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Towards an Affective History of Yugoslavia

Abstract The article discusses the necessity for the diversification of (hi)stories of Yugoslavia, arguing for the importance of incorporating the affects and experiences of Yugoslavia's citizens into the historical narratives. Acknowledging the difficulties emerging from the fact that what is articulated as historical narrative is still part of the experience for millions of citizens of post-Yugoslav societies, the article reflects upon the potential for and obstacles to an affective history of socialist Yugoslavia through the lens borrowed from German sociologist Georg Simmel. It particularly refers to – and makes use of – two sets of Simmel's ideas. The first concerns the *nature of material* and the way we are making a story out of it – more precisely, the relationship between history and experience, life and representation. The second is about the *perspective* from which we look at, approach, and synthesize this material. Simmel's reflections on history and form offer a very useful tool to look at the Yugoslav case and also help de-essentialize and normalize Yugoslav history, making the anxieties that characterize it part of a much broader discussion about history, its nature, and its internal contradictions.

Keywords: Yugoslavia, socialism, history, affect, experience, Georg Simmel

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Introduction: (Im)possible histories of Yugoslavia

The film *Houston, We Have A Problem!*, directed by Žiga Virč, was released in the spring of 2016.¹ Shown as a part of the official program of the Tribeca Film Festival, it immediately attracted significant attention in post-Yugoslav societies.² The film, a docu-fiction, tells the story about a secret space program launched in socialist Yugoslavia that drew on revolutionary ideas about space travel developed by the Slovenian scientist, Herman Potočnik Noordung (1892-1929). In the heyday of the Cold War, Yugoslavs sold the program to the United States, which was desperate to catch up with Russians in the space race. However, once in American hands, it was discovered soon that the program didn't work. This enraged John F. Kennedy and his administration, and posed serious problems for Josip Broz Tito and indeed for Yugoslav foreign policy in general. The film includes

1 Earlier drafts of this article were presented at the workshop "New Historical Writing with Simmel on Form, Image, and Coloration" organized by Nancy Rose Hunt at the Institut d'Études Avancées de Paris, May 28-29, 2015, and at the colloquium of the Centre for Contemporary History in Potsdam on October 29, 2015. I am grateful for all the comments I received during these presentations. I also thank Adriana Zaharijević, Ljubica Spaskovska, and Jelena Vasiljević for their many valuable insights and engaged readings of the text.

2 See Kosmos 2016, Njegić 2016, Stojiljković 2016.

abundant archival footage, highly recognizable images from the history of Yugoslavia and the world from the second half of the twentieth century, and combines it with a fictional plot in which events, narrated from the perspective of the present day, are linked in the manner of a conspiracy theory. Namely, an elderly NASA scientist of Yugoslav origin, Ivan Pavić, returns to Croatia from the United States to meet his daughter for the first time. Ostensibly, he had been forced to leave his pregnant wife in 1957 at the time the Yugoslav space program was sold to the Americans. Together with twenty-five scientists, he had been compelled to move to the United States to try and fix the expensive but non-functioning space program. Had he refused, he would have ended up on Goli Otok, a Yugoslav camp for political prisoners. A car accident was staged on his native island of Pag so that his family would believe he had perished.

According to several media statements by the film's director Žiga Virč, the film aimed to expose the mechanisms of manipulation of the truth engaged in by politicians and the media. This goal was accomplished by combining typical truth-telling visual techniques – such as archival material, testimonies, visits to the abandoned facilities of the space program at the Yugoslav airbase in Željava, Croatia – with the fictional plot about the Yugoslav space program. However, *Houston, We Have A Problem!* does much more than that: it offers a glimpse into history that looks quite familiar, although the film's viewers know full well that it never happened. And yet the fact that this history is not (completely) true does not make it any less real. The viewers may spend the 118 minutes of the film's duration trying to separate the truth from fiction in the story, or they may choose another way to watch the film. (I know that I, and many others, did exactly that.) Taking the fakeness of the film's premise as an unquestionable fact, the viewer may allow to be seduced by a possible history of Yugoslavia. Its underlying fake-ness frees viewers from the obligation of justifying their attachment to that history and allows them to enjoy consuming it without engaging in a dialogue with the dominant interpretations of Yugoslavia's history; they are also liberated from the self-censorship such engagement usually implies. Again, the fact that the story is not true does not make it less real, and does not make it less history than some other stories about the Yugoslav past. Iva Kosmos writes this in her essay on *Houston, We Have A Problem!*

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despite the decision to reject the quest for the truth, *Houston, We Have A Problem!* is not as far away from history as it may seem. British historian Alun Munslow (2006) points to the difference between the past and history – the past is everything that happened before the current moment, while history is a story, a narrative about that past. The mistake of the traditional historiographical discourse is that it equates the past and history. The past is not accessible; all we have are stories about it. And what does Virč do? He takes archival material, interprets it, and creates a story about

the past. Although he says loud that it is not (about) the truth, what he does is not so radically different from what historians do (Kosmos 2016).

