress (staging politics), but you cannot post, you cannot assimilate into an object, the experience or process of hours of work it took you to get to that moment (doing politics). Unease is the raw material for power structures, which can be capitalized in at least two reification forms (Verdinglichung). You can use suffering as a tool for collective political capitalization, and therefore your business is called a political party or social movement. Or you can use suffering as a tool for individual profit capitalization, and therefore your business is called enterprise. The main difference resides in the deactivation and conversion style of unease, but the transformation of experience into a capitalist marketable object seems an unavoidable ontology, even for art.

On the contrary, when you are in front of a machine, you cannot feel cheated, because there is not any possible negotiation with a formulary. When you are in front of a bureaucratic form, you just need to adjust. Bureaucracy is an effective oxymoron, the optimal and most perverted expression of censorship because you are being denied, but at the same

time nobody as such is denying you. I propose to name this experience technical censorship: the subject is being censored, but there is technically no censor against her/him, it is just a matter of depersonalized hygienic unfit. Likewise, any kind of rage remains out of place when you are in front of a formulary. The feeling of fury or frustration can just stay unspoken as a ridiculous or childish symptom. It is senseless to yell at a formulary. Your anger seems as illogical as the rage of a fake computer specialist who tries to change the hardware structure of the machine through software aesthetical modifications.

Here we find again the first *modus operandi* of minimal or micro electro-totalitarian experience, where the human intermediary or person in charge has disappeared. Your problem is not a life or death one, but that triviality is exactly what makes you remark that, even for the smallest obstacles, there is a rigid hierarchical power structure and, at the same time, no one who belongs to that chain is in charge. Moreover, there is not

Kathia Nikabazde, (2022, Georgia). Young Lambs at Marneuli Livestock Market, Georgia [Photography 45 x 30 cm, 500 euros].





Marijana Gligić, (2022, Russland). Uranium Sky [Photography 60 x 40 cm, 1000 euros]

even the ontological space to bring it to words; your discourse just does not match the formulary structure, which makes you rest in the hands of the good will of an unknown (in this case, when I was trying to buy an interrail ticket, he was a worker called Schalk, from online Customer service Team).

Facing this perspective, which considers how totalitarianism works at a minimal or micro-level, supposes a theoretical displacement from the most relevant aesthetical historical considerations on totalitarianism, which used to focus on the physical predominance of colossal architectures, mass spectacles and hyperbolic spatial representations as predominant perceptive features of totalitarian aesthetics (Mosse, 1980, 2005). Those bombastic features have an impact on the subject at a visual level by making he/she/it feel surrounded by a power that is

physically too big to be confronted, whereas minimal features have an invisible influence on the everyday life experience. Even though their presence may seem trivial; most of them manage to remain unnoticed. In this sense, minimal totalitarianism manages to express the contemporary power of an ideologist (the second in charge) over the one of a general director. Through minimal totalitarian aesthetics, the subject feels disempowered not by feeling too small, impressed by architectural pomp and luxury, but by feeling attached and at the same time unable to communicate with someone, because power cannot be seen and the damages as such are too small or anecdotic to be taken into account.

How dare you, an adult subject, become extremely angry because someone did not answer a mail in the following two hours or sent just a certain emoticon as an answer?

Victoria Mateos de Manuel (2022, August 8th).
20:39 [Photography from Sowjetisches Ehrenmal,
Tiergarten, Berlin]



Taken one by one, those neurotic minimal dramas seem politically irrelevant. They can just be perceived as a problem, even provoke a diplomatic passive-aggressive crisis of people unable to directly and openly speak about the problems, when they are added, because all those minimal acts, when they are put together, destroy the subject by constantly reducing or undermining his/her/its self-confidence and possibilities of agency. Therefore, we need to talk about these 21st-century micro-totalitarianism.

Facing macro-totalitarian aesthetics, the sense of powerlessness in a micro-totalitarian system is double. De facto, the totalitarian experience takes place. Nevertheless, the subject does not feel allowed to protest because the expression of totalitarianism seems too small for making a scene, like facing an ant where you would just need to ignore or trample. An example of this Napoleonic micro-totalitarian power is the crowd in the sense of the film *The Naked Jungle* (Haskin, 1954). That naked jungle is exactly what the internet-connected mobile phone produces. The phone manages to control your life completely, but its control ability remains invisible or, even worse, laughable. The phone is the size of your hand, and you can very easily get rid of it. Nevertheless, it works as the same embarrassing addiction to a cigarette or an alcoholic drink. How can something so small, so insignificant, something that you can easily throw or break with your own hands, have such an amount of power over you? It may seem quite difficult to jump a physical wall. It seems ridiculous to be unable to quit from looking at the mobile phone. For this reason, you can sympathize with an immigrant crossing the border, but people laugh at the teenager who is being insulted in a social network. That is the heartless power of micro-totalitarianism. For this reason, the same people who may feel solidary for attending physical demonstrations do not think of themselves as murderers when they bully on the internet.



Irwin, *Transcentrala*, New York, Moscow, Ljubljana, NSK Panorama, color photo, 125 x 112 cm, 1997, photo: Michael Schuster. Two short videos on how the installation worked can be seen following these links: -

<https://youtu.be/4LgdgRCVd3s>
<https://youtu.be/C1Lj91rDsQQ>

Totalitarian Vaporwave

In this case, my micro-totalitarian problem was just about buying an interrail ticket on either around 700 or 400 euros and spending one single night in a 200 euro-room hotel. Therefore, my examples are a commercial bourgeois trivialization of the minimal totalitarian experience. Nevertheless, you can recognize in those incidental irrelevant experiences a small symbol of what powerlessness means and how far it can go in a society where no one seems to be in charge.

In German, its name is *Ohnmacht* (disempowerment): the encircling feeling of not doing something, because power (*die Macht*) in German comes from the verb to make (*machen*). In its etymological German sense, power is originally an experience about agency, about what you do, and not necessarily about recognition or visibility, or even about what you can or could do. At this point, there is a minute, but also a relevant, conceptual difference to the Spanish comprehension of power (*poder*), which comes from the verb *to can, to be allowed to, or to be able to*. In Spanish, it is not about your agency as such; power is about your ability or capacity of agency, as if power had more to do with the possibility or the available space for doing something (the potency), than with really the act of doing, creating, or working as such. *Power* in Spanish has more to do with having permission to do something than with *de facto* doing that something. Hence, there is a conceptual confrontation on what solving problems means depending on the language you live in. In German, you just need to act; to solve a problem, it is enough to do. In comparison to this, if you are thinking in Spanish, power does not mean that you do something, but just that you have achieved the permission or the possible space to act.

Powerlessness may have different causes. It may be due to a physical external barrier (a frontier, a wall). It may also be due to a sociological barrier, for example, an idea or *Weltanschauung* that is well established among the group you belong to, and this idea or belief works as a binding psychological net where you just can feel trapped because you are not able to think outside of the box, you remain fixed to a thought-structure. Nevertheless, powerlessness may also be a spectral intangible experience. I have called it *totalitarian vaporwave*. The subject experiences this atmosphere in the following way: you can go through the situation, but you cannot grasp it, because you cannot recognize or even see the people

or objects who are responsible for it. Hence, it does not make any sense to fight for change. The subject feels as if he/she/it would be practicing the exercise called *shadow boxing*, where the subject is moving and fighting against an imaginary rival.

If you find yourself in a totalitarian vaporwave, you are trapped in different senses. Following the chemical comprehension of matter, power has also diverse states. We could speak about solid, liquid, and even gaseous power. When you find yourself in a gaseous power structure, you can just rely on a negative sense of trust: resisting is a kind of letting it be, waiting, ignoring the atmosphere, and trying to do your own thing. Current totalitarian biopolitical power looks like an unbreakable structure because it seems like an iron prison but works as a gaseous framework; it has the hardness and robustness of steel because you cannot avoid it. However, it also has the overwhelming and ghostly presence of vapor, which expands unseen and unremarkable all over the place. If it is perfectly achieved, totalitarian biopolitical power cannot be seen in everyday life. It is something that surrounds or encloses the subject as an atmosphere or environment (*Stimmung*), but not as a space restriction (a closed door or a wall). You cannot grasp it, and if you have perceived it at least as smell, it means that there was a system failure. You cannot even open the windows to air the room, because the gaseous structure is simply widespread without any kind of physical containment. The subject cannot escape or get rid of it, he/she just learns to cope with it by ignoring to internally survive.

In this sense, totalitarian nostalgia matches the frightening perfection of totalitarian aesthetical structures. It is a kind of unembodied all-embracing or omnimode spirit, which is even lighter than a glass structure or border, where everything remains visible, because now it is just there, you are moving through it, hard to grasp or intangible like the lightest steam.



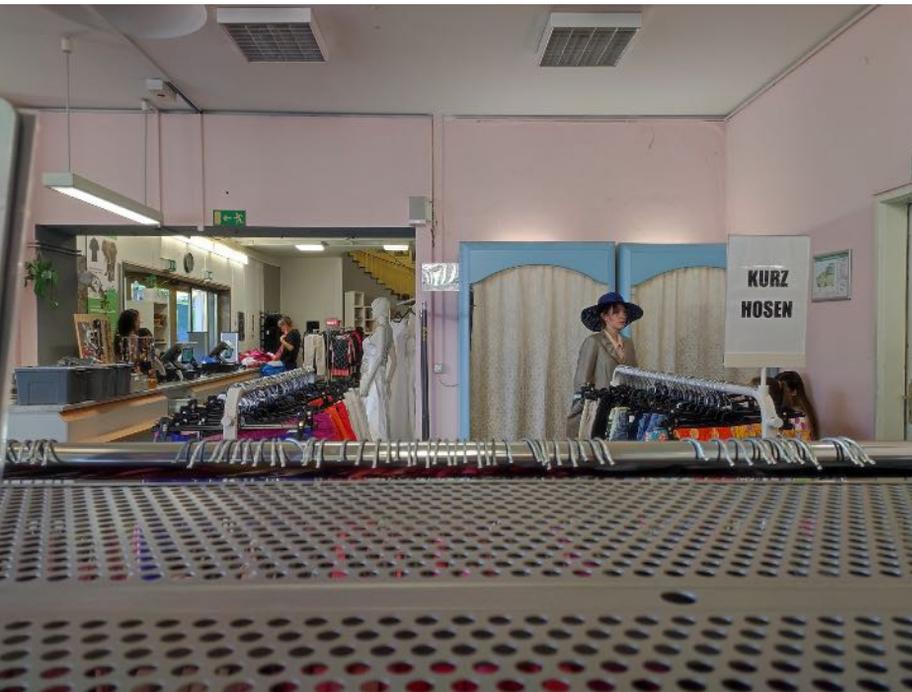
Victoria Mateos de Manuel (2022, August 8th). 21:27 [Photography of Denkmal zur Bücherverbrennung am 10. Mai 1933, Bebelplatz, Berlin]

Only the past, materialized as a colorful folk artistic projection on the gas, manages to make it visible. This bucolic past brings it to vision or gaze in an aesthetically pleasant way, as a high-culture satisfying memory, as a playful meeting with the past. Your only survival option is to play (*mitmachen, die Mitmacht*) or to ignore it (*um-machen, hindurch-machen, die Ummacht*), to get used to it until you stop thinking about its presence. And here comes the unexpected consequence: totalitarian biopolitical power ends to stay and anchor itself to society because subjects begin to experience it as Kant's metaphor of the pigeon. They think that totalitarian gaseous structure is not any longer, what restricts the flight of the bird, but what allows it. As if it were fresh air, they cannot any longer imagine themselves living outside the vaporwave. They are even willing to make it visible, colorful, dancing, and bucolic to enjoy it, to feel that they do not exist in an empty space or anguishing nothing, but belong

to a surrounding tradition that comprehends them. The totalitarian vaporwave can even begin to be understood as a desirable ecosystem: the subject starts to feel prison not as a restrictive confinement, but as a protecting house.

If you decide to play, you fall into the aesthetic deactivation strategy of vintage aesthetics: the past is not any longer a harmful remaining weapon, it is transformed into a cheerful prêt-à porter outfit. Harm is what you try to hide or what society does not allow you to show unless it is transformed into a spectacle or it is politically useful. To speak up against harm is nowadays even seen as a vulgar self-devaluating visibility strategy or an expression of unacceptable selfishness. “Everyone suffers!” – expresses the collective unconscious – “your suffering is not more important than my suffering” – as if society had laid its founda-

Victoria Mateos de Manuel (2022, August 10th). 19:00 [Photography of Friedrichshain, Berlin].





Victoria Mateos de Manuel (2022, August 10th) 18:04 [Photography of Friedrichshain, Berlin].

tions on a public resentful competition. Spoken harm can even be seen as low-cost childish poignancy. The despotic irony, even cruel cynicism, is socially sensed as proper or mature, as the distinguishing touch of a suffering high-profile bourgeois personality. You feel, but you should always remain distant from your own feelings, being able to laugh about misery, even about your own.

In an international scene disenchanted from politics, vintage mode is the speaking strategy that remains feasible for those who want to perceive themselves as surviving innocents, when they are perhaps just naïf people with no strings attached. Vintage clothing would be that innocuous silent of harm that you are allowed to show in the public sphere. Contemporary European people, those who do interrail, want to play mums and dads, but do not want to be parents. They want to remain in an *as-if-state*



Victoria Mateos de Manuel (2022, August 21st). 17:25 [Photography in East Side Gallery, Berlin]. A short video on how this installation worked can be seen following this link: <https://youtu.be/2P6LE-bLrz0M>

such as the one NSK proposes. People want to wear a soldier uniform for the sake of sexy-power without the bloody responsibility of war. Past is transformed into a teenager role playing game that manages to keep the bubble-atmosphere of a city as if it were an amusement park where trauma did not any longer play any social or individual role. Vintage is historical chic. Collective memory is trauma. People want to hear stories of self-help or self-realization, but people do not want to hear victims.

Intercourse: Fable of a Tied Dog

Subtitle: on how the traumatized subject remains attached to trauma.

A traumatic experience may represent a short moment in someone's biography, but it works as a turning point. The traumatized subject begins to rewrite his/her/its life from that turning point. Every kind of sense-giving remains attached to that moment or experience. In literature that is called *in media res*: you begin to narrate not from the physical start of the history, but from a point that is in the middle. The literature gender of Homer's *Odyssey* is therefore trauma and not epics.

Trauma works as a psychological narrative before/after Christ's caesura in someone's biography: an unconscious there (*unbewusstes Da*) where writing begins. Everything, even the experiences that happened before that moment, begins to have a new sense attached to the traumatic experience. Auschwitz survivors did not write about Auschwitz, they wrote from Auschwitz. Not only what happened after Auschwitz belonged to that experience, but also the sense of every previous memory was attached to that later one. Therefore, the possibility of narration is stolen from the victim. I do not agree with Adorno when he said that it was impossible to write poetry after Auschwitz (see Ibarlucía, 1999). It is just that every word, even silence, survived but remained poisoned like contaminated water from a well. The well is not nowadays dry; it is just that there is no longer fresh water.

En aquel instante yo comencé a llorar desesperadamente: nunca más volvería a ver a mi madre, a la que tanto quería. Y seguí llorando hasta que el hambre, el frío, la enfermedad y todo tipo de sufrimientos fisi-

cos y psíquicos terminaron por secarme las lágrimas al cabo de unas semanas. Todo se agotaba dentro de mí, incluso el llanto.

Nunca, jamás en mi vida por muchos años que pueda llegar a vivir, olvidaré aquella primera noche. Ésa es la noche que nunca podré superar... (Friedman,1995: 45).⁷

European academics are nowadays obsessed with memory: we must not forget, we must remember. The problem I find here is that they use a fake-concept for this obsession: when they say memory, they are just pointing out trauma; they are indirectly speaking about the taboo, the victims. Memory is useful for those who were not traumatised, for those who are not traumatised. That is the only reason why they could be afraid to forget. Many victims are just willing to have that peaceful awareness moment where they could remark that trauma had shortly disappeared from their heads. “*Edifice* is a visual journey to a time most people like to forget” – writes the photographer Karol Palka to present one of her works. When states try to rearticulate society after violence, victims begin to be understood by the state and a wide part of the society as part of the problem. Victims remain only useful when the conflict is wanted to endure, because they show how bad persecutors were and therefore, they are a political visibility instrument. When a state decides to move

7 “In that moment I began to cry desperately. I would never see my mother, whom I loved so much, again. And I continued crying until hunger, cold, illness, and every kind of psychological and physical suffering ended to dry my tears after a few weeks. Everything, tears too, was drying up in me.

Never in my life, even if I live for a lot of years, will I forget that first night. That is the night I will not be able to overcome.” [translation from Spanish to English made by the author/writer of the text]

on or to turn the page of a conflict, victims begin to be hidden. They are not any longer politically useful, they are a living reminder that you cannot decorate in a symbolic way. On their damaged bodies and souls, you cannot place flags, slogans or whatever as people does in many silent tombs that were transformed into spontaneous memorials. You can dress a cemetery, but you cannot dress a victim. States and society do not really want to remember pain; they just want to remember in a platonic sense of this action, as if traumatic experiences could be openly spoken as a far and harmless unembodied idea. States need past as a legitimation instrument for the present, as a psychoanalytical time-displacement or pre-recorded strategy (*differánce*) for dissidents or critics: you cannot

Emilia Stanišić, (2022, Russland).
Ida [Photo 45 x 30 cm, 300 euros]





Allen Jones' *Table* (1960s) and *Green Table* (1972) in Allen Jones Retrospective at the Royal Academy London, November 13th 2014- January 25th 2015. Image and information taken from Exhibition Review "Allen Jones RA at the Royal Academy – 13 November 2014 to 25 January 2015 , London Visitors" (wordpress.com)

Speak about the present, but you are allowed to place your critic on the 30s, the 60s, or the 90s. You are allowed to speak about memory when your testimony is useful, when the past is not any longer harmful, or when the past has managed to transform itself into an economical resource (capitalist exoticization and romantization of totalitarian governments). Just leave the present quiet and remain nostalgic. That is the slogan.

Freedom is a negative value: an awareness of nothing. At least that was its meaning in existentialist philosophy. Some people need the chains to remember that negative value. That is why they remain four-legged like Stanisic's girl. When dogs remain tied for a very long time, they may experience a first moment of relief when the belt is opened, but after a few minutes they will ask for the belt again. "I do not want to experience freedom! I want to miss freedom! I just want to experience liberation!" – they seem to think. If the subject is free, he/she/it does not know any

longer what to do, he/she/it does not have any longer references. A limit is not only a barrier, but also a reference, even a goal to achieve, a motivation, and sometimes even an excuse that poses an oppressing problem outside of yourself. When nothing works, everyone shouts in academia “It’s capitalism!”, while they are hindering at the same time their party- and congress-comrades.

Totalitarianism offers a narcissistic kind of submissive freedom: it is not the freedom of choosing (*Just do it*), but the freedom of not having to choose (*Just do nothing*). For this reason, you find activism in capitalism and passivism in totalitarianism. They give you a fixed menu; you do not need to stay in front of a buffet; you do not need to educate your appetite; you do not even need to develop a quality buffet. That is at least how totalitarian propaganda makes it appear. Submission will make you attractive, and it may give you a powerful role in society. At least in Spain, if you want to make a career and be socially successful, the most important thing is not what you do but what you do not do; you do not need to choose, and you must not develop any private initiative, even if it brings something good for the society, you just need to let yourself be placed. The negative value of freedom turns out to mean only insecurity and discomfort. What ends up being enjoyable is the melancholia of freedom, like the remaining nostalgia of an unsuccessful relationship. It is too hard to make a relationship work. It needs too much energy, and it is not aesthetic. It is easier to drink up the frustration of a broken heart. It is even more poetic and sexier to drink alone in a bar than to gain weight and discuss everyday-life supermarket trivial subjects with your wife/husband. “Darling, should I buy the eco-toilet paper?” That is the *WhatsApp*-reality of marriage.

Stanišić’s woman in dog fuck-style is a suitable allegory of that kind of submissive soft power of bureaucracy. There is no escape, but if you let yourself be done, manipulated, placed at a useful location for the state,

you will at least succeed in that kind of effortless abandoned sexy role of the 19th-century *femme fatale* victim, the so-called fallen woman (Bornay, 1990; Nead, 2015). You just need to be lazy, passive, and obliging/servant. Just do not fight, do not oppose yourself, you just need to trust the state as if you were a mystical thrown in the middle of an ocean who believes that you would be able to arrive at the coast not by swimming but by going along with the tide. Totalitarian God will bring you to the appropriate harbour, just like the whales die washing up on the beach. By the same token, you manage to succeed and be socially recognized (*Anerkennung*) by adjusting to the architecture of power: you are allowed to remain as a sexually desired object on the top of the desk if you remain a low-profile anonymous servant. That is the aesthetic contradiction that the lack of democracy manages: it makes enslavement totally desirable.