Seen this way, Virč's film, and the reactions of its viewers in the societies that used to be parts of socialist Yugoslavia, point to an important symptom of the post-Yugoslav social worlds. They reveal a desire, a longing for the possibility to tell, listen to, enjoy and engage with diverse, real and unreal, possible and impossible histories from the second part of the twentieth century, the period which brought dramatic social and economic changes, and which still represents a part of experienced memory for millions of citizens, but is usually subject to normative interpretations that view socialism as a totalitarian system that invaded all spheres of public and private life, and denied any possibility for citizens' agency (Ghodsee and Lišková, this issue).³ In this article, I take seriously this desire for the diversification of (hi)stories of Yugoslavia, arguing for the importance of incorporating the affects and experiences of Yugoslavia's citizens into the historical narratives.

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Memory, History, and Affect

In April 2012, I attended a guided tour in the Maribor Art Gallery of an exhibition entitled *Unfinished Modernizations between Utopia and Pragmatism: Architecture and Urban Planning in the Former Yugoslavia and its Successor States*. The tour was led by one of the curators who selected the work for the show, a young architect from Zagreb. The tour group was comprised mostly of young people, including some from Great Britain, so our guide spoke English. He took us through several rooms of the Maribor Art Gallery, in which were exhibited photographs and models of recognizable buildings, construction designs for socialist cities and neighborhoods, Yugoslav modernist abstract monuments to the anti-fascist struggle, and the plans for the big projects of Yugoslav companies in other non-aligned countries. Our eloquent guide provided us with a great deal of relevant information about the architectural heritage of the Yugoslav period, sprinkling his talk with irony and jokes about Yugoslavia, its long-serving President Tito, and life in socialist times. It was clear from his attitude and way of speaking that he felt as essential to make a distance between himself and his subject, and irony and humor proved to be effective tool for such distancing. The necessity of emotional distance and "the objective assessment" of Yugoslav modernization was also emphasized in the meta-text of the exhibition. One of the display labels read: "It is not our intention to look nostalgically back at historical events, but to critically read the ways in which modern values and ambitions were

3 For a discussion on the possibility and nature of women's agency in socialism, and the need of diversification of feminist histories in the twenty-first century, see Ghodsee's (2015) response to Funk (2014), as well as a forum in the *Aspasia* journal (De Haan et al. 2016).

interpreted and produced: social justice, the public domain, cultural advancement, social solidarity, and the dissemination and exchange of knowledge”.

One of the visitors on our tour stood out from the others: an elderly gentleman with crutches who slowly followed the group on the ground floor, but could not climb the stairs and patiently waited for us to come down again for the last part of the exhibition. When the group approached the model of Split III, a modernist neighborhood built in the Mediterranean town of Split, our guide gave the floor to the man on crutches. It turned out he was Vladimir Braco Mušič, a Slovenian architect and the creator of several modernist projects in Yugoslavia – among them Split III, and Ruski Car in Ljubljana, the bravely designed and highly functional socialist neighborhood where is currently my home. Mušič did not speak for long, but he did say the following: “You may judge, assess, analyze, and make jokes about what we were doing back then, but I want you to know that when we made Split III and other projects, we truly believed we were doing a good thing and improving the lives of thousands of people. We wholeheartedly dedicated ourselves to these projects.”

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This discrepancy between a distanced, “objective,” historicized narrative of Yugoslavia on the one hand, and the experience of it still shared by millions of people inhabiting post-Yugoslav spaces, resides at the core of the tensions, ambiguities, and difficulties that characterize writing and thinking about socialist Yugoslavia twenty-five years after its demise. This discrepancy and the tensions it produces are extremely visible and strongly felt in any attempt to stage or display Yugoslav history in museum exhibitions,⁴ but they are no less evident in the ways we generally think about Yugoslavia. As Ljubica Spaskovska pointed out: “embedded within the vast field of historical enquiry, all present and future attempts at writing about Yugoslavia essentially strive to answer the question of how to frame and narrate the Yugoslav story in a context where Yugoslav time is historical, while the (post)Yugoslav space and the many people who inhabit(ed) that time and space still exist. One faces the challenge of writing about a phenomenon that qualifies as ‘not-yet-entirely-past’ and ‘partially-still-present’” (2014: 241). How we represent and write about Yugoslavia is an important epistemological, but also political question, as the legacy of Yugoslavia increasingly becomes a site of inspiration for some future politics articulated by new left activists and theoreticians in the region and beyond.