Nevertheless, the aesthetic power of submission is more complex than the way Allen Jones materialized it in his sculptures. When you see an Allen Jones sculpture of a furniture-girl, you feel attracted-repelled because you can directly sensually perceive the oppression. In that openly exposed contradiction, you discover pleasure as an ambiguous experience. It is annoying because it is clearly morbid: you are explicitly participating in sexual bondage, you are invited to use the woman as part of the furniture, and you are allowed to feel like an available piece of furniture, which is voiceless, will-less but equally desired, useful, and meaningful.

In comparison to this, Stanišić's image is less disturbing. For this reason, and that is the paradox, it speaks up perversion louder. It manages to communicate totalitarian propaganda in a hidden perfect biopolitical way. You are no longer an Allen Jones' furniture-girl who is reduced to an object. You seem to have surpassed the ontological condition of the useful trophy-wife in order to use architectural power (the bureaucratic desk) in favor of yourself. In Allens' fetishist clear representation of the

oppressed individual as an object, as a spectator you grasp that the subject and therefore the will is nullified. In comparison to it, in Stanisic's photography you remark an ideological displacement: the subject and the object are again split, and therefore the bondage-phantasy achieves a better identification-process with the public, who can imagine themselves equally powerful (being on the desk) and submissive (remaining effortless, question-less, and trusting open). It short-circuits the submission allegory: it is easier to imagine a maid kneeling on the floor, than to imagine a maid kneeling on the throne. Stanisic places the submission not on a submissive place (the floor, which directly means something underneath), but on a power architectural structure (a boss-desk). This experience of passive power is expressed as a visible and unavoidable duty: you are on the desk, you are placing yourself on the labour architecture of the bureaucrat, staying in a submissive position but at the same time in front of him/her/it; you are even occupying the whole desk. He/she/it cannot ignore you if he/she/it wants to continue working. Even if he/she/it ignores you and goes back home, he/she/it is going to find you at the same place the next morning making the same doggy-style position. That passive availability and unavoidability is exactly what allows you to get on the table instead of having to fight against the bureaucrat who is sitting behind the desk. That makes you believe that you have a minimal gesture of power in society, even if you remain submissive and depersonalized, without showing your expression, on the bureaucrat's desk as if you were a human scale hard stamp that occupies the whole writing space.

You need to fight so much, so longer and so constantly to get the same or even a worse labour result than the one you could afford with many, long, and constant two-minute blowjobs to the right person, that everyone prefers to save time, whatever that means. Let other people be in command; I am sorry, but I do not have the time. "It's not about ethics, it is just economy!" – feminists, pseudo-feminists, and antifeminists shout



Anton Polyakov (2022, República Moldava Pridnestroviana). Untitled [Photography 45 x 30 cm, 250 euros]

in academia while they hinder their party and antiparty-comrades. Be effortless and have an anti-nike attitude: *just do nothing*. Profit from passivism, it is your only chance in a totalitarian society. That would exactly be the opposite role of capitalist constant competitive work (*just do it*), where you need to impress and show constantly strength, distance, and a provocative independent fitness attitude. Is it maybe greed the emotion that moves capitalism and envy the one that preserves totalitarianism?

Suddenly, a current unexpected paradox occurs, everyone realizes to be as much exhausted of remaining standing as of standing kneeled. Ethics disappears. The rivalry is even too strong for doing the right nothing and transforming yourself into the right kind of successful submissive. Clever business successful high-class women search for a master or a mistress among anti-capitalist BDSM informal networks. They are so exhausted from fighting actively or passively, that they just want a clear simple affordable everyday life order; the same clear simple affordable

everyday life message that disturbs the romantic melancholy of the looser middle class. “Darling, should I buy eco toilet paper?” That is a successful *WhatsApp* message for a business high-class woman. Psychoanalysts and supermarket cashiers should begin to understand how important the peace of the world can be in a sexual reading of Marxist class conflict.

Mistreatment and abuse relationships have a similar structure to this kind of totalitarian pleasure: victims get attached to the persecutor because at least they mean something for someone. They understand themselves as the ontological product of a foreign language that they are not able to speak until the unknown mother tongue has given them a meaning. Without the persecutor, they feel empty and therefore worthless signifiers. It may be not only fear but also masochist narcissism: it is better to be an object for someone than to be nothing at all. Mistreatment relationships seem so difficult to leave because they have the structure of an endless spiral where all the roles are already given, and you just need to let yourself be placed into the circle; you just let yourself fit in that karma circle of romance-fight-reconciliation waiting for the moment of sweetness again to arrive. It may be exhausting to remain always abandoned and dropped, but at least it is an exhausting-known where you can recognize the pattern. We prefer to suffer instead of vacuum. We prefer guilt to solitude. We prefer closed childish meanings to the lack of sense. We prefer defeat as effort.

Totalitarian Historiography/ Dis-totalizing Reading/ *Entnazifiziertes Lesen*

In September 2022, when I went back to Spain, I tried to learn something about Ljubljana. Something serious. Something, that afforded

to be called *expert academic knowledge* in order to present a paper which seemed reasonable in an international hybrid congress on nostalgia. You know that you belong to an academy, that you are or remain attached to it, even if you do not currently work in a university, when you remark that your writing has been unconsciously interweaved to academic publishing criteria. Nobody is any longer pushing you against a kind of writing structure. Nevertheless, there is an inner automatism towards quoting, towards using currently debated bibliography, towards regarding a logical and dialogical text structure, towards presenting arguments rather than experiences, towards self-censuring your speech in the form of silences, euphemisms, and reformulations, towards proposing something acceptable for the academic community (something strategically intelligent or simply snob), towards being able to write but not writing at all. Following the current academic publishing criteria, you should not leave the common places, and at the same time, your text should not sound vulgar but rather innovative and difficult to understand. That is the current sense and usefulness of academic quoting: it manages to give an apparently solid structure to vanishing smoke.

For example, if I wanted to place this text in the so-called critical academic sphere, I should just begin by posting here some recent published papers of *Radical Philosophy* or another alternative but fashionable and well established outsiders-inside journal (Walsh, 2023). That would make my text sound as the one of a cool independent *enfant terrible* researcher and not as the one of an academic loser who pays her bills working as a schoolteacher even if she could afford to live from her parents for some time while enjoying a fake self-employed 400-euro associate lecturer position in the university. In some countries, daddy has a proper noun (Fulanito, Menganito, Perenganito, etc.). In other countries, daddy has a technical name (Harz 4). Therefore, in current academies, there are lots

of sugar babes, but no one wants to talk about this issue, Post-docs still prefer to say *precarity*.

I was born in an always-catholic conservative, first proletarian, and later middle-high class heteronormative family of one of the PIGS countries. This means that people in my family can combine *cocreta*, *Nora Roberts*, and *Tomás Moro* in a one-and-only sentence. I never belonged to a political party or a religious group, even if I was invited to belong to both more than once. From the orthodox right Catholics, I prefer not to speak, it is better to learn how to play guitar. Additionally, I cannot manage to move correctly among the pseudo-left posh institutional well-established humanities groups in the country where I was born. I hate their perfectly well-hidden racism and classism: many of the so-insulted *voxeros* are just *charnegos*. Due to their daddies' social position, while they afford to live long term or even buy small cool flats in the most gentrified European city-centres, they usually accuse conservative rural unconsciously Stakhanovite workers like my parents of having bought one single flat in a nowadays posh suburb of Madrid. My family is also marked for having paid for a private catholic school for their children. Their money sounds dirty because they did not give it for aesthetic progressive purposes. In Spain, you are allowed to rent five flats and be considered an acceptable left-wing socialist if, at the same time, you read *El País* and live in Usera. But do not try to afford a single flat in Pozuelo and read *ABC*. My family is therefore tasteless, unflattering, and loud. And it is good so.

Although my parents' house is full of that kind of shit, reading and being close to art have not helped us to improve our social image. We may have culture, but we are not bourgeois. We may have money made from work, but we are neither proletarian. My parents' knowledge appears to be low valued for one reason: they did and do not want to deconstruct

themselves. They just want to use their money functionally and hegemonically for absurd things like 3x2 cans of tuna, petrol for a Volvo, and an opera season ticket for Real Theatre in Madrid. If I ventured to talk about academic and political corruption in my country, someone could even accuse me of victimization and unconscious selfishness because of my European higher position in the international privilege pyramid. For this reason, it is better to talk about my family's gastronomic trifle and taste.

The point is that you need to fit in when you belong to the academy and want to have a labour future. Sadly, the academy is still made for aristocratic old manners, for people used to walking on eggs without breaking them, for people who like walking on eggs. You need to be constantly tiptoeing as a ballet dancer, not even as a high-heel stripper. It is uncomfortable and exhausting without being intellectually, emotionally, and materially enriching. Anything can go wrong at any moment: a commentary, a gaze, a movement, a you-do-not-know-what. I usually wear DrMartens. I need to boil the eggs before I can turn back to the academy. But there are too many eggs, barely water, and no camping stove. Scrambled eggs are still here just an eccentricity for breakfasters in an expensive weekend hotel.

Papers, congresses, and PhDs do not have any kind of value outside of the academy, and they can even damage labour mobility and freedom. Your university career at an international level depends on that capability of adjusting. Academics are getting their first steady jobs when they are around fifty or sixty years old. Too many people need to sign recommendation letters for scholarships, prizes, contracts, research, and teaching residences, and those people are also going to be the court of your future senior positions. If you have done international training, there are certain hints to recognise the grade of corruption in the institution where you

have arrived. One of these is the age of reaching a public stable academic job. If someone has been made stable in the academy when he/she/it is around thirty or even younger, there is a trap, someone is cheating. The academic chain is currently very well established. Unless someone lets you jump all the bureaucratic artificial criteria made for the social and economic control of current academic masses, you are not allowed to be a *rara avis* with a full-academic salary. And even if you are allowed, that differential privilege has costs.

Indeed, the most radical labour position nowadays seems to be trying to afford, sustain and improve your job position just by means of your own work. Were Adam Smith or Karl Marx thinking about this when they considered the topic of private initiative? Is it nowadays so radical and dangerous to desire to live from your own work without taking part in corrupt relational labour nets? Is it nowadays so asocial understood to want to work without having to get dressed up as a Minion with your upper boss during the labour schedule? Is it so strange and uncomfortable when workers do not want to share their free time and hobbies with bosses and co-workers? Can you understand that I do not want to share my holidays with the people I work with? That I do not want to play tennis with my boss during the weekend? That I do not want to have dinner with him and his family? Is it nowadays impossible to keep the public and private spheres separated? Why should I write a decade after the existence of Betty Friedan or Kate Millet as the first soft or hard skill line of my curriculum that I am a mummy-wife or a daddy?

Academy no longer has to do with Tonnies' concept of society, where law among other criteria structured the social relationships. Academy has nowadays more to do with Tonnies' concept of community and Mauss' notion of gift (Marinas, 2018; Mauss, 2009; Tonnies, 1979). I am not

hopeful, but I am also not nostalgic. It was not better in the 20s of the previous century. Max Scheler achieved his professorship not due to his research, but just because Konrad Adenauer offered him an academic post in the University of Cologne while he was mayor of the city. This decision had regrettably nothing to do with a quality-based selection of personnel, it was just that Scheler's research positions were near to Catholicism (Henckmann in Scheler, 2000, 15). When you use the word *ideology* rather than *corruption* to explain this kind of labour situation, the decision, being near to despotism, achieves to gain instead a respectable atmosphere of humans who exchange and promote ideas rather than exercise power and control institutions of knowledge production.

When you try to academically write in a foreign language, you even pay for a professional translation. English academies like having Gloria Anzaldúa as an object, but not as a subject of research. *Chicanism* is just comfortable and profitable when you manage to make it a topic explained in Oxford or Cambridge high-profile English. My *Chicanism* is an *Iberism*, which makes the situation worse. My corrupted tongue is not allowed in a frontier poetry reading regarding the Pacific, and it is also not allowed in Instituto Cervantes. My Spanglish may sound uncultured, may sound cheap, but it is not allowed to sound oppressed. When you try to academically write in a foreign language, your considerations must seem adult, also expressed in a perfectly adjustable and precise vocabulary, lacking foreign language stammering. What for? No one is any longer interested in reading papers, even less if those papers come from people who do not have a powerful academic position, because you have therefore nothing to exchange in the academic system. Read Mauss if you are unable to listen to this. Texts are no longer made for reading, but for quotes, which is the contemporary exchange coin in cultural hegemony-battles. In the international office of academic foreign currency, you cannot exchange

an Arendt for a Zambrano, even if they cost comparably. In this sense, the university is nowadays more that kind of a gaseous surrounding state of mind than simply a job position. Even if you leave university, the academic chain stays as a ghost which you need years, when not to forget, just to ignore. The academic chain remains as a kind of watermark. It is only visible to the ones who are able to put the page against the light. That is the kind of draft that positivist social engineers and business administration experts do not still understand: even if you have removed the barrier, the barrier print remains. It is very difficult, when not possible, to repair an academic soul.

Therefore, September 2022 totalitarian fact check: I do not work in the academy, I belong to the academy. Therefore, in September 2022 first and absurd knowledge decolonial attempt: I rejected the university library and went to one of the two available public libraries in Logroño. I reject to embody the academic specialised spectatorship and try to belong to the so-called critical mass media-educated audience. I want to feel cultured without refusing laziness, I want to de-academise myself, and I want to publish expert knowledge without reading experts. As it happens with artworks, whose aesthetical status depends on whether they were placed or not in a gallery or museum, do books increase or decrease their academic value if they are found or not in a library? In which kind of library do books confirm their belonging to high culture academic canon standards? 2021 I sent my academic books *El silencio de Salomé. Ensayos coreográficos de lo dionisiaco en la modernidad* and *Coreoteca. Un archivo de filosofía de la danza* to Free University Berlin. They still do not appear in the online catalogue. They were very gentle; they wrote that they would be of students' interest. In this kind of absurd experiment, I discovered the sort of publishing that arrives to general and not necessarily specialized audiences in small Spanish cities.

Balkans are a known topic in Spain due to the Balkan wars and the role the back then Spanish government played. There should therefore be at least something available on the ex-Yugoslavia regions, I thought. There were no books on Slovenia as such. I just found two books on the Balkans, whatever that geographical category may mean. Both available books were written in Spanish.

My first reading attempt was a physical encyclopaedia of the Spanish 50s. I was firstly searching just for some facts: how many nations or current countries belonged to Yugoslavia (1918-1992) and what were their names? I found a traditional encyclopaedia with lots of volumes that had been waiting for years on shelving. There was dust coming out of the pages when you opened it, pages seemed like a desert waiting for rain, dried and destroyed by haze. It was impossible to find that information. There was not any geographical information; pages lost themselves on anecdotic quantitative facts on industrial production and other economic data. The main message was to understand that the country was working independently of any kind of history. The main training was to take an encyclopaedic text as a ready-made. You can certify the stabilisation of a dictatorship when every quote and every reference is emptied from its original content and just appears as raw material for publishing stuffing appropriation.

I found the answer to these questions in a 1999 book. I arrived to *Historia de los Balcanes* (History of the Balkans), written by a Spanish diplomat called Pedro Voltes. He wrote that “marshal Tito said in 1945 that Yugoslavia had 6 republics, 5 nations, 4 languages, 3 religions, 2 alphabets and only one political party” (Voltes, 1999, 15). Voltes’ book works as a legitimation for the perennial spring of dictatorships and wars. Balkans answer to the “failed succession of hegemonic systems, which were the Roman Empire, the Byzantine, the Turkish, the Austrian and the Soviet [...]”

(Voltes, 1999, 10), they were and are “*une société de cousins* (François Maspero) [...] where one of the most typical clan behaviours was to reinforce the own ethnic group and to harass the neighbour” (Voltes, 1999, 12). Specifically on Slovenia, there was just some small-talk topics that may be useful for the academic interrelation among Slovenia historically unlearned such as me. The eight century was crucial, because it took place the “fighting for independence through alternative battles against Avars and Bavarians” (Voltes, 1999, 44). The creation of a current cultural identity made as an opposition to germanization seems essential in Voltes’ historical hermeneutics: “arrival of German missionaries, whose word established the Avant-Garde of an intense Germanic cultural infiltration [Tasilon II, Duke of Baviera] among the Slovenes” (Voltes, 1999, 72), “Subjugation to the germanization during the Habsburg Empire (15th-16th century), constant rural sublevations [...] Slovenians did not have access to public life, which was in the hand of nobles, public servants and priests appointed by the Emperor” (Voltes, 1999, 73).

I continued reading. Among an endless collection of strange names of kings that said nothing to me at all – with the exception of the word *Habsburg*– and a string of deadly wars, I was just able to catch with my fingernails some ideas that the book tried to structure into a global eternal narration. This is another aesthetic feature of the totalitarian experience: the way history is composed or assembled, where every event, even the smallest one, fits into a chronological line as if it were contingent but unavoidable on a bigger metaphysical national purpose. Like in the artificially written Nazi history of the succession of the German Empires (Schulze, 2001) or the chronological metaphysical narration of the Spanish Empire, the reader had the impression from the books I found on the Balkans that every event, even the most insignificant or trivial one, gave a partial answer to a teleological founding national purpose.

The second book I opened was written by Francesc Bonamusa and published in 1998. From the reading, I could just infer that the term Balkans is related to indetermination. It was not possible to infer from the text either which countries belonged officially to that category or which were considered the geographical limits of the term. Following this text, the Balkans is a geographical laxity imaginary that means “South-Europa or Mediterranean Europe [what could also include Spain or Italy], East-Europe, oriental Europa, East-South Europe or Balkan peninsula” (Bonamusa, 1998, 13). In Bonamusa’s text, there is also a tendency to establish an analogical interest between the Balkans and Spain. His comparison perspective is mainly anthropological, and it speaks about ancestral people or nations with an old tribal closed idiosyncrasy, who cannot afford to find a peacefully habitable place in modern state creation. This ancestral anthropological view of the Balkans is used for argumentative analogical purposes: to legitimate the nationalist, regionalist, and separatist self-determination rights-revindications in Spain. At the same time, the Balkans’ wars work in the Spanish collective mind as the hell-brake of this unsolved and continuously discussed topic of historical idiosyncrasy. It is an already long-term ideological battle, which is still finding a state legitimation through the essay-ambiguities of the 1975 Constitution and a continuous public statements fight with every kind of intervention, such as the ones made by the current Culture Minister Miquel Iceta (Bolaño, 2019): “In Spain there are eight nations. I have counted them”. No names were given.

In some countries, language is used to explain and define things clearly and openly in order to have a debate. In other countries, language is used to confound things in order to create the fictional shared space of putting something in common on the centerpiece to talk about



David Keinne (2022, Slovenia). Lovers II [Photo 60 x 40 cm, 500 euros]

and distribute. In Spain, *nanas* and *poppas* are always asking you “Aren’t you hungry? Don’t you want to eat? Don’t you want to eat?” The worst sin in this country is not eating too much, but remaining ascetic. You may be carnivorous or vegan, vegetarian or raw foody. Just eat if you do not want to have problems with these people. They find it very annoying and impolite to reject something. They won’t accept a *no* as an answer: Spanish has double negation. They won’t accept a *no* as an answer: Spanish has double negation. They will never say #meneither, they will continue saying #metoonot. They will never say Spain is a metacognitive country, a country that has gotten used to building its idiosyncrasy on the question *What is Spain?* Therefore, it should be written *Spain*, not *Spain*. And if you pronounce its name, you should make



David Keinne (2022, Slovenia).
Lovers II [Photo 60x40 cm, 500
euros]

the quotation marks with your hands. We had some of the best medieval universities. You can still see how far the problem of universals has gone.

Senses of Totalitarian Nakedness

1. OSTALGISCHES GESCHLECHT

In German, there is a word to define the vintage attraction of missing Ost-Germany: *Ostalgie* (nostalgia of DDR-life style that is grasped through objects, ways of doing things, and social atmospheres). Nevertheless, when I think about *eastalgie sex* (*ostalgisches Geschlecht*, *ostalginer Geschlechtsverkehr*), the last word that comes to my mind is female submissive pleasant doggy-style soft pornography. There was no sold pornography in DDR. People who lived the fall of the wall and got the welcome present of their first occidental Marks tell you how quickly they run to spend it on buying pornography. If that is a lie, I do not know.

Was the impassable border between socialism and capitalism just about that? You could be naked by a lake, but you could not buy pornography. Nowadays, you take pornography for free, but the number of naked swimmers in and by Berlin lakes decreases each year drastically.