The sphere of the affective – of emotions and senses – has gained enormous attention in the humanities and social sciences in recent years.⁵ In historiographical practice, where the affective and the intellectual appear to be

4 See Mēhilli, 2009, Petrović 2013, 2013a, Popović 2016.

5 See, among others, Cvetkovich 2003, Duyvendak 2011, Hofman 2015, Gregg and Seigworth 2010.

seemingly at odds, we face many serious methodological challenges, as Nancy Rose Hunt (2014) puts it in her discussion of African gender history writing. In the particular post-Yugoslav context and the post-socialist context in general, however, the absence of the affective and emotional from historiographical narratives must be interpreted as an important social, political, and also epistemological symptom. The political importance of affect and emotions, and the political consequences of their absence in the post-socialist context, was singled out by Boris Buden (2009), who writes about social anesthesia as a defining characteristic of post-socialism preventing us from addressing the real social anxieties of post-socialist subjects: “The social contradictions of post-communism – such as the widening gap between rich and poor, the dismantling of all forms of social solidarity, enormous social injustices and widespread suffering – these all remain affectively unoccupied (...) This social anesthesia is one of most salient symptoms of post-communist transformation.”

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The epistemological aspect of this absence is no less significant and also has palpable political consequences. The academic disciplines of history and anthropology have already recognized the epistemic problem, and this recognition has resulted in an increasing attention to and interest in everyday life in socialism – in a number of projects, volumes, articles and museum exhibitions. Oral histories, narratives, and personal recollections have become legitimate sources. Social and cultural history and anthropology take seriously people’s experiences of socialism, their personal sensibilities, showing “respect for their claims of having lived a full and dignified life, in contrast to the claims that all that remains from communism is a collection of exotic memories and the impression that people had at best lived halfway normal lives” (Todorova 2014: 5). The historians of Yugoslavia, particularly those belonging to younger generations, have also recognized the necessity “to ‘normalize’ Yugoslav history, i.e. to open up the discursive space for histories of everyday life and narratives of ordinary Yugoslav” (Spaskovska 2014: 242). Extensive use of the methods of oral history characterizes their work, and in their writings they give voice to the people who lived and made history. While these are enormously important steps towards the inclusion of the experience of socialism into academic, museal, and cultural narratives about history of socialism in Europe, there are still significant lacunae and problems that demand self-reflection and serious consideration.

One of these problems concerns the creation of a clear dividing line between history and memory in studies of socialism. This line has proved to be much trickier than in cases of exploring the past in other geographical contexts. Memories of socialism have attracted a lot of scholarly and popular attention, but they are still treated as selective, unstable, informed (and deformed) by the present state of affairs, and, as such, opposed to “objective” or “neutral” history. This opposition produces telling differences in legitimacy: positive

memories of life and work in socialism are dismissed as nostalgia, while the memories of those who testify about crimes and violence conducted by the communist authorities prevail in media discourses and are taken as objective testimonies with the legitimacy of historiographical sources.

A related problem concerns how socialist subjects are thought of in political terms. In dominant approaches toward the politics of the memory of socialism, the socialist regime and its opponents as clearly opposed forces are given political agency, while the majority of citizens who lived in socialist societies are perceived as apolitical. In general, the history of everyday life seems to take an interest mostly in the non-political aspects of life under socialism. As Thomas Lindenberger (2014) rightfully stresses in his discussion of “salient historical problems of East German life,” there is a symptomatic void: “we know a lot about dissidents and their persecutors on the one hand, and about the normal life of ordinary people seemingly far away from official politics, on the other hand, but very little on how, for instance, the state security and party functionaries intervened in the lives of people who were not dissidents, that is, how authority was executed below the level of systematic repression and tight control.” We also know very little about how these “ordinary people” reacted to that control and how they acted *politically* within the realm of social participation and production provided by the socialist system. The anthropologist Alexei Yurchak (2006) offered an invaluable insight on how people engaged with the socialist authorities, arguing that they were neither opposing nor fully identifying with the system – indicating how limited are the binary oppositions that have provided the primary lens through which the history of socialism is viewed.

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In the prevalent normative view of socialism, which is strongly informed by the narrative of Europe’s two totalitarianisms (Ghodsee 2014), the politics and sensibilities of the majority of people who cannot be classified in one of the two opposed categories (victims/dissidents vs. perpetrators) remain ignored and neglected. This silent majority is presented as manipulated, politically immature masses that actually enjoyed their subordinate position because it offered safety and protection. This representation of citizens and citizenship during socialism has far reaching political consequences. Today, in debates over public space, common and public resources and property, and in the struggle to retain basic elements of the welfare state, citizens are unable to make references to their own experience of different social relations because they are *a priori* delegitimized. Boris Buden points to the paradox that “marks the jargon of the post-communist transition: those who proved their political maturity in the so-called ‘democratic revolutions’ of 1989-90 became children overnight!” (Buden 2015: 123). This paradox is based on “the cynical idea that people who won freedom through their own struggle must now learn how to enjoy it properly” (ibid., 125). The metaphor of post-socialist subjects as children,

similar to the transitional ideology in its totality, does not leave any room for memory: children are “untroubled by the past and geared totally toward the future,” which makes them “the almost perfect subjects of a democratic restart” (ibid., 124).

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The only public realm in which affective, nostalgic engagements with one’s own past is allowed is consumption, and consumerist and popular culture. Consumption has a very curious relationship with socialism. On the one hand, differences in consumption patterns between East and West are frequently highlighted as the most salient feature that defines the distortions and deficiencies of socialism: shortages, waiting in line for basic products, and low quality production, technology, and outdated fashion became the trademarks of socialism (Fehérváry 2013). On the other hand, consumption in socialism is probably the most studied domain of socialist life by both historians (of everyday life) and anthropologists.⁶ It is also the dominant content of museum representations of socialist history. For researchers interested in socialist Yugoslavia, consumption practices are even more interesting because of the “relaxed” or “western” nature of Yugoslav socialism. Studies of consumption and consumerism remain the most numerous studies of everyday life in Yugoslavia.⁷

As the main object of representation of socialism and of research interest in socialist everyday culture, consumption is often seen as the only domain where “ordinary people” engage with their own, socialist past affectively, and this affective engagement is labeled post-socialist/Yugo-nostalgia. The reduction of “ordinary people’s” nostalgia for socialism (usually used as an umbrella term for emotional and engaged recollections of various aspects of life in socialism) to consumerist and consumption practices and relationships is clearly problematic. The anthropologist Svetlana Slapšak (2008) thus sees Yugo-nostalgia as a negative phenomenon that revitalizes only those aspects of Yugoslav culture that were the most accessible, visible, banal, and kitschy. Instead, she opts for another kind of nostalgia: based above all on “the legitimization of longing for Yugoslavia in intellectual circles.” She thus give intellectuals permission to long for Yugoslavia and “its real, productive, and still important achievements, some of which are directly inscribed in the present day world crisis: equality, the right to work, health insurance, gender equality, etc.,” while simultaneously rejecting any possibility that other affectively engaged recollections of socialism may also articulate legitimate, reflected, and politically relevant claims (see also Slapšak 2011: 312).

However, several collective citizens’ actions in recent years suggest the opposite. For example, in February 2014, numerous *plenums* (people’s assemblies)

6 See, among others, Bren and Neuburger 2012, Patico 2008.

7 See Duda 2005, 2010, Luthar and Pušnik 2010, Grandits and Taylor 2010, Paterson 2011.

emerged from countrywide protests in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These plenums were the first notable attempt to reconstitute a civic form of citizenship after more than two decades of entrapment in ethnically defined politics. *Plenums*, even the name, directly refer to the collectivity and collective agency experienced in socialist times and lost in transition. Another example can be found in the May 2014 floods that hit Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The response of citizens throughout the former Yugoslavia was quick, passionate, and overwhelming. Not only did Croats, Serbs, Slovenes, and Macedonians organize the collection and transport of huge amounts of aid to affected areas, but also people from one part of ethnically divided Bosnia gave assistance to those in the other part, and asylum seekers rescued endangered citizens and helping clean up the debris. Roma women breastfed evacuated babies. Chinese shop owners distributed free rubber boots. This compassion and solidarity was accompanied by references to socialist Yugoslavia and its legacies. Many citizens, young and old, noted on social networks the meaningfulness of training at the defense and protection classes in the schools of socialist Yugoslavia, which, soon after the end of socialism, were ended because they were considered an ideological residue of the totalitarian regime. Even before the waters fully receded, the volunteers had organized in “work brigades” – another reference to Yugoslav socialism – in order to clean up affected areas.⁸