In totalitarianism, you are stately allowed and even encouraged to have sex. It is intimacy (metaphysics of sex) that is found subversive. However, it is not just about ideology. Letting you be known by the other, and getting to know the other makes you and the other dangerously vulnerable. It is not only safer but cozier not to tell; it is better for everyone not to know, not to ask, not to speak, just in case you could be interrogated, just in case you were under surveillance. Informal affective networks seem impossible in totalitarian states because it is exactly expressing affect that puts the relation and the other in danger. You are allowed to share solitude, but not to meet with the other. Affects are therefore built on ignorance, which is a kind of silent care and trust. If you love, you must not get too close, you must not speak, and you must not let intimacy take place. Pornography is a kind of protective barrier in totalitarian systems, while eroticism puts everyone in danger.

Szárász, Katalin (2022, Hungary). Phases [Photo 60 x 40 cm, 350 euros]





Victoria Mateos de Manuel
(2022, July 8th). 19:28
[Photo from Bucarest]

Next to me, crushed against me for the whole journey, there had been a woman. We had known each other for many years, and the misfortune had struck us together, but we knew little of each other. Now, in the hour of decision, we said to each other things that are never said among the living. We said farewell and it was short; everybody said farewell to life through his neighbor.

We had no more fear.

The climax came suddenly. The door opened with a crash, and the dark echoed with outlandish orders in that curt, barbaric barking of Germans in command which seemed to give vent to millennial anger.

(Levi, 1959, 10)

2. EASTIMACY

The Internet has achieved the democratization of the totalitarian home: there is no longer a need to wait until the person is gone to introduce some kind of microphone in the houses of irrelevant people. The Internet has created a will-totalitarianism through apparently harmless machines like Alexa. Nowadays, the masses pay to let themselves be kept watch. Surveillance is no longer understood as an intimacy breakdown because the masses no longer have a perception or feeling of intimacy. They are so lonely that are willing to give their data because being an object of surveillance is a strategy against irrelevance, it means to matter to someone. A hidden guard could just be the professionalized or go pro fantasy of the social network follower. Being watched means for many people that they are someone or come into existence.

The long socialization in internet networks has erased the feeling of discomfort. There is not any longer a perception of intimacy, but a configuration of the (a)ethical subjectivity as a cooking sieve: no experiences remain for the subject; what gets in, gets simultaneously out. You can even seem suspicious and understood as a socially dangerous person for not telling others, for not showing off, for keeping things for yourself, for not having social networks, and for not using a mobile phone. Totalitarianism is not mainly based on psychological behaviorism, but on cognitive neuroscientific pedagogy: it does not only want to model your behavior but to access completely to your thoughts. That is why pornography is for free: it gives access to the world of desire, to the unconscious of the population. Haven't you seen Mel Gibson's film *What Women Want* (Meyer, 2000)? At least when there were porn-video clubs just the seller knew where each of the clients ticked. Frankfurt school already developed this topic by distinguishing between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*, *Körper* and

Leib, also remarking that there are undeniable qualitative differences in comparable vital experiences. Nowadays it has also to do with the self-narration or reflection of the subject (in the sense of *innere Bearbeitung*), something that Walter Benjamin introduced in *Der Erzähler*. There are no more confidences, there are only confessions and statements due to the changing reading habits. Before the appearance of online journals, it was very common to read the newspaper in a bar. The reading relation was based on a silent exchange basis, where you perfectly knew which place the text occupied and which one had your opinion. In an online journal, the commentaries of the reader have the same importance as the text as such. Reading can even be considered as part of the original text. Written comments are like the tail of a wedding dress, and there is no bride without a sumptuous wedding dress.

This cyber-access to intimacy has achieved to rewrite the subjective experience of totalitarian power. There is a social tolerance toward invasive practices, and violation of intimacy is socially understood and accepted as a way of taking care. Surveillance and care seem to be the two faces of the same coin. It works as the bodily deviation in KZs: being naked should not be understood as being stripped, but just as remaining open for health control. In English, there are at least two words to express the surveillance entity: watchman, but also caretaker. I remember when parents used to open the drawers of children's rooms in search of writings or you-never-know-what personal materials. Children were not allowed to understand that practice as invasive, it was taken as a discrete method of searching for interesting topics to initiate a conversation. Therefore, children began to cheat in diaries. Parents still think that family communication is successful and exemplary.

Intimacy used to be a very different concept if you thought about it westly or eastly. It was not a concept, but rather a space. Like in Merimee's

novel *Carmen*, there was a woman who knew a woman who talked to a woman who lived DDR who said “We knew we were all recorded. Now that I am old and my body is no longer firm, I just expect that the state recorded a porno tape. I would like to see it and experience myself again when I was sexy and gorgeous”. Nowadays people say that Germans are

Alberto Garzón’s tweet on February 2019. Imagen taken from Exhibition Review: “Allen Jones RA at the Royal Academy – 13 November 2014 to 25 January 2015, London Visitors” (wordpress.com).



Nestle UK advertisement from the 1950s. Image taken from Exhibition Review: Allen Jones RA at the Royal Academy – 13 November 2014 to 25 January 2015, London Visitors” (wordpress.com).





Marin Měster (2022, Slovenia-Croatia). Untitled [Photo 40 x 30 cm, 250 euros].

humourless. The difference between capitalist and socialist intimacy used to be what in and out politically meant in each of those systems, in which kind of space and situation you began to feel naked. Capitalist intimacy: come over to get a fuck. Socialist intimacy: let's go for a walk.

3. THE NOSTALGIC “FEELING AT HOME”

February 2019. Alberto Garzón, current Spanish Consume Minister and since 2016 general coordinator of the political Party called Izquierda Unida (United Left), posted a selfie in Twitter. He was in the kitchen, accompanied by (among others) a beer and a thermomixer, posing with his left hand in the pocket and the right one holding a wooden spoon. He seemed to be cooking a paella in a DDR sweatshirt. “Sunday...perfect day to cook sailor rice [arroz a la marinera]. I [mentaycanela's husband] do not call it paella because a lot of you are from Valencia and I do not want to fight. [emoticon] Photo taken by mentaycanela [Garzón's wife]”.

You can recognise that the photo is an *easttalgic/ostalgic* socialist fantasy because there are many and quite sophisticated objects in the kitchen. The subject is surrounded by objects that are not only useful but mainly manage to express his personality as happened with the first bourgeoisie homes in the 16th century (Durer's *Saint Jerome in His Study*). At that time appeared the concept of *Stimmung*, which was understood as the atmosphere at home that the subject created through decoration. The inner design of the house was an architectural projection of the owner's personality. Moreover, as Betty Friedan (2009) explains, the use of highly developed technological cooking equipment did not emerge as a democratizing help for the improvement of social taste, but as a capitalized strategy to make the role of housewives more attractive for American



Victoria Mateos de Manuel (2022, July 10th), 16:14 [Photo from Blaj].

women after the Second World War. To avoid the boredom of repetitive caring practices it was necessary to develop propaganda that made women feel that they were doing a difficult and innovative task at home, a task that did not only require love and dedication but skilled high-tech abilities such as the ones engineers had. Household appliances managed to make the kitchen seem like a scientific laboratory where high-tech difficult operations were taking place. Housewives felt no more as caring untrained subjects but as well-trained home engineers, an upscale social role that not every woman was able to satisfy. Every woman should stay at home, but not every woman was able to stay at home correctly. That is another historical feature of totalitarianism: its invasive pedagogy, which

does not only try to educate the subject for the public sphere but also tries to rule how adequate life at home and marriage should seem.

Garzon's selfie is a political re-appropriation of those capitalist propaganda strategies after the Second World War. It is the classical Sunday Spanish masculine cooker exception: the mother-wife is responsible for the invisible task of weekly feeding; the father satisfies his ego with impressive Sunday meals. He gets the prizes, while she only has responsibilities. Nevertheless, the photography tries to work as a masculine allegory of a supposedly socialist caring state, where gender equality has occurred. You remark that it is propaganda because the decoration in the anonymous socialist house used to be a kind of aesthetic contradiction. DDR-socialism appears as the lack of objects: a space that remains unfurnished in the sense of just having the basics, which are strictly useful or functional. The house did not necessarily express the personality of the owner, but the welfare state comfort minimums and equality achieved by the state. The anonymous house should work as a spatial projection of communal belonging. You were allowed to express solitude or emotional dispossession, but that solitude was not for yourself, it had always a social meaning and some kind of material survival rescue in the middle of a metaphysical emptiness. Therefore, solitude, as it was expressed in that socialist home coziness, worked as gratitude for not being left alone in the middle of an *unpolitizable* tableland. Home solitude represented social acceptance, belonging, and the ability to manage a vacuum. People who were born in already capitalist countries ask DDR people "if there were no shopping malls in East-Germany, what did you use to do in your free time?" There is a woman in Berlin who still answers, "I played sports, I went for a walk into the wild".



FAST FORWARD

Nostalgia – Temporal Tempest

An exhibition curated by IGOR LOINJAK included artworks from three artists, CUI QIN, SANTOS OCASIO and SARASONAS. The exhibition opened on July 5th 2020 at the Kazamat Gallery and remained open until July 17th 2020. The works collected and exhibited in this project create a bittersweet harmony through which an immersive experience is created and curated, directed towards a phenomenal explication of nostalgia as concentrated, oversaturated time (as a temporal tempest) or dispersed, time without map and direction, a timeless time.



Igor Loinjak

Note on Nostalgia

Looking etymologically at what nostalgia can and should mean to us, we come to the components from which this concept is coined. Klaić's dictionary says that the word is of Greek origin and that the derivation consists of two words – *nóstos* (return) and *álgos* (pain). Furthermore, it states that this noun signifies a great longing for the homeland, for home, but equally a yearning for something familiar, with which we have united and merged. Nostalgia, in its original meaning, is a desire for home, but it also denotes a desire to achieve a state of balance between a person and the overall situation in which they find themselves and live.

The works created for this exhibition are the result of the work of young artists brought together by the Scottish city of Glasgow, a city that none of them called their permanent residence but rather a transient stop on their educational journey. Cui Qin, Santos Ocasio, and Sara Sonas are artists whose works are linked by the mentioned concept of nostalgia. A large part of art arises from the need to capture and express the feeling of what is simultaneously close but also strange to the artist. Sigmund Freud explained this feeling with the word *unheimlich*, which is translated as eerie, not fully explaining Freud's term. Artists from Puerto Rico, Guangzhou, and Zagreb are connected by contemplating the relationship that can be established between oneself, home, and the temporary dwelling that is a temporary home, which, in this case, was Glasgow for the exhibitors.

In his works, Cui Qin returns to childhood and uses objects that have marked that period of his life in a certain way. However, these objects are given a new dimension as Qin modifies them, making a slide or seesaw unusable for the purpose for which they were intended. Ocasio explored light, more precisely, the lack of it. The symbolism of light is very powerful in almost all cultures, and the lack of light signifies a state of despair, meaninglessness, but also a yearning produced by the desire to understand the world and the cosmos. The “Before and After Light” cycle is where the artist also reflects on the feeling of nostalgia that haunts a person when they feel lost, abandoned, and torn from the metaphysical absolute associated with the divine, more precisely with God himself.

Sara Sonas is also preoccupied with exploring and searching for a new way of grasping and understanding the meaning of the reality she is immersed in. The minimalist aesthetics in which she combines organic and inorganic elements, such as wood and wire in the series of works “Unknown Path” and “Universe of Nature”, is Sara’s attempt to harmonize reality and return to the time when the chaos she feels in the world was replaced by the mental and internal cosmos of “youth”.

The artists themselves emphasize that with their simplified works and an emphasis on the aesthetics of minimalism, they seek to provide viewers with the opportunity “to focus on the general intrinsic concept in the proposal of each individual” and to independently discover the meanings of ideas that the artists have presented to them. Personal experience is not fully communicable, but the communication of experiences allows us to redefine ideas about ourselves and the world in which we live. In this way, we make our experience the starting point for someone else, whose experience will help them come to their own. In that sense, culturally speaking, art is one of the best ways to communicate experience. The Russians have captured this very well in their dictionaries because, in

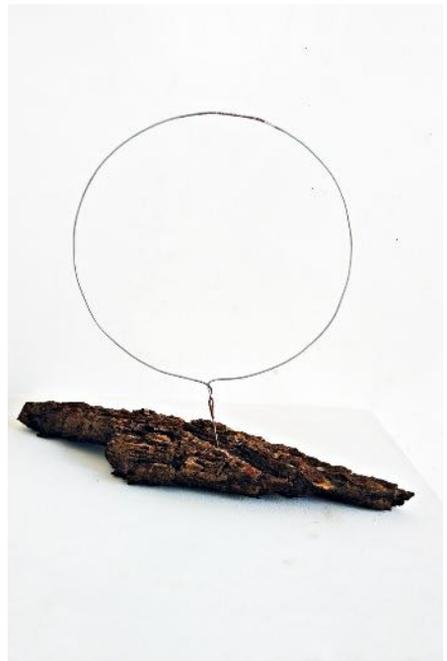
the Russian language, the word for art is precisely *experience*. The works of Cui Qin, Santos Ocasio, and Sara Sonas presented in this exhibition are an additional contribution to the communication of experience and ideas. United around the concept of nostalgia, the works draw us into the search for those times we long for and dream of their return. “By placing the past on the throne, as a monument, the artists propose the problem to the audience and themselves, allowing its acceptance and confrontation”, emphasize these authors. Perhaps their frozen past will remind us of those “eerie” and “nostalgic” landscapes that we rarely think about but are within us and communicate in the “storm of time”.

SARA SONAS

s.sonas@hotmail.com
sarasonas.com

Sara Sonas is a Croatian visual artist who graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb in 2017, in the Painting Department under the mentorship of Duje Jurić. She obtained her master's degree in painting at the Glasgow School of Art, University of Glasgow, Scotland, where she currently lives and works. She has won several art awards and exhibited in solo and group exhibitions in Croatia, Spain, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. Since 2018, she has been a member of the Croatian Association of Visual Artists in Zagreb, and a member of 126 Gallery in Galway, Ireland. Reproductions of the works included in the exhibition and this publication are: *O jednoj mladosti – About a youth*, pencil on paper, 21 x 29.7 cm, 2018, *Nepoznati put – Unknown path*, wood and wire, 30.5 x 26.5 x 17 cm, 2018, *Univerzum prirode – Nature's universe*, wood and wire, 10.5 x 8 x 16 cm, 2019.





CI QUIN

409579032@qq.com

Cui Qin was born in China in 1991. Cui graduated in Model Making from the Arts University Bournemouth, and received a certificate in Advanced Studies from the Academy of Fine Arts in Guangzhou, specializing in sculpture. From 2015 to 2017, he was a member of the sculptors at Nidu Model Studio in Guangzhou, China. He has exhibited in several group exhibitions in China, London, and Glasgow. The artist obtained a master's degree in drawing at the Glasgow School of Art, University of Glasgow, where he currently lives and works. Reproduced are the works from "Transformation series": *Jednokratni tobogan – One-off slide*, plastic and acrylic, 15 x 15 x 15 cm, 2019, *Ljuljačka – Swing*, plastic and acrylic, 22 x 15 x 15 cm, 2019, and *Klackalica – Seesaw*, plastic and acrylic, 17 x 4 x 5 cm, 2019.

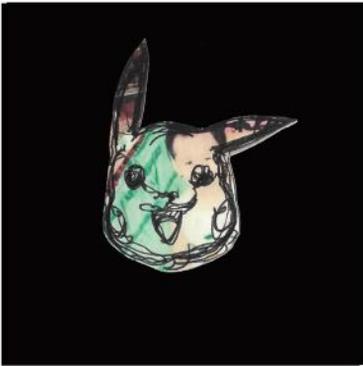


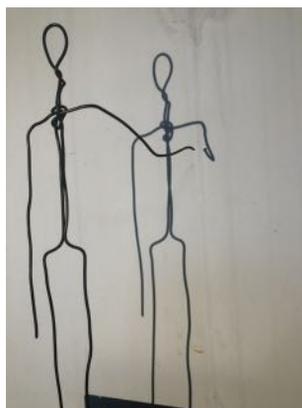


ALEXANDRA SANTOS OCASIO

ale.santosocasio@gmail.com

Alexandra Santos Ocasio was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 1991. She graduated in Communication from the University of Puerto Rico. The artist completed her master's studies in the drawing department at the Glasgow School of Art, University of Glasgow. Her works have been exhibited since 2014 in solo and group exhibitions in San Juan, New York, and Glasgow. She currently lives and works in Glasgow. Reproduced works from the Before and after light series: *Sujetlo će me naći – Light will find Me*, brass, nylon and cloth, dimensions vary, 2018, *Homage vječnosti – Homage to the Eternal*, paper and thread, 50 x 65 cm, 2018, *Kompromitiranje zvijezda – To compromise the Stars*, collage, 106 x 90 cm, 2019.









Nostalgia Movements conference – Pop-Up Exhibition



Day two of the Nostalgia Movements conference at the Multimedia Institute MAMA in Zagreb exposed – through an ephemeral pop-up event – three distinct approaches to or engagements with nostalgia as phenomena of daily life – as an aesthetic (Ivana Ljubičić), artistic and performative practice (Teuta Gatolin and Juraj Šantorić) or as systematic exploration and architectonic conceptualization (Dafne Bere). Its goal was to provide an environment for expression of attitudes towards popular culture and everyday life haunted by the specter of nostalgia. The immediate overlapping of the four projects in the small exhibition area overflowed with the soundscapes of locally sourced vaporwave and low lit ambience with one desktop computer, television screen and two projections offered for a momentary immersive experience of anemoia

Pop-up exhibition at the Multimedia Institute
– MAMA, Zagreb, 2022.



(coined by John Koenig for his “Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows” project), a type of nostalgia for a time or place (or feeling) one has never known, a simulacrum of experience. One might suggest it being an experience of someone else’s nostalgia altogether which would fit into the hauntological aspect of this particular exploration. Concept and the curatorial work for the exhibition was done by Dario Vuger (Museum of Fine Arts in Osijek) and Dafne Berc (Social Fringe: interesting untold stories).

INTERNATIONAL INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE

Nostalgia Movements

PHENOMENOLOGY__CONTEMPORARY AESTHETICS__VISUAL
STUDIES__MEMORY STUDIES__PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURE__HISTORY
OF IDEAS__EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGY



DECEMBER 15—16, 2022

Ivana Ljubičić

Selected Works







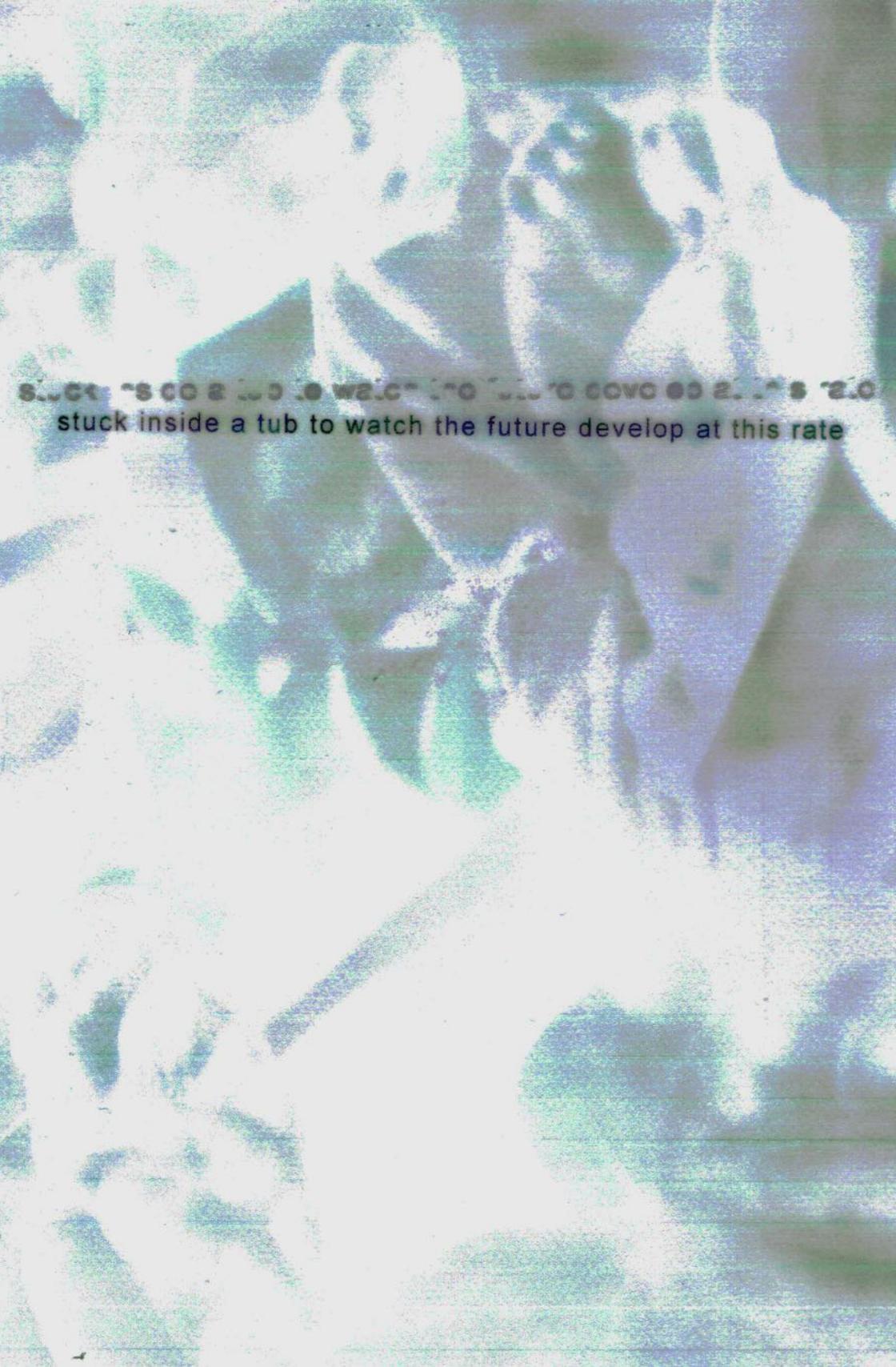












Stuck inside a tub to watch the future develop at this rate

Teuta Gatolin

Stuck Inside a Tub to Watch the Future Develop at this Rate



Stuck is an attempt at poetry (re)generated and remixed out of various bits of the internet and its intended and unintended archives, taking snippets from digitized magazines and ephemeral print, social media posts and search engine results, news sites and various public domain books.