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The reflective and political engagement with the experience of socialism is not reserved for intellectuals, is not the privilege of the elite. It is necessary to take “ordinary people” seriously as political subjects and to seriously consider their affective memories as *historical* narratives. This is not necessarily an easy task, but it is politically, morally, and epistemologically essential. As a first important step towards its fulfillment, I propose the deeper exploration of the aspects that make the task so difficult. To reflect upon the potential for and obstacles to an affective history of socialist Yugoslavia, I borrow the lens from German sociologist Georg Simmel (1858–1918). I particularly refer to – and make use of – two sets of Simmel’s ideas, that he developed in his later writing “The Constitutive Concepts of History” (Simmel [1918] 1980). The first concerns the *nature of material* and the way we are making a story out of it – more precisely, the relationship between history and experience, life and representation. The second is about the *perspective* from which we look at, approach, and synthesize this material.

History and life

The metaphor of the tapestry, which Simmel used to describe the ambiguous and complicated relationships between life, experience, and history, seems applicable to the case of Yugoslavia. “Life as it is experienced,” Simmel says,

8 On floods and the politics of citizens’ response, see Petrović 2014, Zaharijević 2014.

“may be compared to a tapestry. Only short strands of its many threads are visible. The rest of the fabric is woven beneath the surface, continuously weaving together the part of the fabric that can be seen. However this function is concealed by the surface fabric, which is interwoven in the same way. It follows that only a linear arrangement of the threads of the fabric will reveal the design that cannot be identified in any of its individual parts. History, on the other hand, extracts a single strand as if its development were uninterrupted. In consequence, a form of continuity is created, but not a pattern” (Simmel 1980: 155).

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The metaphor of a tapestry has often been used for Yugoslavia because of the country’s multi-ethnic, mosaic-like composition. This tapestry was unwoven in the bloody, violent conflicts of the 1990s. This inescapable fact decisively limits the potential of visible strands when one writes about Yugoslavia. The bloody disintegration of the country became not only “an action understood by reference to its antecedents,” but, even more so, an action understood by reference to its *consequences*. Because of the general anesthetization of the socialist experience (Buden 2009), and the normative ways of writing about Yugoslavia now marked by ethnic conflict, nationalism, and violence, it is almost impossible to bring what still defines the lives of millions of former Yugoslavs to the surface of the tapestry as defined by Simmel: the complex concrete experiences, the confusing experiences of the senses, the vague familiarities, and ambiguous moments of recognition. For years, I have been engaged in research on the experience of the mandatory military service in the Yugoslav Peoples’ Army that still connects men in post-Yugoslav societies across ethnic, social, and cultural lines – the same men who fought and killed each other in the 1990s. Whatever their role was in the 1990s, and whatever their position within the nationalized landscape of post-Yugoslav societies today, the great majority of the men I spoke to viewed military service as a formative and still important experience. The values constitutive for hegemonic masculinity and otherwise universal to all-male communities, values such as male competitiveness and friendship, provide the core of this positive assessment of the military service. At the same time, this shared experience reveals the sentimental and emotional side of post-Yugoslav men and their troubled subjectivities. These strands in the fabric, however, remain firmly concealed under the surface of Yugoslavia’s tapestry. Framing military service as a site of or pretext for male-initiated violence in the dominant narrative of Yugoslavia’s history excludes the emotional ties of a Bosnian man to his Serbian friend from the army, ties that sometimes survived rupture, trauma, displacement, and genocide. It excludes the pride with which a sociology professor from Ljubljana explained how he was able at the age of eighteen to cook for the whole unit of his fellow conscripts in a remote post on the Austrian border. The current historical framing does not provide a space for the anxiety of

a photographer who displayed photographs of army buddies at an exhibition and begged me to track down the people in these photographs. He himself did not dare to do it, as he was too afraid of what he might learn about their destinies after the violence and killing during the war.