The writing process loosely follows the chance-based writing methods of the Dadaists and other actors of the European avant-garde, alongside the use of online OCR scanners, text-to-speech apps, sometimes LLM AIs, and various glitch-art methods of joyfully destroying a file to see what wonderful things arise from the wreckage. Stuck is often realised through online and offline group workshops, where we negotiate with the language, the internet, ourselves and each other.

This work is a part of a larger art research interested in the lack of imagination that plagues societies under late-capitalism, preventing us to imagine sustainable and kinder futures.

dala je skuhati pod lukom i kraj i raj
 dala je skuhati pod lukom i kraj i raj

Eve and Adam were to bend,
 as the time masters
 themselves.

Da, to Bje'tako
 in

a vision where rot and
 pel reopen
 to the rainbow, they were to be seen as rhinestones on the
 surface, on the face, on the surface of the face
 of malt.

Dala je skuhati pod lukom
 kraj i raj.

She did it at such short notice.

The point and place su na kraju u parku,
 na kraju parka.

ix:

outstretched

the hills

are almost

near her.

a cloud.

it's always only a year.

anyway,

let her
think

the years in and the years out
troubles and
sailing mad

our arm

outstretched,

a little shift.

My great blue room, the air

zipped quiet

sweetie, truth scares
truth feels,

alright

sing a song,

come to her

And m e

we display wherever we are

Nostalgia is a story, it might be the only type of imagination and storytelling we are still allowed to indulge in, but that's only if nostalgia is kept docile, and the past keeps forgetting it used to be able to remember the future. A part of the antidote to capitalist realism might just be feral fabulation of the future and meticulous fact-checking of data we come into contact with.

The research consults and references Svetlana Boym's work on nostalgia, Mark Fisher's ideas about lost futures, Duchamp's infrathin, language playwork of Gerturde Stein's *Tender Buttons* and Joyce's *Ulysses*, among others.

Currently this work-in-progress consist of digital collages, poetry, audio recordings and divination cards.

Juraj Šantorić

Horizon of Seas and Milk – Perspective of Auto-Greeting

Within the program of the interdisciplinary conference *Nostalgia Movements* held in December 2022, organized by the non-profit association Sf:ius from Zagreb, alongside numerous lectures and accompanying exhibitions the conference included, I performed *Horizon of Seas and Milk – PERSPECTIVE OF AUTO-GREETING*. Through this performance, I contemplate nostalgia as an affective phenomenon constructed with utopian memories of a fictional community from an inherited past and dystopian imaginings of a precarious and alienated future. Memories thus evoke longing, and the thought of the future, solitude. Simulating the potential of their intertwining culminates in ecstasy where the here and now become one possible space of existence, while art manifests as a medium for surviving the game in which the subject unexpectedly finds itself with self-awareness. Reflecting on fragments of my own identity in the performance, I open up imagological branches of ethnicity, sexuality, masculinity, and a sense of cultural-spatial belonging at the crossroads of the Balkans and the Mediterranean. Dancing between the unexperienced and the discouragement of the player not awaited ejects from consideration. And while in the background, verses can be heard: “Live for us, son, live for us, son, let

Foto: Aleksandar Danguzov



the goat feed you only with milk, let the vine only quench you with wine, but you will carry the name of one of your own”, tranquility becomes the only value of simple serenity.

Artist statement

“Horizon of Seas and Milk – PERSPECTIVE OF AUTO-GREETING” is an authorial project born as a reflection on a series of circumstances within family, romantic, friendly, and professional relationships, which intersected at the same point – DEPARTURE. What this departure brings and takes is the starting impulse for the assembled collage. It seems that a fracture on one tape does not necessarily signify the end; however, it certainly suggests that in the newly formed gap, doors have opened to everything that has accumulated and strained for a long time, now surfacing in solitude.

“When does one become an artist? What remains for the Yugoslav romantics? Where does the human longing for the sea come from?”



Foto: Aleksandar Danguzov



Foto: Aleksandar Danguzov



These are questions weaving a web upon which this performance sways. On one hand, it is a cry for opening up and liberating oneself from previous fears regarding self-realization. On the other hand, this is a kind of recapitulation of one's past self, where the performance serves as a possible medium to intrapersonally reconcile with interpersonal aspects. However, above all, this is just a personal story about the ambience and environments I have witnessed so far and have created in the context of the Balkans and the Mediterranean, where I am attempting to define myself in some way.

Coffee – text from the performance

That coffee was strange and interesting, and others there were like that too; it was Balkan, not Mediterranean. In general, I find coffee interesting. I mean coffee as a concept, a ritual, synergy, a medium. When I say “large cold” here, nobody understands me, not in the first, second, or third café. When I think about it, I didn't even know what “large cold” was when I left home to go somewhere. Yes, “large cold” became my first home at some point. Although I didn't have a permanent address, I settled in a small seaside town. Let me go back to the Balkan café – or maybe a missing coffee cup (?). Cold macchiato, please – “what?” Please, coffee with cold milk. “Do you mean espresso with cold milk?” – Oh yes, that, thank you. I mentioned the difference between Balkan and Mediterranean coffee. I'll try to explain it; Mediterranean coffee is more relaxed, and fluid, requires less engagement in interaction, you're more focused on yourself when you drink it, the fullness of the environment comes to the fore, you feel the space, and often gaze towards the sea. Mediterranean coffee somehow goes down easier on the stomach. Balkan coffee is warmer, more intimate, more intense, accompanied by lively discussions; it demands engagement. On Balkan coffee, you don't

feel the ambiance of the space as much; you're more focused on social criticism or lamentation. Balkan coffee simply has a thicker sediment.¹

The performance *Horizon of Seas and Milk – PERSPECTIVE OF AUTO-GREETING* is my first authored performance, created as the final project within *Vizkultura's* research and educational program *How to Think Urbanism and Public Space?* conducted during the academic year 2021/2023. The first presentation took place on January 26, 2022, at the Cultural Center Magacin (MKM) in Belgrade, followed by performances in Rijeka, Zadar, and Zagreb. These cities were chosen as specific performance centers, with Belgrade representing the Balkans and Yugoslav Nostalgia/Romanticism, Zadar (where I studied) symbolizing the Mediterranean and being associated with cultural-genetic factors, considering the Kajkavian Ikavian dialect. Rijeka embodies a space of comfort I feel on every visit, and to which I happily return. Zagreb is significant as the first urban setting from which I ventured into the world, and now I return to it as a student.

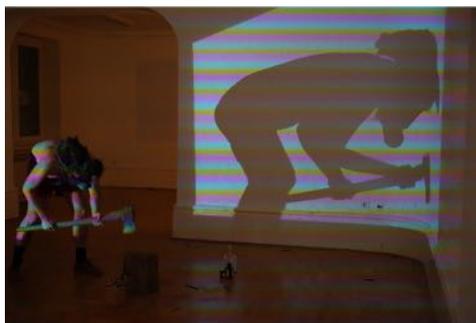
Meanwhile, the performance continued with the sequel *Horizon of Seas and Milk – ANNUAL CLEANSING*, serving as a reexamination of the aforementioned themes and an exploration of the changes that unfolded over the past year. The emphasis was placed on contemplating one's own identity in the context of artistic expression and activism, which particularly defined my experience in the year 2022. In line with this, the artist's statement begins with an acceptance of oneself and one's artistic habitus, initiating a dance. However, the stage continues to appear as an unknown entity. The body hovers, creating pirouettes infused with the aromas of the Mediterranean and the Balkans. The

1 The Croatian version of the text, along with other texts used in the performance, has been highlighted in color in the student magazine of the Literary Association Ludens, 2022.

evocation of rain and fertility becomes both a confession and a purification of one's own archive, much like the hope that the harvest will reveal a home. After strenuous work, rest is needed – an idyll where sweat mixes with brandy. The scents of immortelle and quince permeate the air. The question of locality resurfaces. In other words, nostalgia returns through the affective landscape of the imagined Balkans and the Mediterranean, initiated by contemplating coffee as a social phenomenon in everyday life. The relationship is further expanded through the tactility of embraces, and thus, in the performance, I utter the text “Mediterranean embrace” – one in which bodies romantically intertwine, and simultaneously, you lose yourself in the airy space between bony forearms. Collective support is absent.

The Balkan embrace, one where there is no room for coldness because bodies almost become one, and you suffocate under the heavy, sweaty hands that imprint your vertebrae into your lungs. A closed society suffocates you. Beef and fig bread. The Mediterranean and the Balkans kiss. Harvest, wheat, and a bath on the island from Dionysus's archipelago. The idyll of the eternal sun and a gaze toward glaciers.²

Foto: Slaven Botić



2 For more about the performance, Google “Dolazim u posjetu - vizkultura.hr” and “Plesna scena - Ima li mjesta za mlade umjetnike?”

Dafne Berc

Out of Script



[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5oCl3PWpDK4&t=20s>]

Our current living is being more and more situated in a scripted realm (Klein, 1998), which leads to confusion of one's own real needs, especially when these are replaced or permeated by virtual needs created and directed by external forces. (Baudrillard, 1981).

How often do we have the possibility to act freely in the city? To deviate from pre-described pathways in a mall, university, bank, at a concert, in a park? Do we recognize that most of our social practices in space tend to follow predetermined scripts?

The scripted realm could be understood as both, mental and physical spatial concept that varies in magnitude from body to cosmos. More importantly, the scripted realm provides a critical perspective on how

one could understand urbanism, particularly through an assemblage of spatial constellations among which, to my mind, urbanity dwells. On the other hand, these constellations manifest in an architecture through which one can observe such a realm. Here, the interrelation between scripted space, understood as the dominant condition, and space out of script, understood as “the other” space able to bring about individual or collective free will, is posed in dialectic terms to identify emancipatory social practices in space. The scripted exterminates the finite resource of perception of the real, which is the only condition able to provoke one’s emancipation, only to be perceived and comprehended through one’s emancipation. The virtual substrate of our needs and the scripted constituent of space stem from the way in which reality is represented and perceived. In order to enter the physical dimension of the proposed dialectic, one must first briefly recall the mechanisms of representation and perception of reality.

Simulacra and Simulation

The social and material condition that defines our reality is manifested in several constructs, practices, and images. The same can be said for the urban condition. Here, the ontological substrate of reality emerges mediated by a complex mechanism of representations, where the real is no longer possible to distinguish. Hence, social relations, power relations, institutional and cultural relations become blurred. On the other hand, the spatial edifice defined by such relations is neither contradictive nor unreal; but rather distanced from creating a humane environment.

This poses a problem, since such a condition contributes to the consolidation of an ever more alienated society, because it does not allow foreseeing a value system of identifiers that could help build an eman-

culated sense of self within the collective. Yet, it is fair to assume the existence of emancipatory practices. The particular question lies in detecting where they may be found and how they operate, for the same condition makes it difficult to locate genuine emancipatory social practices in space, as the physical realm, the city, presents itself through an even more complex set of representations.

Since a humane environment, the setting by which most emancipatory practices emerge, is defined by a reality that is not only material but also mediated and represented, the question of identifying the material condition of reality as well as its representation becomes a key instrument to locate emancipatory practices; the object of this reflection, whose goal is to establish a taxonomy of spaces of emancipation.

Firstly, it is necessary to make some appreciations. Representation as an extension of reality or reality vis-à-vis representation, both working on the same plane of imminence, used to constitute a fairly recognizable and coherent epistemological construct. As mentioned, the mechanisms by which representation is mediated have fallen short to keep the aforementioned consistency and recognition. The exponential rise of individual desires, atomized politics of identity, consumption offer, etc., but also abstract knowledge systems and technological devices, have led to a vast and highly mediated array of signifiers, seemingly tailored to appeal individually. In turn, representation of reality has been increasingly substituted by a simulation of reality.

According to Jean Baudrillard, “simulation (...) is opposed to representation. Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of the real (even if this equivalence is utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Simulation, on the contrary, stems from the utopia of the principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference. Whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by in-

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[just stepping out the door a perfect song](#)
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Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino

[Seed's partner](#)
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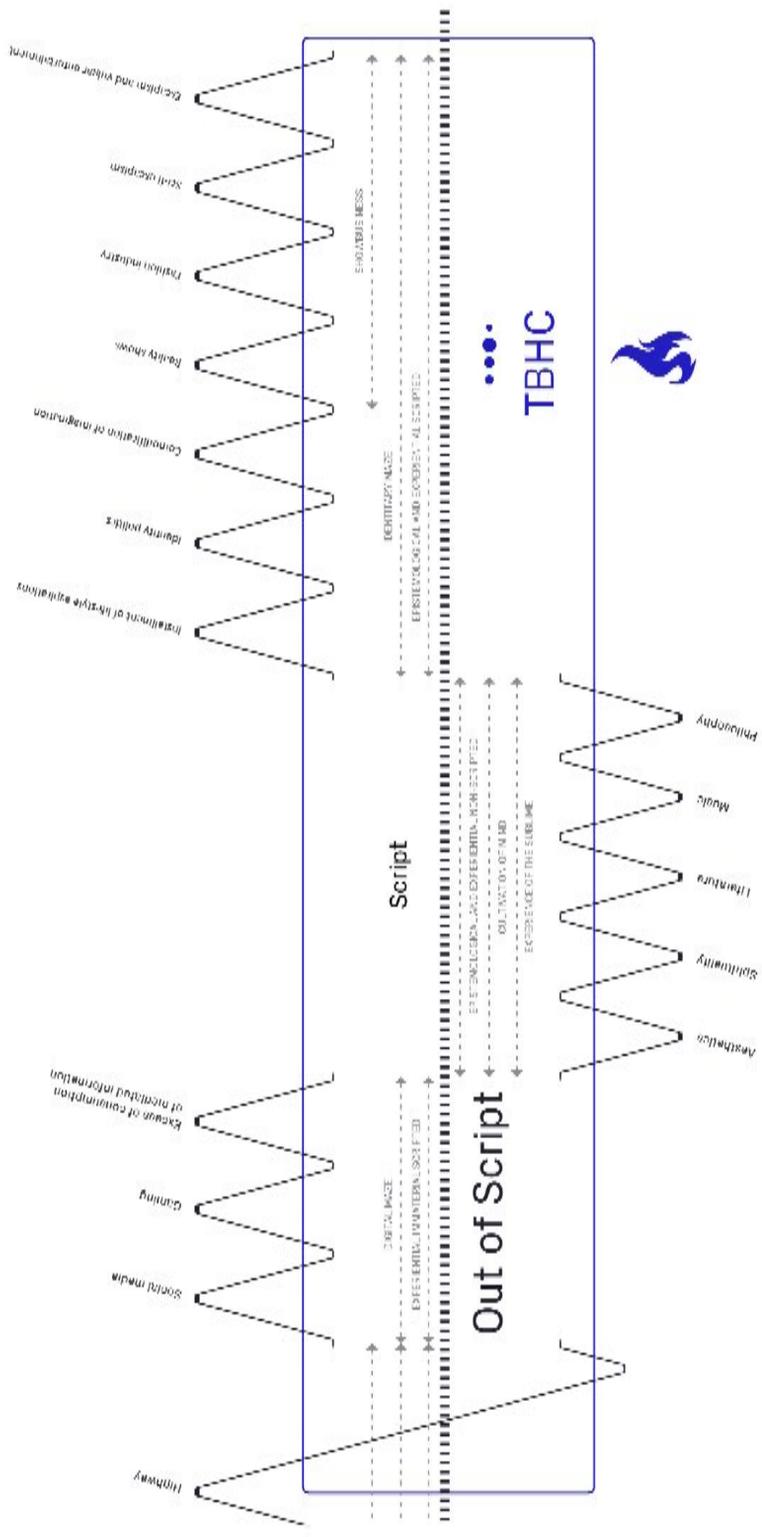
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terpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelopes the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum. Such would be the successive phases of the image: 1) it is the reflection of a profound reality; 2) it masks and de-natures a profound reality; 3) it masks the absence of a profound reality; 4) it has no relation to any reality whatsoever; and 5) it is its own pure simulacrum. When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning” (Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 1981, p: 6).

Reality, together with its representation, has become a mere mirror image of itself, and an illusion that fails to represent reality as it used to. In that sense “The impossibility of rediscovering an absolute level of the real, is of the same order as the impossibility of staging illusion. Illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible. It is the whole political problem of parody, of hyper-simulation or offensive simulation that is posed here” (Ibid., p: 15).

In such play of simulations, the real becomes dissolved and replaced by a hyper notion of the real. The hyper-real lies in the best / the favorable depiction of reality, a sort of illusion that embraces all signifiers present in reality; a staged archetype that explains all possible variations of such reality. For instance, the American average middle class, as portrayed in Hollywood, is built upon statistical data, never a unique such family, in order to convey a convincing representative rendering (Ibid., p: 21). The hyper-real becomes a central part of the collage from which reality is reproduced, even negated so to speak. The city is not alien to this fact.



Scripted Space

But how does simulation and its most convincing instrument, the hyper-real, manifest in space? Which form does it acquire? At this point, Norman M Klein's notion of "scripted spaces" becomes useful to address the urban and physical milieu. The collective and/or private realm of the city features different outdoor and indoor spaces and buildings that can be classified in urban typologies. Parks, theme parks, shopping malls, strip centers, museums, consolidated historical city centers and university campuses, among other examples, constitute these urban typologies.

But the scripted condition also extrapolates to media-service clouds, social networks, gaming platforms, experience salons, or the mediation of world conflicts, wars and catastrophes on a distance. The self-determined choice of how to perceive, use and experience them is no longer possible. One cannot project and/or build a narrative of its own, for these typologies firstly define themselves from the aforementioned play of simulation and simulacra. And secondly, because they serve their own purposes, inscribed within a larger power structure that is no longer recognizable for the same reasons mentioned in the first place.

Therefore, these typologies (material or immaterial) operate as scripted spaces with illusionist effect, where the audience becomes the essential character. Here, a narrative is imposed on architectural spaces and at the same time striving from the latter. In such edifice, the kind of special effects that works in cinema works in architecture too. But it should never rely too much on it, since the key is not in the spaces themselves or in how illusionistic they are; the key is in the narrative that is received. The narrative of the audience itself is more relevant than the illusionistic effect of the spaces.

Nevertheless, the dome, tube, arcade and labyrinth, among others, are recurrent recourses in shaping the narrative, sometimes even hopelessly, since the staging of the narrative demands a rather immersive space. "Space as an accelerator as opposed to slowing down. In scripted spaces, the entrance and the exit are pre-assigned.

Configured as narrative journeys, where the audience becomes a central character to the story, and where the story lets one pick and choose forced perspective; offering seemingly infinite choice, but practically no way out. Operating like ergonomic fascism, the simulation of reality in scripted spaces still allows and enhances interaction within the narrative. A coded narrative that is continually being adjusted and that relies on a culture based on feedback". (Norman M Klein, Lecture 1998, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tGr2xVD3mFo&t=3s>)

The narrative is always about power, the give and take of authority; what authority "the player" relinquishes, and what authority the player pretends to have control over. "A ritualized version of the free world against predetermination. A kind of trade-off". The Church and the Casino are canonical examples of scripted spaces; a combination of illusionism and cheerful alienation where one feels a bit lost, but enchanted. In this sense, the script must be at the right temperature, like the air-conditioning. The scripted space is derived from the study of the space between the design and the intentions of the client, and the reception of the viewer and the user (the parishioner, the player, etc.); in no moment these match (Ibid.).