The possibility for affective, sensual, and sentimental strands of Yugoslavia's tapestry to come to the surface is additionally hindered by the high amount of (self) censorship that post-socialist subjects apply when they speak or write about socialism, even in cases when they recognize the positive, progressive, and emancipatory aspects of Yugoslav socialism. Two characteristic signals of this self-censorship are contained in the title of the above-mentioned exhibition: *Unfinished Modernizations between Utopia and Pragmatism: Architecture and Urban Planning in the Former Yugoslavia and its Successor States*. First, it employs the term *former* Yugoslavia, despite the fact that the exhibition is about the socialist period;⁹ and second, it speaks about *unfinished* modernizations – a typical way of characterizing Yugoslav modernism and modernization, as if socialist modernization could never be “real” and definite, and as if any modernization is total or finished (cf. also book title *Modernism in-between: The Mediatory Architectures of Socialist Yugoslavia*, Thaler, Mrduljaš and Kulic 2012).

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A more recent and even more telling example comes from the Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia in Ljubljana, which launched a campaign for collecting “objects of our everyday life” and invited citizens to bring objects to the museum and tell the stories of these objects. Nowhere in this call were either Yugoslavia or socialism mentioned, although it is clear from references to industrial and consumerist objects (the first television set manufactured by Iskra company, a bottle of the Yugoslav soft drink Cockta) that that is the period in question. The call mentions the upcoming “exhibition about everyday life” in a sentence that looks unexpectedly interrupted, as it remains unstated which historical period the exhibition will address. In small print at the bottom of the call, the period is specified as “1945 to 1990,” but again without naming it, as if such naming would make the whole project political, and public representations of everyday life in Yugoslavia need to remain apolitical, stripped of any capacity for the articulation of legitimate claims about the present and the future. Such narrativization shows that avoiding “Yugoslav” and “socialist” has already become a habitual practice in post-Yugoslav, nationalized societies.

“We do not preserve memories, we preserve history,” claimed the leader of the Slovenian partisan choir performing revolutionary songs in Trieste, Italy (Hladnik Milharčič 2011, quoted in Hofman 2015), thus directly opposing the apoliticization of recollections of the Yugoslav socialist past. This

9 For problematic uses of “former Yugoslavia”, see Slapšak 2011: 302.


 MUZEJ NOVEJŠE
 ZGODOVINE SLOVENIJE

PREDMETI NAŠEGA VSAKDANA -

**PRINESI PREDMET
IN POVEJ NJEGOVO ZGODBO**

Morda doma hranite staro stekleničko Cockte? Otroški tricikel ali katero izmed prvih otroških igrač? Embalaže za hrano in čistila? Ženske ali moške konfekcijske obleke, narejene v slovenskih tekstilnih tovarnah? Brigadirsko uniformo? Lesen ležalnik s počitnic ob morju? Morda vstopnico, plakat s koncerta ali katerega od slovenskih glasbenih festivalov? Prvi Iskrin prenosni televizor Minirama?

Muzej novejše zgodovine Slovenije želi skupaj z vami dopolniti muzejske zbirke in podarjene predmete predstaviti na gostujoči razstavi o vsakdanjem življenju. Vabimo vas, da nas obiščete in z nami delite predmete in njihove zgodbe.

Za vprašanja in dodatne informacije so vam na voljo:
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 Podgoričeva 2023

Zbiranje predmetov iz obdobja 1945-1990
 bo potekalo do odprtja nove obdobjne razstave novembra 2016.



The poster by the Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia in Ljubljana, inviting citizens to bring everyday objects and tell the stories of these objects (source: Facebook).

sentence also exposes the political relevance of the distinction between history and memory in the case of socialist Yugoslavia. It needs to be read in the context of the intense revisionist processes that have taken place in post-Yugoslav societies (and in post-socialist Europe in general), in which the roles of victims and perpetrators, anti-fascists and fascists' collaborators have become relativized.

In order to become a suitable object of history, Yugoslavia is reduced to a linear and flattened narrative, cleansed of any affective or emotional investments and ruptures, and thus deprived of the capacity to make an intervention in the present. What Yugoslavs believed, their emotional investments, how they perceived themselves becomes irrelevant or "unimportant" (Simmel

1980: 171) in the history of Yugoslavia. This is a history that does not tolerate life, and cannot absorb multiple, often contested roles, sentiments, and relationships into a narrative that bases its claim for legitimacy on the argument of historicity.