Since it is shaped by a limited and standardized display of predetermined types of experiences and appearances (thus offering vicious cognitive comforts of reduction), scripted space performs as an instrument for narrowing the field of people's vision or imagination. It also supports normalization and increased shrinkage and flattening of the

emancipatory realm of human activity. The activity embedded in scripted space estranges people from the reality of life around them by inserting sequences of “virtuality” in their everyday routine, and by training them to be compliant with restricted selection of choices. Here, the accessibility of scripted space to people is physically, economically and psychologically conditioned; vis-à-vis the suspicion that accessibility is actually a sort of inaccessibility that will inevitably result in marginalization, frustration and depression. Although always performing as a manipulative instrument, scripted space can be both positively and negatively connoted depending on the requirements of its creators.

As mentioned, a scripted space can provide a seemingly rich variety of possibilities, all carefully catered for the user or consumer. For instance, the average choice of experiences attainable in a grand casino could be quantified in about 100 games, altogether associated with live shows of sorts (from music or magic to standup comedy), decorated thematic interiors, etc. The same can be said about thematic parks such as Disneyworld, or shopping malls among other examples.

Such an array of choices, although empowering at first glance, offers no way out should one decide to step out of the path. If it is about entertainment, the initiative to inscribe your own kind is impossible, since the offer is already predetermined and given to you; for you to decide and choose. A clear analogy to the endless choice, but with a no way-out situation, can be found in the remote-control cable TV, where one can jump from channel to channel with up to 200 options. So many. Yet nothing fully catches one's interest, as if it all represents the same difference. One enters a world in itself with no way out.

Yet, an extrapolation of the actual tendency of living in an ever more scripted space could lead to the consideration of certain existing types of scripted environments as more inclusive for people. For example,

an understanding of the city as a hotel with a casino; of the concept of casino, where one's small coin is after all always welcome, partly validates the casino as a space "for everybody"; thus, also as potentially inclusive environment for the ones who cannot either economically or psychologically afford to dwell in the rest of scripted space.

One point perspective

I dream of fame	<p>Dancing in my underpants I'm gonna run for government I'm gonna form a covers band an' all (Stop)</p>
In my moments of escapism	<p>Back there by the baby grand, did Mr. Winter Wonderland say "Come 'ere, kid, we really need to talk?" Bear with me, man, I lost my train of thought</p>
Surfing simulacra	<p>I fantasise, I call it quits I swim with the economists And I get to the bottom of it for good By the time reality hits, the chimes of freedom fell to bits The shinin' city on the fritz They come out of the cracks, thirsty for blood (Stop)</p>
As all fears have become a trade	<p>Oh, just as the apocalypse finally gets prioritised And you cry some of the hottest tears you ever cried Multiplied by five I suppose a singer must die</p>
Does it only bother me?	<p>"Singsong 'Round the Money Tree" This stunning documentary that no one else unfortunately saw Such beautiful photography, it's worth it for the opening scene I've been driving 'round, listening to the score Or maybe, I just imagined it all I've played to quiet rooms like this before Bear with me, man, I lost my train of thought</p>

Scripting the Absence

On the other hand, the narrative is never fully imposed, because the storyline finds itself built through various mediums that never equal each other; the space is defined by a different category than the technological gadgetry even if both are the material correlates of the story, the fiction. In the scripted space, the gap between such differences allows for the emergence of an “invisible interface” and/or “an apparently empty space”. Either way, “the audience tends to fill in the blanks, so to speak”. This is exactly the opportunity, the gap, the threshold in which a window opens for the users or spectators to project and at the same time extract their own narrative. This is the type of absence that presents itself as an “aperture”, a chance to “humanize our alienation”. (Norman M Klein, Interview 2009, <http://www.le-hub.org/lang/en/archives/230>)

“Fact and fiction commingle very easily (...) Fiction is always more believable than fact (...) Interactivity is a mental act (...) And it is the mental pictures that are more powerful. (...) Everybody working on film or music knows that what you leave out is incredibly important (...) The pauses are much more powerful than people realize (...) Spaces between in our moment, spaces where mental pictures are made (...) One of the old psychological terms is ‘the imago’, the image inside. (...) These mental pictures can actually have a value, you can hire the advertising company (...) An agency to do that, for example (...) You can launch policies and politics that justify action (...) They can have a kind of entropy, they can be slower, they can be faster”.

(Norman M Klein, Lecture 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JucdhD9MY8o&t=2314s>)

Space of Emancipation

The “other” space, opposite to scripted space, could be understood as the space of emancipation, i.e. a mental-physical spatial concept which allows one to step away from the routine of everyday functioning. But also opens one up to indulge in reflection, contemplation, imagination, transgression, and other states of consciousness and awareness of the body; a space of sentience and intelligibility at the same time. In that sense the concept of space of emancipation should neither be understood nor represented as something unattainable or even nonexistent, but on the contrary, as an ever present and omnipresent occurrence reflected in a constellation of events and appearances that characterize the palimpsest of the space we live in.

The city performs as a space of encounter and exchange, as an apologia for the use value that hosts countless multiplicity of functions and purposes in the realm of social, economic, cultural, and ludic, etc.

Consequently, space of emancipation is embodied in the urbanity of the streets and other city exteriors. The city streets are the remainder of the spaces (and places) where one can still search for encountering people that still strive, whether conscientiously or not, to live their lives for real. Others may be waterfronts, coastal promenades, public beaches, subculture and its spatial correlation, nightclubbing setups, etc.; all suitable constructs for being among people, being in public protected from the public.

On the other hand, the actual tendency of living in an ever more scripted space, has already led us to foresee certain existing types of derelict and transitory environments within the city as more emancipatory for people. These are constellations or enclaves that embody the oxymorons

such as the so-called “terrain vague” condition (Solà-Morales, 1995), featured by a clear territorial border to cross and intuitive rules of use. Terrain vague is therefore to be understood as a reflexive space able to both mirror and counterpoint the restrictions of actual institutional city. Regardless of its nominally hostile properties and appearance, it acts as an inclusive environment for everybody in search of freedom.

Tranquility Base

Jesus in the day spa
Filling out the information form
Mama got her hair done
Just popping out to sing a protest song

My instinct rejects

I've been on a bender back to that prophetic esplanade

Where I ponder all the questions

Commodified condolence

But just manage to miss the mark

Good afternoon
Tranquility Base Hotel and Casino
Mark speaking
Please tell me how may I direct your call?

This magical thinking
Feels as if it really might catch on
Mama wants some answers
Do you remember where it all went wrong?

In comforting virtuality

Technological advances

Really bloody get me in the mood

My avatar exchanges joy

Pull me in close on a crisp eve, baby

Kiss me underneath the moon's side boob

Good afternoon
Tranquility Base Hotel and Casino
Mark speaking
Please tell me how may I direct your call?

Do you ever indulge

Do you celebrate your dark side

Then wish you'd never left the house?

In outwitting self-inhibition?

Have you ever spent a generation

Trying to figure that one out?

Good afternoon
Tranquility Base Hotel and Casino
Mark speaking
Please tell me how may I direct your call?

Hotel & Casino

Don't you feel estranged too?

Religious iconography givin' you the creeps?

I feel rougher than a disco lizard tongue along your cheek

The rise of the machines

I must admit you gave me somethin' momentarily
In which I could believe
But the hand of harsh reality's un-gloved
And it's on its way back in to scoop you up
But not on my watch

Science Fiction

I wanna stay with you, my love
The way some science fiction does

Noise of nonsense

Reflections in the silver screen of strange societies

Swamp monster with a hard on for connectivity

The ascension of the cream

Deafens us

Mass panic on a not-too-distant future colony

Quantitative easing

I wanna make a simple point about peace and love
But in a sexy way where it's not obvious

Highlight dangers and send out hidden messages
The way some science fiction does
The way some science fiction does

I took refuge in myself

I've got the world on a wire

In my little mirror mirror on the wall

In the pocket of my raincoat

But I sense that's hard to share

So I tried to write a song to make you blush

But I've a feeling that the whole thing

May well just end up too clever for its own good

The way some science fiction does

Sci-Fi

Similar to fables, Sci-Fi presents an instrument for sharpening socio-economic commentary and reasoning - among other, evident in the fiction of Aldous Huxley, Ursula K Le Guin, Ray Bradbury or Philip K Dick. But today Sci-Fi mainly perpetuates the dominance of existing power structures, fostering social segregation and exploitation and relying on property perception and rights; inciting individual material aspirations as commonly practiced.

In Sci-Fi, space of emancipation is on one hand being simulated as a space of exclusivity; embodied in all sorts of segregated and purified material and immaterial environments that are fueled by the installation and proliferation of identity and lifestyle based role-models. And on the other, space of emancipation is being simulated as a space of exclusion, decay, poverty, torment, hazard, catastrophe, apocalypse, nothingness, etc.; staged as a display of environments of Sci-Fi narratives, as for example, “the room” within “the zone” of *Stalker*, a series of interiors in a “dystopian LA” of *Blade Runner* or “the last refuge” in the simulation of *The Matrix*, or a myriad of other less fortunate tales.

Both types of simulation depict a technological yet solitary, alienated and mostly extraterritorial space, which is overprotected or too severely wounded to host emancipatory practice; therefore, eternally stuck in the futile complicity of utopian and dystopian nostalgia. In fact, emancipation from the current simulation of the space of emancipation is a crucial prerequisite for the struggle to decolonize technologies and science fiction in order to (re)turn them to the service of the emancipatory realm of human activity.

Out of Script

The question here lies in why simulacra would not be able to re-produce the meaning of the real through simulation, since this relies on the motif and intention behind such a production. Here, the stages of production of the image should still keep a somewhat leftover or a remainder of certain “singularities” buried in people’s mental space. In such a condition, the re-creation of meta-narratives takes over, based on the synergy of such singularities (Baudrillard, 1981).

One strategy or way to operate within this fatal scenario or simulacra is to trust in the capability of humankind to represent reality to a point in which such representation can be put into practice and value, so that the ontological substrate of experience in reality can occur in a genuine manner. This goes from the reenactment of socialism to the social practices in a park, etc.; yet such practice and value should distance itself as much as possible from technological interference - mediating the way we practice the different folds of reality. But if such strategy turns futile, then perhaps the order of the increasing linearity of simulacra’s fatality is to be inverted; in that sense, it is probably necessary to get to a total collapse of technological interference, get back a couple of centuries behind, and then adopt the first strategy.

Regardless, a starting point would be to operate with the first framework, keeping in mind the learnings from Ignasi de Solà-Morales’ terrain vague and other spaces that provide the possibilities to inscribe emancipatory social practices. An extrapolation of such reasoning could indicate that envisioning space of emancipation in dialectical terms with the concept of urbanity would be an instrumental understanding to renew a relation with the reality of life.

Star Treatment

I just wanted to be one of The Strokes
Now look at the mess you made me make
Hitchhiking with a monogrammed suitcase
Miles away from any half-useful imaginary highway
I'm a big name in deep space
Ask your mates but golden boy's in bad shape

I found out the hard way

er **That here ain't no place for dolls like you and me**

Everybody's on a barge

ss **Floating down the endless stream of great TV**

1984, 2019

Maybe I was a little too wild in the 70s
Rocket-ship grease down the cracks of my knuckles
Karate bandana
Warp speed chic
Hair down to there
Impressive moustache
Love came in a bottle with a twist off cap
Let's all have a swig and do a hot lap

es **So who you gonna call?**

The martini police

ng **Baby, that isn't how they look tonight, oh no**

It took the light forever to get to your eyes

I just wanted to be one of those ghosts
You thought that you could forget
And then I haunt you via the rear view mirror
On a long drive from the back seat
But it's alright 'cause you love me
And you recognize that it ain't how it should be

Your eyes are heavy and the weather's getting ugly

Let's fly out of here

So pull over, I know the place

Don't you know an apparition is a cheap date?

What exactly is it you've been drinking these days?

Jukebox in the corner

To a starry atmosphere

Long hot summer

They've got a film up on the wall and it's dark enough to dance

What do you mean you've never seen Blade Runner?

Oh, maybe I was a little too wild in the 70s
Back down to earth with a lounge singer shimmer
Elevator down to my make believe residency
From the honeymoon suite
Two shows a day, four nights a week
Easy money

Intoxication mutes

So who you gonna call?

The martini police

Intoxication mutes

So who you gonna call?

The martini police

Vibrance of being

Baby, that isn't how they look tonight

It took the light absolutely forever to get to your eyes

And as we gaze skyward, ain't it dark early?
It's the star treatment, yeah
And as we gaze skyward, ain't it dark early?
It's the star treatment





Dario Vuger

Timeless Blueprint for a Post-visual Utopia – Interview with Zlatko Kozina

I am not quite sure where to begin with the inquiry into nostalgia through and within your work so we might as well go to the heart of the matter from the very start. Considering your distinctly ludic style in painting often fruitfully escaping definition and consistency over time, one might assume that your work has an implicit basis in a somewhat “nostalgic disposition” towards the contemporary, highly conceptual, artistic practice that often falls into the category of decoration. Your artistic reactions to the issues arising from your daily encounters with art, social issues, and intellectual problems seem to point towards a somewhat peculiar relationship with everyday life, the present moment, and the ideas about our past. Could you expand on that or even (dis)prove my point with some of your work?

KOZINA: In one image with a landscape motif (the reference for the painting was one of your photographs, as you know), I wrote a fictional dialogue where an *invisible but evidently present* figure speaks to another (an allusion to Luc Tuymans, who, among other things, dealt with the past of his own country, Belgium, portraying it as a colonial

tyrant in Congo). The dialogue conveys the message that “the past is not what it used to be”. So, the fuel for my painting did not require your reasons for engaging in photography, nor Tuymans’ (I haven’t deeply studied his elaboration on the mentioned theme) painting reasons. Simply, “ingredients” were sufficient for me – hints of information that a Belgian artist explores the past of his country, and that you, at some point, captured a photographic snippet. Connecting these two is pure arbitrariness. Others’ artistic intentions are like parts of still life (and perhaps in my work, at its core, lurks some latent *Memento mori*?).

Dario Vuger

Untitled, 35 mm color film photography, 2014



Zlatko Kozina, *Live*, 2023, acrylic on paper, 24 x 33 cm
(All works reproduced by the courtesy of the author)



In metaphorical terms, I must first “feed my own children” and only then save the world: in other words, my “painterly instinct” requires achieving a state of equilibrium, respecting the primary visual space within the frame. *Balance*. Line, color, plane, and surface are like hungry children waiting in the house, while my “search for food” is a chosen compositional principle, for example. So, only when the children grow enough will they be ready for the freedom of departure. Where they will go and what will happen to them, I, as the “provider”, do not know, and I do not want to control it completely (that is the reason why a true artist easily lets go of their own art – they have given it everything they were obliged to give). The belief that through “growing up” they have gained enough strength for their “own continuity” (otherwise, everyone would end up as prey to the predator, read: victims of the *Zeitgeist*) makes me relaxed. This self-continuity is manifested through encounters with the other (i.e., when the work is whole in itself, it stimulates in others the awareness to think of themselves as whole beings), which can be either planned or accidental. Therefore, I could say that I am not nostalgic in the sense of lamenting for some past times, but, in fact, I pay more tribute to previous eras and styles (without identifying with any) as those that sacrificed themselves for the upcoming ones, creating fertile ground, “humus” necessary for the growth of something new. And that’s why “the past is not what it used to be”. It has changed its essence and properties. Hence, even the most modern is not different from the ancient: just a new layer in the *Noosphere* (which would be the envelope of human consciousness that also protects the Earth from dangerous influences, no less than the atmosphere), as Teilhard de Chardin would say.

And yet, it often happens that in a “surge of nostalgia”, precisely those authentic painterly (and other visual) attempts become objects of

consumption, which is essentially the consumption of objects as shaped elements (and shaping elements) in everyday life. The very foundation of this everyday life is based on reminders, memories, and a sense of being placed in another (and/or) past time – as an experience, it is entirely designed. How can one resist the tendency for your own works to become a form of designing a nostalgic ambiance?

KOZINA: The key word is *body*. Thought cannot exist without the body of the one who thinks. In that sense, I am anti-Platonist. The painting surface (canvas, wood, paper, etc.) and matter as the carrier of color or texture is primarily important to me as an object (the image as a window into visual reality or abstract space is not unimportant, but is still in a secondary place) precisely because the object itself is nothing else but a “body”. The body of the image, as well as its own objectivity, is undeniable evidence of sensory awareness of balance (gravity). Depending on each individual work, its objectivity is always unique and irreplaceable precisely because of its inherent “gravity” – stronger or weaker. Therefore, I could say that in evaluating visual/artistic objects (whether mine or others), the contextualization of style, intention, or “iconology” is secondary. It is more of a kind of pseudo-interest, a false trail. That is precisely why I do not hesitate to engage in the “consumption of objects shaped elements” that you mention. I could even say that it is more of a kind of new construction; “artistic intentions” and “curatorial concepts” are just externals as one (but not the only) of the present shaping elements in the newly built structure with new meaning that is now discovered, although it has always existed (analogy: man recently discovered nuclear fusion, but did not invent it, as it has been present for eons). Memories of these “externals” are simultaneously older and younger than the externals themselves. So, is this “discovery” useful to anyone other than me as the author, I hope it is, that is the question. Of course, there is always doubt, but in my case, there is also

an awareness that I do not take myself too seriously, which fortunately frees me from giving a more precise answer to that same doubt.

Therefore, we should not find it strange to consider nostalgia itself as a “discovery”, not as a phenomenon, but of its utility in shaping everyday environments as “emotional wholes”, especially since for many years we have theoretically described and practically tested the post-pictorial reality after the iconic turn. When the world becomes an image, as an object of design and commodification, emotions themselves emerge, from which nostalgia is perhaps only the first, but certainly the currently most prominent product. Can we assume that the visual representation of nostalgia thus helps us to relate to it – or resist it – in a more authentic way than mere cynical acceptance of the social – and emotional – reality in which we currently find ourselves? Irony, satire, and humor here become a form of response to nostalgia as part of contemporary social reality. Yet, indirectly, part of that response is also found in your painting. Should we joke about our undeniable instinct to immerse ourselves in nostalgia?

KOZINA: You’ve hit the nail on the head. Nostalgia absolutely makes sense to consider as a “discovery”, or almost solely as a discovery; moreover, if it is not a discovery, then it is just a physiological reaction, mere information. Why? So, I perceive and understand nostalgia in the same way I understand matter and energy themselves. Matter allows us to crush it, knead it, melt it, bend it... (recall Serra’s verbs), or poetically speaking, allows us to kill it and resurrect it, that is, transform it into objects, things, and inventions. And precisely the ways in which we understand our experiences that we once had with things supply us with the necessary strength to have expectations of the future filled with hope. For example, describing the establishment of relationships between people through a television set (today, this computer screen

takes it to unprecedented levels), the American physicist Henry A. Garron states that by looking at each other on the fluorescent screen and both sides using materials while transcending materials, i.e., phosphorescent substances on cathode ray tube screens, enable the encounter of individuals within the substance of the screen. In line with the above, I understand your “emotional wholes” as “inventions”, resurrections, and acquisitions of revived, but also new “bodies” similar to those technical ones, provided they recognize themselves as part of the “nervous system of humanity”. Like floating “free radicals”, individual nostalgias are insignificant, even harmful. This is precisely the reason why in my paintings or drawings (*body of continuity*), I resurrect “old materials” transcending what is now into what has passed (*body of continuity*), and vice versa. In a way, precisely from my belief in the meaningfulness of the overall reality that has its beginning and end (humor as a sign of transcendence is only possible then and in that way), relaxation in playing with instincts emerges, as eternal (satisfied with its own autoreferentiality) adolescents, where every day I decide on one of the two “Autonomies of the Image”. And although I would like to choose the one that says “in God’s mind there is only ONE THOUGHT, and in that one thought, all knowledge that is possible is contained (that is why it is an IMAGE and a reflection of his being)”, very often I fall into the autonomy of an indefinite image, a world of dreams and the tyranny of feelings. And perhaps that is precisely the

Zlatko Kozina
MoMA, TATE and JA, 2022,
oil on canvas, 144 x 90 cm

MAMM

TATE

JA



most visible in my work: a constant struggle and non-acceptance of the possibility of any autonomy that any contingent entity would establish in its own relativization of reality.

I would dare to say that nostalgia and the critique of artistic idealizations of one's own role in the system of artistic production come together in your lapsus-linguae work depicting a childish drawing of a family with a child. Family members are designated as MoMa (from Croatian word Mama for 'Mommy'), Tate (from Croatian word Tata for 'Papa') and Ja (Croatian for 'me'). On the level of appearance and materiality, this painting seems to evoke a certain idealised disposition of some past expectations, a nostalgic view. But departing from that surface, a kaleidoscope of interpretations and motifs open up, beginning with the explicit critique of artists' own confusion of art-world with family.