The Past and the Future

The narration of the Yugoslav past as history requires the framing of Yugoslavia as a discreet historical fact – with the precise date of its beginning and equally precise date of its end. The title of the exhibition of the Museum of History in Yugoslavia – *Yugoslavia from Beginning to End* – opened on December 1, 2012 illustrated this need. Historians who deal with various aspects of life in socialist Yugoslavia also emphasize temporal discreteness and definiteness of the history they describe: this history “began in one point in time, and officially ended in another” (Duda 2015). To be narrated as history, Yugoslavia thus must be understood as the past and its pastness must be absolute. This is often a strategy aimed at salvaging that past from the revisionists and working against the banalization, hollowing out and falsification of historical facts in order to stigmatize it and discard it as a ‘totalitarian’ deviation. Such strategy, however, ignores the fact that although formally and historically dead, Yugoslavia still lives in everyday encounters, in references, smells, tastes and words, in the fine tunings and epiphanies of people living their everyday lives across the former country. And it is not necessarily a generationally bound experience that renders Yugoslavia still alive. Here is what a young person (who has no or hardly any experience of living in Yugoslavia) wrote on his blog: “Yugoslavia is the only way I refer to the place I’m originally from, where I grew up, but also to the place(s) where most of my friends and family live at the moment. I do realize that it may seem as if I’m trying to recreate or call into existence something that is long gone but for me Yugoslavia is right now and right there. It is not an internationally recognized state, nor is it a state that I need to see restored, it is simply the best name I have for all the things I feel to be familiar and intelligible – the music, the dishes, the ideologies, the cities, the patriarchy, the policies, the words, the concepts, and the people.”¹⁰ To many people Yugoslavia is “immediately present” and constitutes “an actual, palpable reality” (Simmel 1980: 176).

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This life of Yugoslavia ideally fits Simmel’s category of *the form of life*, in that it is intrinsically related to the future. In Simmel’s words: “contents which logically fall within the domain of the past, but which still lie within the consciousness of the present experience, are also oriented to the

10 <http://www.philopolitics.org/being-a-yugoslav-1-marko-simonovic/>, accessed 17 August, 2016.

future.” In the constitution of history, “the conscious interest is to ‘re-present’ the past insofar as it is past, to constitute the past as a content or object.” In history, “the past as such acquires the status of an autonomous value.” Here, according to Simmel, lies the fundamental difference between life and history: “the organic relationship between the past and the future is the exclusive source for the significance of the past for life. History, however, dissolves the relationship” (Simmel 1980: 177). In order to imagine an autonomous and decent future that is an alternative to what is usually presented as the only possible future in transitional, neoliberal ideologies to which the people of the former Yugoslavia have been extensively exposed in the last two decades, the Yugoslav past needs to be the past for life – with all its disorder and elusiveness. It is not unambiguously over and easily locatable, but is capable of intervention into the present and incorporation into future imaginations. This is a kind of past the philosopher Boris Buden describes in the introduction to his book *The Introduction to the Past* that he wrote together with the film director Želimir Žilnik:

“this book derives from an open confession that it does not know exactly what the past is, and even less where to look for it. For a historian, it is self-evident that the past is supposed to be something that has already happened (...) and is always behind us. This book does not accept such an understanding of the past. On the contrary, it derives from the dissolution of unity and disappearance of historical time. (...) The past is something new: it is ubiquitous, present here and now, to everyone and for everybody. The past is more actual than the present and less certain than the future” (Buden 2013: 7).

Many young leftist theoreticians, artists, activists, members of political movements and parties that have emerged from anti-austerity protests in the wider region since 2008,¹¹ return to the Yugoslav past with the aim to discover something new there, something to be used for articulating present and future alternatives. But in these returns to the past, there is a paradoxical moment which significantly defines possibilities for thinking about Yugoslavia at the present moment: to be a constitutive part of future politics, this past must remain an object of life in Simmel’s sense. However, to be a politically legitimate source for creating alternatives, it must become an object of history, because only historical facts may be used as valid arguments in public debates in post-Yugoslav societies characterized by historical revisionism and faced with Europe’s paternalism. This embrace of history and the inevitable erasure of experience in rediscoveries of Yugoslav socialism is not difficult to understand in the post-Yugoslav context: any positive reference to the socialist past, especially if it relies on one’s own experience, is usually dismissed by nationalist elites in the Yugoslav