Your artistic alter-ego is a detective creating visual inquiries and resolutions to cases of art stepping over the possibilities of its own ontology. Is this role also instructive for everybody interested in contemporary visual culture? Maybe the sole fact of being informed about contemporary visual phenomena builds an ability to withstand and reflect on our nostalgia-driven culture, or does it just make us cynically adjusted to it?

KOZINA: You've accurately observed how the contemporary "Art World" in its activities (advertising, exhibition, trade) promotes the idea of "family vacation", culture for all, emphasizing (sub)consciously that the "artistic truth" is in the right hands, in the hands of professionals.



Zlatko Kozina
The Art World, 2022
watercolor on paper, 24 x 33 cm



Zlatko Kozina
Aloomomak, 2023, acrylic on paper, 28,5 x 21 cm

Museums and galleries have become like parks where tired people rest on Sundays, similar to those in G. Seurat's painting, *La Grande Jatte*. In any case, everything is bright and clear; handsome "dad" and "mom" and "beautiful child", all with whitened teeth, tanned and taut skin, become an ideal. The suppressed desire of the "child" (me) for such "security" is shown in the painting you refer to. However, as I already mentioned, perhaps the primary visuality, in the end, remains the only reality for many (who do not have the desire to "extend into visual culture"), even if it is reduced to the physical reaction of the viewer. It is similar to the one we have when looking at the human skeleton. This is also the main reason why I am skeptical about most contemporary works that do not contain the necessary completeness, that works of tradition and even works of Modernism had in themselves. Artists used to, figuratively speaking, easily join the existing circle; their rhythm was inherent,

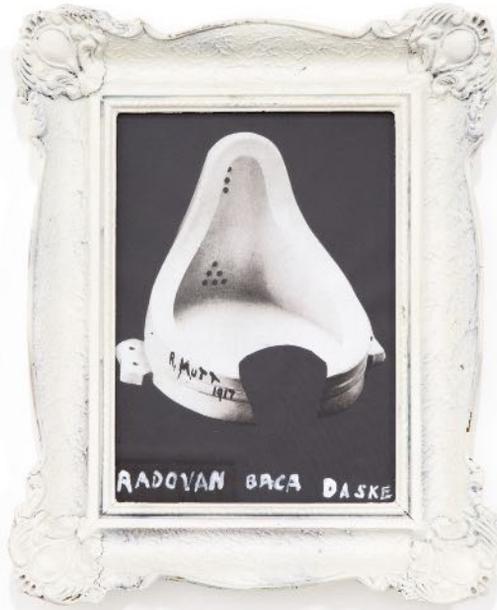
built-in. And it seems to me that the vast majority of today's artists, like drunken guests at weddings, forcefully join the circle, but unlike their predecessors, with their lack of rhythm (which is important because it is an element of integrity and continues as it comes from the heart of togetherness) they spoil the dance, or they can be interesting only briefly, like sympathetic revelers. Yet, even they, like real party breakers, have no measure and cause discomfort (although the art establishment justifies them). I persistently explore these irregularities generated by *activism without cause* in the role of a self-proclaimed *Internal Affairs Art Detective*, whose nostalgia (let's call it that) is not one that would lament the situation after the damage is done but is more directed towards the recomposition of art in an evolutionary sense.

Must the detective, in that sense, be open to doubt in himself as someone who potentially prevents the evolution in the constant recomposition of the already achieved status quo? This detective would be somewhat on the level of Rick Deckard (the bounty hunter from Blade Runner, a detective in a certain sense) who lives in a world of visual and metaphysical uncertainty that has become absolute and therefore almost trivial. Would anything change for Deckard if he "knew" and truly "was" a replicant? Is Detective Blarcsy a lonely figure, or does he belong to a broader, latent movement in contemporary art (which we can certainly observe from the perspective of dystopian science fiction)?

KOZINA: As I mentioned before, doubt is inevitable. Every person is, to some extent, a "doubting Thomas". Doubt is a kind of "thorn in the side". However, it would be crucial not to let doubt take control because it is nothing more than undermining the foundations of an individual who is then condemned to eternal presence in their own stiffness and fear, clinging in a cramp to their own short-lived and

contingent existence. Or, to bring the essence of my works closer and clarify some things as we have this conversation, I will use a specific analogy: speaking about Nam June Paik, John Cage, or, for example, Bill Viola as giants of contemporary artistic expressions, art theorists (but also most others who are more or less familiar with the works of these artists) often tend to label them as top-notch artists, but also as “contemporary Buddhists”. This, of course, in the world of contemporary art and beyond, regularly evokes favor by enveloping these artists in an “aura of wisdom” as something that is self-evident. As a contrast to this cliché, through my own work, I establish a new term: “contemporary Christian” (and of Catholic provenance!) within the conglomerate of contemporary art. In the technospheric age we live in, this is, of course, a kind of risk, almost an oxymoron, true “radicalism”, or simply put a “serious mistake”. Since I haven’t had any experiences with ecstatic visions so far (I doubt I ever will), my decision has arisen from pure intellectual reflection, understanding, and connecting the “unconnected”. All of this may seem strange at first glance, but as you know, humor is the most creative thing for me, protecting my “followers” in their “mistakes” with freedom, measure, integrity, and play. Besides, I admit that the thought of my “state of being in just one Thought” in the current constellation of all possible versions of contemporaneity, and especially contemporary art, could be a pure “subversion” So, who is Detective Blarscy for me? I would say by no means someone who, in Heideggerian terms, has been “thrown into existence” (even if it is dystopian like Rick Deckard’s), but rather someone, in Stein’s terms, who is “placed into existence”.

Meanwhile, we have been “overwhelmed” by the news that one of the canonical works of conceptual art - Marcel Duchamp’s famous urinal – has been roughly attributed to a great artist, and that we all – from great art connoisseurs to even greater producers of artworks – have lived in a kind of delusion not only about that



Zlatko Kozina
L.H.O.O.Q. 4.0, 2020, collage,
marker on paper, 25 x 20 cm

singular work of contemporary art but also in a more important delusion that reveals our inability to analyze and properly historicize contemporary art. From this perspective, the need for a detective seems even greater and more current than just a few days ago when we could only speak of him as a methodical figure. Indeed, in your painting L.H.O.O.Q.4.0, we can anticipate somewhat this turnaround which then, of course, has not yet outgrown the confines of fact, but has somewhat challenged the status of conceptual art as a point of rupture and reintroduced them into the corpus of works from which some new visual phenomena are created.



Zlatko Kozina
Everyday L.H.O.O.Q., 2021, pen on photograph, 9 x 13 cm

*Then there is *Everyday L.H.O.O.Q.*, which, along with *Missing link 2* complements the argument from the standpoint of conceptual reaches of art operating in new, recursive visualizations of what we can only consider somewhat betrayed promises of art from the middle of the last century about the radical interpenetration of art and everyday life. The only place where we really see this is once again the aestheticization of everyday life through nostalgia understood as a medium between the artificial and the lived reality. If we have to choose between nostalgia and the politicization of the past, can we imagine a third way or imagine that choice as a scale of intensity and highlight some productive ratio?*

KOZINA: When the idea for *L.H.O.O.Q.4.0* was born (when we quickly read the lyrics of the song by the Queen “Another One Bites the dust”, we get *joy is throwing boards*), I initially thought about the fact that Duchamp’s wielding of the sword turned against him (as ancient wisdom pointed out) because, in the end, even though it was supposed to be the last thing he, as the progenitor of Dadaism, would want, his work *Fontana* (and he himself) became “sacralized” almost equally (if not more) as Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa*. Now, after the latest news (I don’t know if it will actually be confirmed as authentic), it seems to me that the sword he took this time decapitates him, leaving his numerous adorers, to whom (I repeat if it proves true) only the role of the “great inquisitor” from Dostoevsky’s novel *The Brothers Karamazov* remains. Likewise, *Everyday L.H.O.O.Q.* and *Missing link 2* are primarily indications of

Zlatko Kozina

Missing link 2, 2021, oil on canvas, 30 x 46 cm



the importance of human tactility and the impossibility of shaping any works of art that would not involve “modeling reality” with their entire body. Because only with the fragility of our own body are we able to acknowledge our own limitations, and ultimately, in a common-sense way, our own defeat. Instead of answering your question about what to choose, nostalgia or politicization of the past:

“Memory is therefore like the stomach of the spirit, and joy and sorrow like some sweet and bitter food. When you hand them over to memory, it’s as if you’ve transferred them to the stomach. They can be stored there, but they cannot give a taste. So, the one who remembers his joyful and sorrowful moments does not savor the delight of joy or the bitterness of sorrow in the way he felt it in the past when they were real events” (St. Augustine).

Speaking about the impossibility of shaping works of art that do not involve modeling reality, can we sharpen the thesis – especially in the horizon of contemplating nostalgia as the contemporary design of a particular emotional landscape/state – precisely in the direction of emphasizing this first aspect (shaping works of art), which then, in a special way, model (modulate) reality to make it a resonant background for (nostalgic or any other) experience. Namely, there is a certain artificiality in the expression “shaping a work of art”, which sounds to me like “making something look like a work of art”. The question remains of what is ultimately shaped by a work of art, the context, the situation, or just the work itself? In this regard, an artistic work should be regarded as a product of the same culture that enables (for political, economic, and other reasons) the emergence of nostalgic phenomena, i.e., that they themselves are seen as “discoveries” just as artistic phenomena are seen as “works”.

KOZINA: How did the image or shaped object originate at all? How is it that at one point, cave people began to leave their mark by painting on cave walls or creating small sculptures? In my opinion, humans simply realized that healing (in the broadest sense) cannot be experienced if there is no body that needs healing. Primitive people used objects in their rituals, intuitively understanding that one cannot heal without doing something physical. That's why, in the darkness of the cave, in a state of altered consciousness, ancient artists were not satisfied with just the vision of an animal, but, moreover, that *pre-imago* was a necessary condition for the birth of the visualization of the world. Therefore, they fixed that same vision on the cave walls made it tangible. And speaking of the importance of touch, the Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa, in his famous essay "The Eyes of the Skin", states how "touch connects us with time and tradition (G.K. Chesterton defines tradition as the "democracy of the dead"), so while holding a pebble-shaped by waves, the hand feels not only the pleasure of the soothing shape but also because the pebble expresses the slow process of its formation; the perfect pebble in the palm embodies duration, its time has turned into shape".

And what does it look like when duration also has consciousness, examples of prehistoric miniature 'Venus' show us – the "time of hominization" transformed into shape. Isolated experience is a glass of water scooped from the "river", which has turned into something static, even something abandoned. Paradoxically, only when individual experience, with all other experiences, forms a "river" (which from "source to mouth" implies not only a fragment of "water" but everything: both the "bed" and the "shore" and everything living and non-living in it, on it, and beside it); "it can be held in the palms, regardless of size", of the whole to which it belongs (to paraphrase Henry Moore and his treatment of sculpture as a complete work). A

true artist, the work of art is not primarily a product of culture (mostly to art theorists) with which he “comments” on something, but a kind of “exoskeleton”, an external skeleton that supports the artist, meaning the artist encounters himself in the work. I am increasingly convinced that art did not begin with the appearance of man on Earth but with the emergence of the universe, which from the very beginning strives for a goal and which thinks of itself only through man, without whom the universe itself makes no sense (news about space exploration strongly reminds me of researching the placenta, or the afterbirth, an organ that has already done the most important work).

Do you remember the wild child from the movie *Mad Max 2* who wound up the mechanism of a music box, enjoying the melodic sound? Although he never wondered when or how the mechanism was created, what it was once a part of, or what it is useful for, he still enjoyed the harmonious tones. Isn't that a vivid paradigm for most contemporary artists (and thinkers)?

I agree that this kind of blind fascination is quite symptomatic of the contemporary era, but I would certainly expand on that metaphor. Namely, Mad Max is a film with extremely little dialogue, and it can serve as a good social commentary (even the “desert of the real”), especially today when virtual wealth has devastated not only our immediate reality but also language, and thus, thinking. The phenomenon processed from Baudrillard through The Matrix to Žižek in Mad Max is actually – especially from today’s perspective – spectacularly immortalized. When Max gives the music box mechanism to the wild child, he reacts to the discomfort of potential social interaction that is impossible to build in the circumstances of the total stripping of culture and the reduction of relations to violence and physical dominance. This reduction is nothing more than a concrete



Zlatko Kozina

Big Fight Between Two Conceptual Artists in Neoplastic Interior, 2021, acrylic, oil, pencil on canvas, 60 x 80 cm

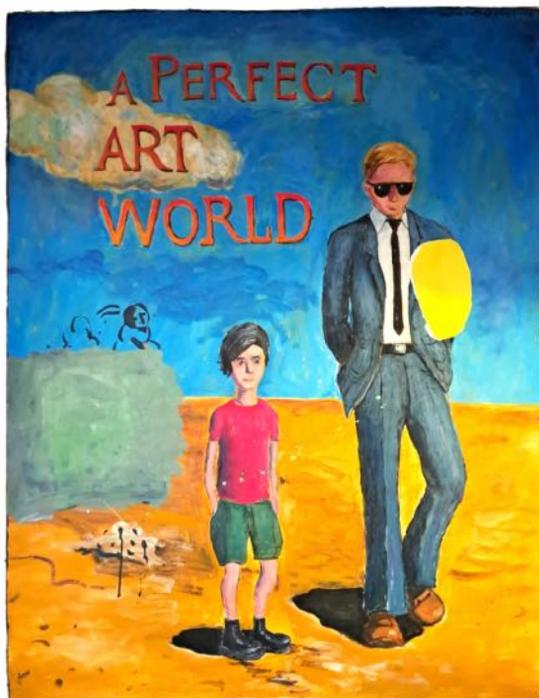
radicalization of what Debord called “the retreat of everything that was truly experienced into representation” back in the sixties. As a culmination of separation – which is conceptually inherent in your work as well – elements of culture (here, stripped-down mechanisms in the form of fascinating artifacts) become aesthetic objects themselves, more interesting and spectacular than what they were in their original form – hidden beneath the nicely shaped shell of the music box.

In “Big Fight Between Two Conceptual Artists In Neoplastic Interior,” the protagonists in the visual representation inhabit a wholly sentimental space, but the painting itself, in its expression, appears as

shaped with something more than mere art historical referentiality in mind. The very concept of “shaping” takes itself as its object to some extent – the neoplastic interior visually appears worn out in its inability to function as space at all, and the shaping of characters exudes the character of naive expression. How to explain these visual pieces of information to someone who is not willing to see the context of the image but still appreciates the pictorial nature of the scene? In a somewhat more abstract situation, we can also ask the same regarding “ALOOMOMAK”, or in a clearer situation with “A Perfect Art World”.

KOZINA: In the work “Big Fight Between Two Conceptual Artists In Neoplastic Interior,” I combined three facts: the painting of American realist painter George W. Bellows from the early 20th century, “Stag

Zlatko Kozina
A Perfect Art World, 2018, acrylic, ink,
collage on paper, 146 x 114 cm



at Sharkey's", neoplasticism as a historical style of the early avant-garde, and the relatively recent conflict between two local conceptual artists, Braco Dimitrijević and Goran Trbuljak. How would I define the work itself? Perhaps as oscillating between two structures that negate and establish each other: does the work want to be experienced only as pictorial, the "artistic intention" emerges, does one want to think primarily about artistic intention, the pictorial emerges. In that sense, I could say that I would like each of my works to be "2 in 1" – someone is more inclined to one aspect of the work, someone to the other, and someone even to both. The works "ALOOMOMAK" and "A Perfect Art World" as painterly analogies refer to two spaces: the first, as a draft or proposal for a potential installation, refers to the famous sign on the Hollywood Hills as a marker of a specific cultural landscape. Using the same font, I wanted to check if the selected "new" sign, as something ultra-local, can become something universal. The second refers to the space of the art world where the boy is the "artist", and the man in a suit is the "critic-curator-collector" (an allusion to the movie "A Perfect World" with Kevin Costner and T.J. Lowther as the main protagonists.

My immediate association with "ALOOMOMAK", in particular, but also with others, was the "painting" of Ed Ruscha, which – along with his photography – operates in a purified area of foggy memories. Paraphrasing Matthew McConaughey in the series True Detective, it could be said that his paintings, and also photographs, look like someone's memory of a painting, feeling, or place, and that memory seems to be constantly fading. Your method of constructing the image seems to subscribe to that model, not with explicit intent but out of necessity in processing symbolic and visual content. We have touched on the dynamics of your work several times – both here and in our conversations – but it is worth emphasizing once again the importance of the reaction and free association of everyday



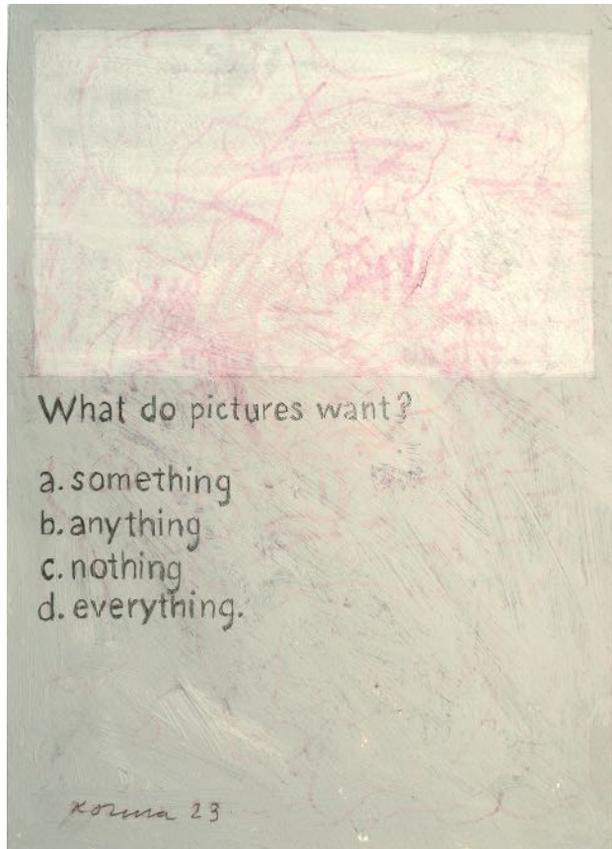
Zlatko Kozina
Bastards, 2023, watercolor, guache on paper, 24 x 33 cm

*content in a unique and, above all, visually shaped space of the image. This dynamics proves interesting from the perspective of visualizing how our memories (and today, thinking in general) “work”. We recently touched on this in the case of your new painting “Bastards,” which could also be observed in the same sense as a memory of an idea that inevitably disappears in that memory. Moreover, on Instagram, you accompanied it with the song *Black Hole Sun* (Soundgarden), and the black sun (perhaps as a motif from Julia Kristeva’s book on “melancholy and depression”) is visible as it “illuminates” the scene in which the “desert of the real” – with Elmgreen & Dragset and Ugo Rondinone at its center – somehow resists that “illuminating effect” coming from all sides.*

The question above all questions in the theory of image after the iconic turn has been addressed in two works (“What do pictures want?” and “Sane”) that, in a way, can form the basis for a more extensive critique of that very question – What do pictures want? That is, counting on their obvious power to create not only visual but also emotional landscapes of desire, have we perhaps bypassed the question of whether and why the image is precisely our subject (and then also a means) of research, in thematizing the field of visual

Zlatko Kozina

Sane, 2023, marker, pencil, gouache, acrylic on paper, 33 x 24 cm





Zlatko Kozina

What do pictures want?, 2017, acrylic, marker pen, collage on MDF board, 24 x 33 cm

studies itself? I am inclined to think that – in the nostalgic turn of contemporary culture – it becomes clear that by problematizing the image, we inevitably speak about the nature of reality and metaphysics that we have been (un)successfully trying to abandon for a long time, thereby indirectly pointing out the inadequacy of our subject – images as the center of our interest. The image can only be so much – paraphrasing Guy Debord – a calm center (of happiness), surrounded by despair and fear (which thus represents only the disorder of our relationship to images).

KOZINA: I believe in the nature of reality that is an IMAGE, but not IMAGES. Therefore, holding his creation in his hand (mind), the artist

repeats with his contingent body the contingent creation of creatures by God (read: reality). It is a creation conceived and shaped by the same WORD that has become FLESH (Jesus Christ, Son of God = God's Thought), God's creation that will become a prototype of all creations. And since in this IMAGE everything exists (even the mentioned "surrounding of despair and fear"), everything is in a way justified. Of course, I am aware that the just described Christian metaphysics is a dreadful thing for many "contemporary thinkers", but that is precisely what enlivens me for the freedom of humor-filled games with images that want "something", sometimes "anything", sometimes "nothing", and sometimes "everything".

One of your first reactions to my call for this nostalgic interview was an image that is also a reaction to one of my photographs. In addition to the "Live" photograph of a river landscape formally translated into the language of painting, above the scene, an imaginary dialogue with Luc Tuymans addressing (or quoting) Gilbert Chesterton's famous "The past is not what it was". Is this (only) an assemblage of associations or a work shaped to comment on my call, and then on the status itself as a potential nostalgic subject?

KOZINA: Seeing your photograph of the river landscape immediately appealed to me (even before we got to the topic of nostalgia). When I started painting based on that template, I accidentally started using gray tones, and in the process, it began to associate with the painting of Luc Tuymans, which is mostly imbued with a nostalgic atmosphere. After that, I remembered Chesterton's quote precisely thanks to the conversation with you, and thus, another one of my "longings for (inner) homeland" was created.

In the meantime, another one of my photographs had the honor of being the subject of a reaction in your painting, which, in a certain sense, continues our conversation here, but also the image that precedes it since the principle of construction remains largely the same, from the photographic template to Chesterton's quote. Since we will certainly strive to represent this interview as richly as possible in the publication, with all the necessary reproductions and references, it seems important to ask about the suitable place for exhibiting your works, or the preferred way of exhibiting, and whether it ultimately plays a role in a certain type of reception of your works?





Dario Vuger
Untitled, digital photography, 2023

Zlatko Kozina
Painting without a cause, watercolor, gouache on paper, 24 x 33 cm

Zlatko Kozina

Meanwhile, D.A. Has Built a Sandbag Dike With Meantime, 2023, watercolor on paper, 24 x 33 cm



For example, photography – potentially the biggest beneficiary in the current nostalgic turn of contemporary culture – is especially suitable for exhibition through a photo book, adding to each photograph the charm of an intimate and at the same time documentary record. It seems that this would particularly suit some of your works.

KOZINA: You started with “In the meantime” :); by coincidence, today (coincidence?), I posted on Instagram a work called “*Meanwhile, D.A. Has Built a Sandbag Dike With Meantime*”. Of course, it refers to Darren Almond and his work *Meantime*, in which he made his artistic work available to the local population in Slavonia during a flood, precisely at the moment when he was supposed to have an exhibition in MLU... for example, that’s how this story could go... This story is evidence of how your idea with a photo book is brilliant. Why? As you may have noticed, my works are mostly smaller in size; most are 24 x 33 cm, and the reason I chose that format is that these are the dimensions of Dali’s “Persistence of Memory”, a monumental work (I want to check if I can produce a somewhat “strong” work in a time when larger and larger paintings are being painted (I, of course, have nothing against large formats, but in the vast majority, they are mere decorations intended for fancy spaces). That’s why I treat my paintings – drawings, not only as finished works of art but also as didactic material; I see them as “utopian templates for the realization of projects in space” (e.g. *ALOOMOMAK* above Split or, for example, Sarajevo... as one example). That’s why I don’t view my oeuvre chronologically, but, on the contrary, I view it as a whole, a body. That’s why I use the interchange of styles as “surrogate multimedia”. In conclusion and question at the same time: Isn’t a photo book ideal for such a concept or idea of mine? :)

Of course, a photo book could be a good start for such a visual exploration, which would probably ultimately exceed its possibilities, and

above all, the possibilities of what is permissible in the circumstances of our contemporary society. Namely, I would definitely try to include as many reproductions as possible of all the works that your works are (in)directly inspired by, while in the design itself, I would try to use “tricks”, “dupleric”, and such solutions that would ultimately lead us to the realization of a “utopian (sic!) draft” or an alternative “atlas of mnemosyne”. Perhaps the aesthetics of such a project would have some indirect nostalgic effect, a search for a place and time to which these images essentially correspond. Can we then talk in that regard about an “anti-spectacular” or “psychogeographical” effort in your work?

KOZINA: I agree, absolutely. The works I refer to indeed have a say, or, however fragile the spatial-material structure may look, the future requires origin. True artistic objects/spaces of the past are “sacrificial animals”, which are continuously (of course, plebiscitary) sacrificed, and their “names are read” like the names of those who perished in some pogrom – without pomp.

I am currently conducting another interview with Professor Purgar, essentially on the same topic but – of course – with a focus on the role of visual studies and the possibilities of studying the image in an analytical approach to the phenomenon of nostalgia in contemporary culture. In doing so, we touched on the question of contemporary art, how it deals with memories, and how it uses and employs them as material for its works. It was said, among other things, that – paradoxically – “it is precisely institutionalisation that makes art such an effective soft weapon. It doesn’t need to be good or valuable at all; it cannot be objectively assessed or, even less, interpreted. Despite everything, in the star system, every work turns

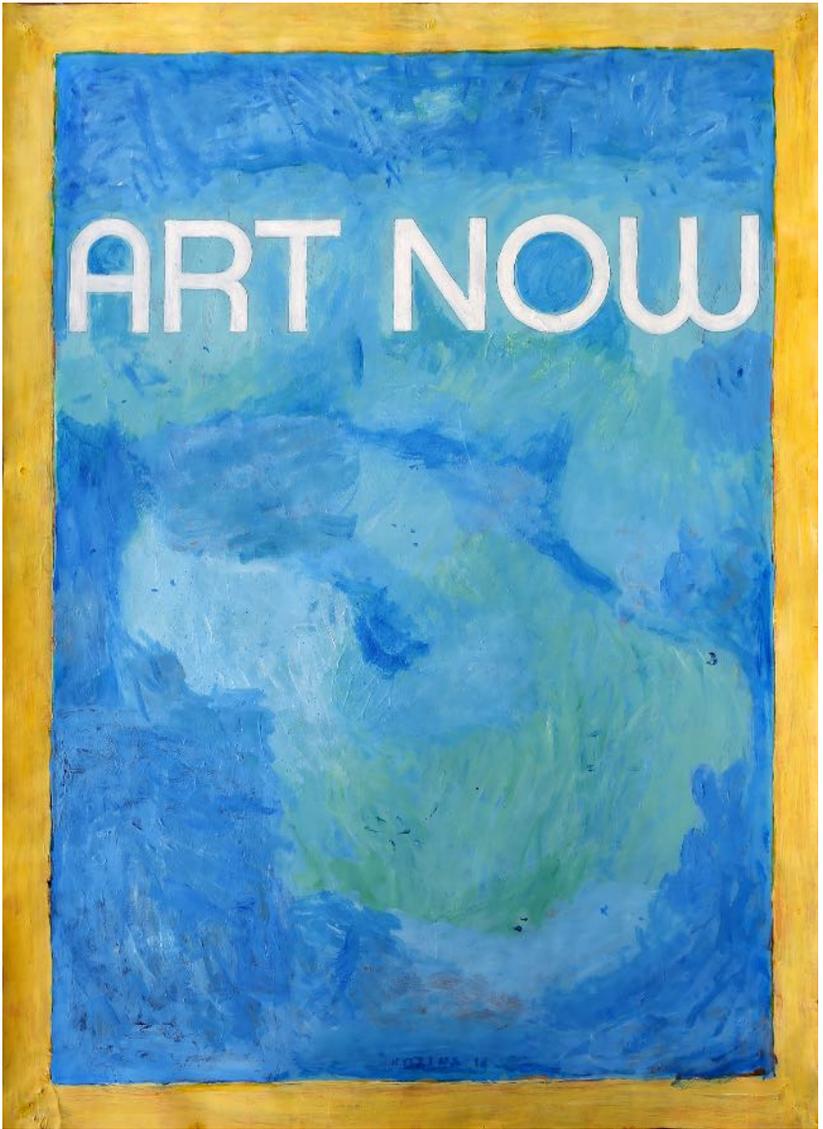
into gold; art remains the ultimate space of freedom". Does this, from your perspective, mean that artists bear great social responsibility, or that the social expectations of art are so low that there is ultimately no mutual recognition of artistic creation and everyday life? My question, of course, is directed at the possibility of artists (as well as other cultural workers, and producers of all kinds) creating works that ultimately aesthetically reshape our relationship, understanding, and visibility of phenomena from the past, making them open to political and economic mobilization.

KOZINA: Chesterton roughly says: "People establish institutions when they are happy; when they are unhappy, they destroy them". It means that a happy anarchist is an oxymoron. For freedom, he says it shouldn't be defined as "I do what I want," but as "I am free to refuse to do what is bad". In one parable from the Gospel, three servants are mentioned. Each received a different number of talents that they were supposed to monetize or multiply. One received one, the other two, and the third five talents... so, I think that true producers of art (of all kinds) are those who received five talents (speaking about the possibilities of artists)...

We are nearing the end of our conversation, and one of the things I like to ask all my interviewees (because this item can elevate and deepen our exchange here) is certainly about significant influences on their work and worldview. In that sense, I'm interested in whether there are any books, works (artistic, pop-cultural, others...), or practices that you consider formative for your view of the world or understanding of your (and then other, cultural, artistic, and other) work? These are, of course, not just recommendations for what you consider cult or important cultural, artistic, or other achievements, but precisely works that bring us close to your point of view, or at

least to the visual/conceptual environment from which we can look at your work more “intimately”...

KOZINA: Art itself, of course, has never been enough for me. I believe that even sincere physicists and mathematicians cannot be satisfied with only physics or mathematics. Actually, to transcend something in the field one engages in, it is necessary to step out of one’s comfort zone. The only baggage I carry in such kind of nakedness is analogy, which is crucial in my work. I don’t use analogy only in expected places. Connecting two or more “incompatible” things causes a spark that is a prerequisite for the birth of a creative paradox. Three or four years ago, I read two books by Gilbert K. Chesterton: “Orthodoxy” and “The Everlasting Man”, discovering an author close to me who had been under the radar the whole time. Of course, he is not the only author who influenced me. In fact, I always read several books at once, often by authors of extremely different worldviews (e.g. on one side Jacques Maritain and on the other Peter Sloterdijk), not because I can’t decide (I decided, as I mentioned before) but precisely because of the dissimilarity, because only in this way can necessary complementarity come to life. Unforced breathing with one lung, simply put narrow-mindedness. Honore Daumier and Henri Matisse, in their visual language, although extremely opposite, opened up to me more than anyone else the space of the painted picture. In Daumier’s case, humor and true empathy are crucial (as they are for me). In other words, let’s be completely open; what Louis-Philippe was to Daumier is today woke culture to me, a malignant form of petit-bourgeoisie cloaked in high-tech clichés and agreed-upon “empathies” (which is especially abundant in “Art Now”).



Zlatko Kozina

Art Now, 2018. acrylic on canvas, 100 x 79 cm

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USB_collective

Discarded Elements Reimagined and Rediscovered as a Retrospective

2014018023

The project of a few individuals under several titles and a variety of visual and intellectual experiments was always already a retrospective – it was an exercise in looking back, a radicalization of taking back, and a reflection on the cultural experience of being practically invisible while proactively engaged with contemporary socio-economic situations. This is something USB_collective takes from its spiritual predecessors in global (the Situationist International) and local context (the Gorgona group). The name is actually an acronym for U-shaped Basilicas, stylized as yoU Shaped Basilicas, a type of architecture in the Roman Empire era.

Looking back now at their respective practice of retrospecting through everyday life in physical space and cyberspace, we find artefacts of past engagement which provoke only aesthetic interest and sporadic motivation in contemporary youth to provide for themselves a similar outlet of leisurely artistic and intellectual engagement few years before plugging into the daily grind of work, cultural management, cultural production, etc.

The collective engagement of the USB_collective consisted of no more than three people at one time and associated within itself no more than three other groups which may have included the same individuals – these were the >“Institute” for Propaganda and Applied Autonomy< with its imaginary basis in Ivanić-Grad, Croatia and the >“Institute” for Leaving the 20th Century< with its base in Pula, Croatia. The practices these groups engaged in consisted of (1) establishing a unique cyberspace for distribution of materials, (2) production of physical fanzine publication, (3) various actions in physical space, mostly associated with ludic tagging and mapping of areas in which anonymity meets the environment of myriad (un)conscious everyday engagements between individuals, spaces, tools, etc. Along with a conference and various collaborative projects of the individuals involved with USB, there were some events exclusive to the group and ephemeral in character:

– 2014: Closed captioning of daily liminal experience as USB_collective. Sticker tags displaying common daily occurrences – mostly background sounds of our daily surroundings – were attached to a random location, provoking the temporary change in the perceptive situation: “[elevator dings]” sticker is applied to a door of a city tram, etc.



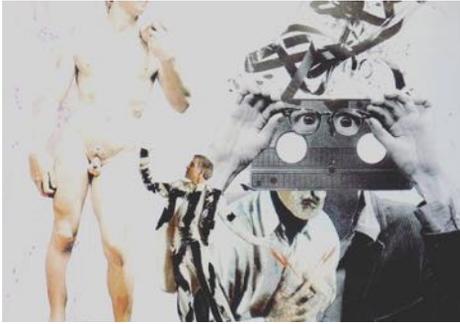


– 2015: Presentation at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb as USB_collective under the title of “ALUnder control” saw the first exposition of the “Klinika” fanzine which was at the time coupled with the web-page accessible only by knowing the IP-address which changed multiple times a day and could be checked through engagement with USB_collective social media accounts.

– 2017: KLINIKA fanzine as the >“Institute” for Propaganda and Applied Autonomy< was distributed at random, most predominantly by inserting the pamphlet-like-fanzine into selected books at the local humanities college and some book fairs. The topics explored the way in which the efforts of the Situationist International could be appropriated for use in contemporary cultural and political situations.

– 2018: Final exhibition of the project “Pola Izložbe: Pola Ideje” (*Half of the Exhibition: Half of the Idea*) explored the ideas and (in)consistencies of street art and art of the street as a practice and as a way of thinking, thus concluding the somewhat organised efforts of the group. “Warm Hacker Summer” – which lasted for a couple of years – was the last project of the group in which certain visual artefacts were pushed back into play, overproduced, exhibited and offered for augmentations by the audience. The same pictures were later partially “repaired” from audience’s inputs and offered again for interventions during the last exhibition of the group. The process of creating these works consisted of making a collage from 1980s Yugoslavian computer magazines in (in a series titled “Who can I be now?”); scanning of these collages and stretching them to a large format to be printed in sheets of A4 paper on a broken home printer; re-scanning and re-printing; glueing the printed paper on stretched and prepared canvas. As the exhibition audience intervened onto the canvas, the nostalgic content of the 1980s aesthesis slowly disappeared giving way to a language of “street art” style of expression impressionist in character and no longer reducible to a certain type of visualisation.

Ultimately, USB_collective ended up riding on the vapour-wave, establishing a situation of dissent within a cultural, artistic and visual landscape of a certain locale, showcasing its results and offering its methods for appropriation by other like minded collectives over the internet;



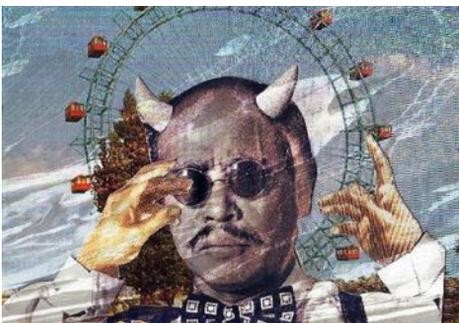
thus, being situational in character, it explored the contemporary possibilities of the idea to think globally and act locally not only as a method, but as a way of life which is particularly troublesome in the spectacular social organisation of the world.

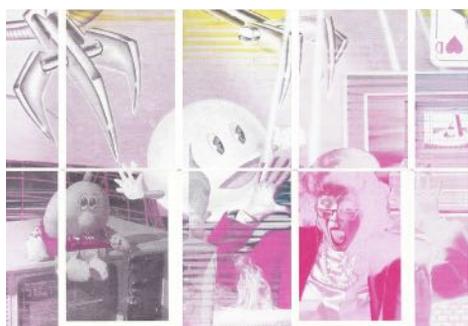
In an attempt to historicize this short-lived experiment would ultimately only mean to explore and describe its failure due to the concrete social and geopolitical context in which it emerged without any kind of aesthetic consistency in mind except for the radical will to explore that which is shown everywhere but spoken nowhere and vice versa. The paraphrased idiom of the movement remains: “The virtual is never finished, only abandoned”.

For the most part, what the movement was dealing with at all times were discarded elements of a culture which is no longer transforming but rather only eating itself up and thus creating a huge amount of

waste. It is no longer a dadaist dance on the rubbles of old Europe but rather a scavenge on the wastelands of the New World; intention was no longer to create aesthetic objects and ludic art events from something already destroyed but rather to take that which is only spectacularly disintegrated and push it back into circulation as a sort of a glitch in the matrix. Success of such a task can in no way be measured nor would it be in the spirit of the movement to even attempt to do so. What must be noted, from the Situationists of the 1960s to Wark's *Hacker Manifesto* and beyond is that this type of attitude has its role in maintaining the possibility for authentic expression in a culture that is always on the brinks of becoming just a picture of itself and thus falling into the black hole of nostalgia where no (new) movement is on the horizon of possibilities.

The (un)expected result emerged from the recollections of this bygone ephemeral movement: the spectacle is no longer the sole recuperator of otherwise irreducible, radical or even revolutionary practices. Namely,





on the local level, in the areas spectacle cannot reach effectively, nostalgia acts in its place. On the fine ends of the spectacle, nostalgia lingers like the thin hairs brushing away every last particle of authentic expression. So, in the end, described as at one point as a black hole, and on the other as a fine line on the fringes of the spectacle, one might consider nostalgia to be the total environment of the spectacular universe, which is not that strange of an observation since it ultimately is a collection of images in a seemingly harmonious unity of representation. And where images dominate, so does the feeling of yearning for the reality they ultimately obscure in mediation and attentive promotion of their own agenda. When we feel nostalgic, we are already immersed in the spectacle, the same being with the feeling of thirst and being actually dehydrated.

The implicit result of this retrospective – which was already at play in the very inception of the movement – as a document and as practice suggests that nostalgia produces an impoverished – liminal – present that has to be re-engaged in a ludic, provocative mannerism of radical “environmenting” towards a poetic understanding of the space of everyday life. Just as the spectacle reduced our experiences to images, nostalgia reduces our emotions to longing. To battle this reduction, one must first re-develop a language which can express much more than what an image can call attention to.

How many artistic endeavours have already been lost in time that was not subjected to history? Did everything imaginable already exist somewhere but was only abandoned or forgotten? Are movements that are meant to be forgotten black holes which will suck in everything that comes even remotely close to discovering its true potential? Can we really secure a(ny)thing from being lost?









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Further Reading

In dealing with nostalgia as a phenomena which should be phenomenologically circumscribed and practically engaged – rather than academically defined and intellectually addressed – we should venture outside the scope of books on nostalgia as well as nostalgic literature altogether. To inform our ability to perceive and think through nostalgia as an element of one psychogeographic effort we do not require clear methodologies, theoretical foundations and endless analysis. What we do need is time for mindful reflection on our culture as a whole and the ways in which it is structured in order to produce certain effects, influence our thinking and direct our action in the life-world. At the point in which culture contracts and becomes a picture of itself, a sort of system of exchange in superficialities, nostalgia emerges at first as a symptom of this reduction of experience and second as its spectacular augmentation which is nothing more than commodification of loss into a product to be produced and consumed inside a certain world-picture.

That being said, this section does not offer an extensive list of resources for further reading on nostalgia because this book ultimately is not about reading nostalgia, but reading *through* it. Being already fully immersed in the spectacular nostalgic landscapes of contemporary popular culture we adopted the propaedeutic character and method of heideggerian phenomenology which relies on circumlocution and “methodic hesitation” to provoke results which are achievable only in practice, mindful observation and psychogeographic engagement with the life-world which, even though embedded in the language of daily life, is in no way reducible to it.

The list you have before you might then be considered as a set of instructions, workbooks and material for what is yet to be exercised in real-life, a preliminary communication which should result with an attitude on and not a clear and distinct account of nostalgia. It would be wrong and in opposition to the intentions of this volume if our effort here only produced additional reading or writing on the subject and thus further eliminating action from our impoverished reality.

Boym, Svetlana. 2002. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books.

A pioneering critical examination of modern nostalgia, the book which almost single handedly defined all other approaches to nostalgia from its inception at the very beginning of the 21st century to this day.

Debord, Guy. 1967. *The Society of the Spectacle*. & 1994. *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*. [many editions and translations]

Aside from it being one of the most critically engaged and provocative – albeit dark and ominous in character – studies of contemporary western culture, Debord’s theory of the spectacle employs a specific style to express his ideas, a style that is in line with his equally extravagant methods of physczhogeographic provenance as well as his extensive use of paraphrase and taking note from the infamous passage in Count Lautreamont’s letters about plagiarism being a necessity implied by progress. The book is invaluable read especially in terms of understanding that there are alternative ways of “doing” theory and that intellectual work in a certain mannerism of radical thought can and should be considered a type of praxis, especially considering the ‘preparatory character’ of this book which is in no way a definitive theory or a completed volume in itself.