11 For an overview, see Štiks 2015.

successor states as banal Yugo-nostalgia and, worse, a morally problematic glorification of a legacy that inevitably leads to terror and gulags (Kirn 2014; Petrović 2013b). The paradigm of the two twentieth century European totalitarianisms, in which socialism is equated with Nazism, remains strongly present in the narratives of united Europe, making it additionally difficult to stake politically legitimate claims by referring to the socialist past.¹² Because of this, those who turn to Yugoslavia for inspiration for future political paradigms feel that they must detach the Yugoslav past from the messy and contested experiences of actual Yugoslavs. One way to do that is by reducing that past to the pure essence of the revolutionary moment and its values, and purifying it of all ideological layers that might compromise it. For this reason, the all-female choir *Kombinat* from Ljubljana performs exclusively partisan, anti-fascist songs that were written during the Second World War by members of the partisan movement. In their opinion, only these songs, untainted by the subsequent state ideology of socialist Yugoslavia, are capable of reflecting the “pure” revolutionary values of resistance and solidarity. Those written during Yugoslav socialism cannot be the holders of revolutionary potential as they have been corrupted by the ideological use of the socialist regime (Hofman 2015). Similarly, many theoreticians turn to “genuine” partisan art and its messages, to the “pure” aesthetic value of the modernist monuments dedicated to anti-fascist struggle, etc.

In the process of the transformation of the Yugoslav past from life to history, the past acquires the status of an autonomous value (Simmel 1980: 177), and simultaneously becomes disconnected from those who created it and from those for whom Yugoslavia is, in some form, still part of the present. To feed present desires and accelerate collective affects in post-Yugoslav times, Yugoslavia needs to be emptied of any past desires, visions, and affects. But is such Yugoslavia, emptied of life, capable of making an intervention in the present or in the future? And isn't such rediscovering of anti-fascism without partisans and socialism without Yugoslavs by the new generation of post-Yugoslav leftists disturbingly reminiscent of the historical revisionism of post-Yugoslav nationalists and liberal political elites?

12 American anthropologist Kristen Ghodsee points to another important dimension of equating Nazism and communism on the European level: it is closely connected to and was accelerated by the economic crisis in Europe. The European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism was created by the European Parliament in 2008, and in many former socialist countries monuments to all victims of totalitarian regimes were erected, and museums and institutes devoted to all totalitarian regimes were established. These developments should be seen “against a backdrop of growing social unrest in response to the global financial crisis and Eurozone instability in Spain and Greece” and “in the context of regional fears of a re-emergent left” (Ghodsee 2014; see also Ghodsee 2015).

Instead of a Conclusion

This article highlights the tensions, ambiguities, and uncanny political consequences of attempts to articulate histories of socialist Yugoslavia two and a half decades after its dissolution, in a historical moment when it is still an important part of the life experience of millions of people. This experience is inevitably complex, messy, fragmentary and resistant to flattening into a linear and consistent historiographical narrative. Georg Simmel's reflections on history and form offer a very useful tool to look at the Yugoslav case and also help de-essentialize and normalize Yugoslav history, making the anxieties that characterize it part of a much broader discussion about history, its nature, and its internal contradictions. The article has no intention of moralizing the frameworks of the Yugoslav past employed by various interest groups in their intellectual, cultural and/or political work, nor does it offer any practical solution that would overcome the ambiguities and disorder that emerges from the very nature of experience and life – Yugoslav or any other. On the contrary, it suggests that ambiguity and disorder should be acknowledged and made visible in the production of historical narratives about socialist Yugoslavia, and taken as a productive site for reflecting on modernity, temporality, and the future.

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Ka afektivnoj istoriji Jugoslavije

Sažetak

Članak razmatra neophodnost uvođenja raznorodnosti u (i)storije Jugoslavije, i ističe značaj inkorporiranja afekata i iskustava građana i građanki Jugoslavije u istorijske narative. Uzimajući u obzir poteškoće koje proizlaze iz činjenice da je to što se artikuliše kao istorijski narativ i dalje nerazdvojivo od iskustva ogromnog broja građana postjugoslovenskih društava, članak razmatra potencijal i prepreke za izgradnju afektivne istorije socijalističke Jugoslavije, kroz optiku pozajmljenu od nemačkog sociologa Georga Zimela. To se posebno odnosi na dva skupa Zimelovih ideja. Prvi se tiče *prirode materijala* i načina na koji od njega pravimo priču – preciznije, na odnos između istorije i iskustva, života i reprezentacije. Drugi se odnosi na *perspektivu* iz koje gledamo, pristupamo i sintetizujemo taj materijal. Zimelove refleksije o istoriji i formi pružaju vrlo korisno oruđe u razmatranju jugoslovenskog slučaja, i pomažu u deesencijalizovanju i normalizovanju jugoslovenske istorije, uključujući neizvesnost koja je odlikuje u širu raspravu o istoriji, njenoj prirodi i njenim unutrašnjim protivrečnostima.

Ključne reči: Jugoslavija, socijalizam, istorija, afekt, iskustvo, Georg Zimel