Boorstin, Daniel Joseph. 1962. *The Image. A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*. [any edition]

Boorstin, an American scholar and a historian of modern culture, explored and brought forth in his book the radical reconceptualisation of the concept of “image” from the standpoint of contemporary popular culture in the US. However, his presence in media theory and visual studies remains sporadic at best. This is mainly due to his methodological outlook through which he offers a critical and comprehensive modern history of the phenomena without pretensions to deliver a theory of the image or “pseudo-events” proper; the approach also defined his style which is highly engaging, linear and abundant with information, narratively structured as a story about modern culture, a thing in which Boorstin excelled throughout his work as an author. The other point was the radicality of his observations that were at the time unparalleled and unaligned and – similar to the case of Debord – “up for grabs” by other intellectuals in the emerging fields of media studies.

Tauber, Alfred I. 1997. *Science and the Quest for Reality*. London: Macmillan Press. A collection of texts which problematize the relationship of science and the

concept of reality begin with the translation of Heidegger's seminal essay "The Age of the World-Picture". The topic bears special relevance today not only in order to retrospect just how radically the notion of reality got transformed in the light of new techno-scientific advances and discoveries – not only in 1997 but even more so today – but also the way popular culture and its spectacle – and with it also the phenomena of nostalgia – are 'designed' by contemporary science and its application in consumer technology.)

Çağlayan, Emre. 2018. *Poetics of Slow Cinema. Nostalgia, absurdism, boredom*. Switzerland: Springer Nature/PalgraveMacmillan. Critical reflection on cinema is one of the fundamental resources for thinking about the concepts of the spectacle as well as of nostalgia. In the case of this book, it is instructive to take the author's thesis and apply it to popular blockbuster cinema in America and elsewhere. Phenomenal success of films like *Dune* – or epic SF cinema in general – can prove to be symptomatic of the spectacularization of nostalgia. On the other hand, the phenomena of 'remakes' and 'requels' in popular cinema also point towards the more absurdist elements of the culture deeply immersed into a nostalgic landscape of late capitalism.)

Church, David. 2016. *Grindhouse Nostalgia. Memory, Home Video and Exploitation Film Fandom*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Church, David. 2023. *Post-Horror. Art, Genre and Cultural Elevation*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. (Another important study area for phenomenological circumlocution of nostalgia surely is horror cinema, predominantly in the US, from the end of 1970s onwards. Aesthetics of horror cinema from that era bear clear hauntological aspects and exemplify to a great deal of accuracy a state of social disintegration which Debord described as – paraphrasing here the quote mentioned in the Introduction – an image of happy unity surrounded by desolation and horror in the calm centre of misery. Almost any contemporary study of horror cinema will prove beneficial in that sense for the understanding that horror films are much more than just scary films for frivolous consumption and without substance.)

Tanner, Grafton. 2016. *Babbling Corpse. Vaporwave and the Commodification of Ghosts*. New York: Zero Books.

Tanner, Grafton. 2023. *Foreverism*. London: Polity. (The first and the latest book by an American culture theorist, Grafton Tanner, introduces into the academic discourse

and intellectual debate a variety of pop-cultural phenomena which provide for a better, richer and more profound understanding of contemporary culture which finds its expression in phenomena of the digital world, virtualities and visualisation of life. Taking cues from derridean philosophical outlook and engaging research that covers historical as well as contemporary accounts of phenomena, Tanner delivers a refreshed perspective on nostalgic phenomena circumscribed through four equally engaging volumes, two of which are mentioned here with the rest listed in the Bibliography section.)

Roquet, Paul. 2016. *Ambient Media. Japanese Atmospheres of the Self*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.

Roquet, Paul. 2022. *The Immersive Enclosure. Virtual Reality in Japan*. New York: Columbia University Press. (Taken in the context of another Debordian idiom which states that the spectacle acts as the continuation of the western project of thought effectively turning reality into a speculative universe, these books act as an instructive corrective of our perspective on technological development in contemporary era. Both books showcase through a popular yet phenomenological account the way in which non-western - even though still profoundly capitalist - culture share fundamentally different conceptualizations of identity, memory, reality, virtualization and visualisation of experience. Even though they end up being bound up by the same technological products, two cultures differ radically in the way they employ, understand and use these technologies, giving us the opportunity to hack into our common conceptions of the abilities, possible and prescribed uses of our technological products.)

Cross, Gary. 2015. *Consumed Nostalgia. Memory in the Age of Fast Capitalism*. New York: Columbia University Press. (This should be read in the key of pioneering historical works on contemporary popular culture, however paradoxical it may seem. Daniel Boorstin's *The Image*, a monumental exploration of popular culture from the pen of America's most important historians of popular culture and American identity, proved to be hugely influential for Debord's theory of the spectacle. In the same manner, this book might prove helpful for the elaboration of a more critical attitude towards contemporary culture as a whole and in a global context.)

Beller, Jonathan. 2006. *The Cinematic Mode of Production. Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Fisher, Mark. 2009. *Capitalist Realism. Is there no alternative?*. New York: Zero Books. (Building on the theory of the spectacle in implicit or more explicit sense, the two books explore the later phase of capitalist production in which visualisations take command over any other type of communication and production of meaning in culture, thus producing nostalgia in effect as an eerie feeling of longing for an open world in which possibilities were expressed through ability to express them in language, not that much unlike the difference between the freedom offered to us by open ended personal computers of the first generation where you could do virtually anything if you knew how to code it and the freedom of the smart-phone of today...)

Bonnet, Alastair. 2010. *Left in the Past. Radicalism and the Politics of Nostalgia*. New York: Continuum Books. (A book by an interesting and fruitful author engaging subjects outlined in the Introduction to this volume, especially in coupling political theory, nostalgia and psychogeography of the Situationist provenance.)

Todorova, Maria; Gille, Zsuzsa. 2010. *Post-Communist Nostalgia*. Oxford: Berghahn Books. (For those interested in continuing their exploration of nostalgia in the context of post-socialism beyond the scope outlined in this book.)

Biographies of the Contributors

Grafton Tanner is the author of *Foreverism* (Polity Books, 2024), *The Hours Have Lost Their Clock: The Politics of Nostalgia* (Repeater Books, 2021), *The Circle of the Snake: Nostalgia and Utopia in the Age of Big Tech* (Zero Books, 2020), and *Babbling Corpse: <nostalgia, technology, and the rhetoric of neoliberalism*, and his writing has appeared in such venues as NPR, The Nation, the Los Angeles Review of Books, Jacobin, and Real Life. He is the host of *Delusioneering*, a three-episode audio series about the myths of capitalism. Currently he is writing a book on the re-emergence of exorcism in the late twentieth century.

Krešimir Purgar received a BA degree in Art History and Italian Studies and a PhD in Art Sciences. He is a professor at the Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek, Croatia, where he teaches courses in visual studies and art theory. He has presented papers at conferences in Colorado Springs, London, Manchester, Barcelona, Skopje, Rome, Florence, Palermo, Vilnius, Chicago, Dartmouth College, University of Western Ontario and elsewhere. He gave invited lectures at universities in Genova, Cagliari, Prague, Tirana, Graz, Pristina, Kraków, Milan and Tübingen. He authored *Pictorial Appearing. Image Theory After Representation* (Transcript, Bielefeld, 2019) and *Iconologia e cultura visuale. W.J.T. Mitchell, storia e metodo dei visual studies* (Carocci, Rome, 2020). He edited (with Ž. Paić) *Theorizing Images* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle, 2016), *W.J.T. Mitchell's Image Theory – Living Pictures* (Routledge, New York, 2017), *The Iconology of Abstraction – Non-figurative Images and the Modern World* (Routledge, New York, 2020) and *The Palgrave Handbook of Image Studies* (Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2021).

Nadežda Čačinovič, professor Emeritus. Born on April 1, 1947, in Budapest. She received education in Zurich, Bern, Belgrade, Murska Sobota, and Ljubljana. She studied philosophy, comparative literature, art history, and linguistics in Ljubljana, Bonn, and Frankfurt; graduated from the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana (philosophy and comparative literature). She defended her Ph.D. in philosophy at the Faculty of Arts in Zagreb. Since 1976, she has been employed at the Faculty of Arts in Zagreb. From 1995 to 1999, she served as a visiting professor at the Jan van Eyck Postgraduate Centre in Maastricht. In 1995, she participated in the establishment and has since been teaching at the Centre for Women's Studies in Zagreb. She represents Croatia on the Executive Board of the International Association for Aesthetics. From 2009 to 2017, she was the president of the Croatian P.E.N. Center.

Blaženka Perica, art historian. Since 1986, she has been residing in Germany, where she obtained her PhD in 1999 from the University of Kassel with a thesis titled "Specific Objects. Theory and Practice in the Works of Donald Judd". She has worked as a research associate and/or curator in several museums (Kunstsammlung NRW, Museum Wiesbaden, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt) and various renowned art galleries in Germany. Since 2007, she has been teaching as an associate professor at the Art Academy in Split, Croatia, lecturing on contemporary art and since 2009, she has also been teaching the course "Concept of Art" at the graduate level. As an associate in 2009 and 2010, she also taught the subject "Art Today. Contexts of Contemporary Art" at the Art Academy in Osijek for undergraduate and graduate students.

Silvia Pierosara is an Associate Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Macerata, Italy. She studied the theory of recognition, narrative ethics, and relational autonomy. She is interested in the ethical implications of narratives as paths to personal and social emancipation and in the exploration of the structural features that make narratives violent or tolerant, inclusive, and attentive to suffering. She actually explores the link between narrativity and relational autonomy. She devoted some monographs and several essays to these topics. Her actual researches focus on: the possibility of a "narrative autonomy" that values the concept of self-authorship and scales back that of self-ownership; critical philosophy of history including progress, memory, and nostalgia.

Alexei Kazakov is a Ph.D. student in Philosophy at the University of Ottawa in Canada, where he also received his BA (2018) and MA (2022). His research interests lie primarily in the critique of modernity at the intersection of two traditions of thought: Anglo-American post-analytic social philosophy (Alasdair MacIntyre, Bernard Williams, Charles Taylor) and the French anti-totalitarian left tradition of political philosophy influenced by Raymond Aron (Marcel Gauchet, Pierre Nora, Claude Lefort, Cornelius Castoriadis, etc.)

Ronald Alvarez Vera, major in Philosophy from Ecuador. He gave several interdisciplinary courses and participated in conferences over these years to expand the horizon of my knowledge. In order to complement his formation and vocation in understanding and helping others, last year he started a degree in Psychology. He has worked as a philosophy teacher in several schools in Chile and also in Ecuador and have taught courses like History of Philosophy, Philosophy of mind, Philosophy of Music, Metaphysics, Modern Philosophy, and Literature to name a few.

Josip Klaić (b. 1991) is an assistant at the Strossmayer Gallery of Old Masters and PhD candidate in art history at the University of Zadar, Croatia. He graduated in Art history and Archaeology at the University of Zagreb. After his internship at the Museum of Contemporary Art (2018/19), he acquired the title of curator. He worked at the Ministry of Culture and Media 2021/2022. Also, he has collaborated with several museums, festivals, and independent cultural institutions. He is the author of several exhibitions and several scientific, professional and critical texts. The interests of his research are the art of the second half of the 20th century and the theory of photography.

Margherita Maselli was born in Parma, Italy, in 1997. After a bachelor degree in Foreign Languages and Literature at the University of Bologna, she graduated with a master's degree in Interdisciplinary Research and Studies on Eastern Europe, with a focus on the South Eastern European region. She is currently (2022) living in Zagreb, where she is working as an intern at Clubture Network.

Nika Petković (1992, Rijeka) holds a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Film Studies from the Faculty of Humanities, University of Bologna. After completing her studies she

started collaborating with the “Cineteca di Bologna” on a project “Cineturismo in Emilia Romagna” and with the festival “Il Cinema Ritrovato” as a jury coordinator and as a production assistant on educational workshops. In Bologna, she also collaborated as a researcher of archive material at Home Movies Archive and with the festival “Archivio Aperto”, mainly focused on amateur and experimental cinema. In 2019 she moved to Zagreb, where she continued collaborating as an archive researcher for the film “Fiume o Morte!” (Igor Bezinović, RESTART). She collaborates with the educational program Sedmi kontinent (Seventh continent) as editor of the educational film platform Vrti svoj film. She was one of the film programmers of the 18th edition of the ZagrebDox festival. She also writes film reviews and essays for film journals (*Hrvatski filmski ljetopis*) and websites (*Kultura-punkt*).

Tihana Pupovac, theoretician and cultural worker. For more than ten years, she is been active on the independent cultural scene in Croatia and the region, developing and implementing numerous projects, events and publications related to the cultural heritage of Yugoslavia, memory studies, urbanism etc. She was the coordinator and the initiator of the Inappropriate Monuments platform, the coordinator of the MaMa club and the editor of the “MaMa na zahtjev” podcast, as well as vice president of the SF:ius association. She is a doctoral student at the Institute of Philosophy, ZRC SAZU in Ljubljana. Along with the cultural policies of socialism and the socialist heritage, she deals with the early modern European political theory, Marxist, feminist, and psychoanalytic theories and their receptions in socialism, and the history of radical policies.

Ivica Baković graduated in 2007 with a degree in Croatian Studies and Slavic Studies from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Zagreb, and earned his Ph.D. in 2013 (Performance of History in Macedonian and Croatian Drama Literature of the Second Half of the 20th Century). Since 2007, he has been employed at the Department of South Slavic Languages and Literatures at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Zagreb. His book Drama around History: History and Memory in Croatian and Macedonian Drama of the Second Half of the 20th Century (Zagreb: Central Europe, 2018) has been published, as well as several literary translations from Macedonian.

Reana Senjković graduated and obtained her master's degree from the Department of Art History at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Zagreb and earned her Ph.D. at the Department of Ethnology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in 1997 (Visual Aspects of Political Propaganda and Folk Artistic Expression. Croatia after 1990). She has been employed at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb since 1990, and since 2012, she has held the position of scientific advisor in permanent tenure. For her book *Lost in Transmission: Pop Experience of Soc Culture*, she received the Annual State Science Award (2009). For her book *Every Day Victory: Culture of Youth Work Actions*, she received the Annual "Milovan Gavazzi" Award from the Croatian Ethnological Society (2016).

Victoria Mateos de Manuel (Ph.D., SPA) is currently an independent researcher, school teacher since 2020, and MA student in Spanish as a Foreign Language with the research warburgian project Ethosformel. She published two books: *El Silencio de Salomé. Ensayos coreográficos sobre lo dionisiaco en la modernidad* (CSIC/Plaza y Valdés, 2019) and *Coreoteca. Un archivo de filosofía de la danza* (Ediciones Complutense, 2021). Holds a BA in Philosophy (Universidad Complutense Madrid, 2009), MA in Gender and Diversity Studies (Freie Universität Berlin, 2011), MA in Teacher's Training (Universidad Complutense Madrid, 2018), and Ph.D. in Philosophy (Universidad Complutense Madrid, 2017).

Igor Lojnjak was born in Osijek on April 3, 1988. He obtained his BA in philosophy in 2010 from the Jesuit Society Faculty of Philosophy and MA in comparative literature and art history from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. He is a lecturer at the Faculty of humanities and social sciences in Osijek and a PhD student at the Doctoral School of the University of Osijek. He worked at the City Galleries Osijek and the Museum of Fine Arts Osijek, regularly writes art reviews for daily newspapers and magazines, curates exhibitions and writes introductions and prefaces for art catalogs. His areas of interest include the medieval and early modern periods, as well as art theory, especially contemporary art. He is interested in exploring spirituality and mysticism in contemporary artistic practice and is a member of the Croatian Section of AICA (International Association of Art Critics).

Ivana Ljubičić / AMIO MON is an artist and musician based in Zagreb, Croatia. Creating retro dreamscapes and digital heavy chill collages which are, a lot of the time, utopian visions of the atomic age that were closely connected with the visions of conquering the cosmos. As a freelance artist, she worked with bands and musicians such as Elev, Planisphere, Denisova, Maha Jeffery, Spencer Yenson & The Fever, Dimitrije Dimitrijević, lilliewah, and others. She also worked as a freelance designer for Red Bull, Pickbox, and Lanvin.

Teuta Gatolin (1993) is an intermedia artist based in Croatia, currently researching storytelling ecology, the subversive potential of mythological tricksters, nostalgia, illusion, and technology as one of the companion species to humans. Her work is often process-oriented, spawning iterations of itself realized with other fabulators. She often collaborates on intermedia performance projects and has worked many times with the independent contemporary dance community in Croatia. Her works have taken the shape of installations, text, collections of objects, workshops, letters, costumes, virtual spaces, and a range of mixes, mashups, and negotiations between various art media. She studied New Media Arts at the Fine Art Academy, and Journalism/Media Studies at the Faculty of Political Sciences, both in Zagreb, Croatia.

Dafne Berc is an architect from Zagreb, also trained at the Berlage Institute in Amsterdam and Universidad Politécnica de Catalunya in Barcelona. During 2002-2005 and 2009-2012 she was tutoring design studios at the Department of Urbanism, Spatial Planning and Landscape Architecture of the Faculty of Architecture, University of Zagreb. A substantial part of her work has been dedicated to studying territorial and spatial issues in a broader sociocultural context. She is in particular concerned with the structural analyses of tourism landscapes of the northern (European) Mediterranean and the coast of Croatia, and with the impact of postindustrial economies on urban transformations. As an author, she collaborates with different professionals and organizations, dealing mostly with cultural and artistic practice in the country and abroad: research projects, lectures, studies, articles and publications, exhibitions and art installations, workshops and other related formats.

Juraj Šantorić was born in 1997 in Zagreb. He is a third-year student of Philosophy and Ethnology and Anthropology at the University of Zadar. He received the Rector's Award at the undergraduate level in the academic year 2021/2022. As part of the CEEPUS student mobility program, he spent a semester at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, while also doing an internship at the Center for Cultural Decontamination (CZKD). He is the author of several performances that problematize issues of identity, belonging, the academic world, and urban design, which he has performed at the University of Zadar, the International Festival of Contemporary Theatre Zadar *snova*, and the ValOm festival. He considers performance art as a prospective anthropological method. In his work, he strives to create an authentic expression that connects scientific and artistic discourses.

Zlatko Kozina was born in 1968. in Slavonski Brod, graduated from Faculty of humanities and social sciences in Rijeka at the Department for Visual Culture and Fine Arts (today's Academy of Applied Arts in Rijeka). From 2000 to 2016 employed as an art teacher in two high schools in Slavonski Brod. From 2016 onwards working at the Academy for Arts and Culture in Osijek, currently the head of Visual and Media Arts Department. Few recent solo and group exhibitions include (2018) "A Perfect Art World" in Gallery Greta (Zagreb), "Suvremena umjetnost" in Gallery Julije Knifer (Osijek), "Suvremena umjetnost 38" in Salon Galić (Split) and "East of Eden" (Osijek/Split/Graz 2021-2022). Author of two collections of essays, *Odgajanje pogleda* (Cultivating the gaze, 2013) and "Tijelo kontinuiteta" (Body of continuity, 2020).

Dario Vuger is a photographer, curator and researcher currently working at the Museum of Fine Arts in Osijek with part-time engagements with the Academy for Arts and Culture and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Osijek. He has obtained his PhD in Philosophy from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia with the thesis "Spectacle and Time in Contemporary Philosophy" and his MA in Philosophy, Art History and Heritage Studies from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. His research interests include heideggerian phenomenology, theory of the spectacle, philosophy of technology as well as visual studies, outsider art, visibility, spirituality and reception of phenomenology in Japan. He is a member of International Media and Nostalgia Network (imnn), Central and East European Society for Phenomenology (CEESP),

International Association of Art Critics (AICA) and Croatian Association of Artists of the Applied Arts (ULUPUH).

INTRODUCING

NOSTALGIA MOVEMENTS

INTRODUCING NOSTALGIA MOVEMENTS presents a psychogeographical outline of an effort to critically engage the phenomena of nostalgia in everyday life as we experience it today. From essays, interviews, and research to aesthetic renderings and artistic reactions, this volume aims to demonstrate the scopes of nostalgia's influence on contemporary culture as a state of being, feeling, and as an attitude provoked by the techno-scientific developments of the late 20th and first two decades of 21st century. Not being a simple introduction, this book does not contain a concise history of nostalgia, and beyond its perspective as an academic resource – as a contribution to an ever-growing field of nostalgia research –, one of its primary goals is to provide the reader with the propaedeutic for practical engagement with the phenomena of nostalgia there where its effects are most observable: popular culture of our time.

Dario Vuger, PhD is a curator at the Museum of Fine Arts in Osijek, Croatia, researcher and lecturer in contemporary philosophy, aesthetics and theory of art. He is a member of Central and East European Society for Phenomenology (CEESP) and International Media and Nostalgia Network (imnn).

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