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Yugonostalgia and Yugoslav Cultural Memory: *Lexicon of Yu Mythology*

Aleksandar Bošković

As a cultural phenomenon of the transition period in postsocialist societies, nostalgia for socialism took different names and shapes in different countries: in Russia it is called Soviet nostalgia, in East Germany—Ostalgie, in former Yugoslavia—Yugonostalgia. Although these “red nostalgias” share the same basic structure of privileging the *red* past over a colorless present, their kaleidoscopically varied appearances somewhat reflect the idiosyncrasy of each former socialist system and the modes of everyday life it created. The case of former Yugoslavia involves yet another exclusively local shade of red, manifested in the bloody disintegration of the socialist federation. The unfortunate case of the violent collapse of Yugoslavia inverts its fortunate image as the only communist state in Europe that was not under the control of the former Soviet Union.¹ The fall of the Berlin Wall marked the end of the Cold War era and communist regimes in the countries of the communist bloc. While Germany went through national reunification, Czechoslovakia through its “Velvet Divorce,” and the Soviet Union through a largely nonviolent series of “velvet revolutions,” the dissolution of Yugoslavia was bloody and contentious. It was followed by a burst of violence and wars that enabled the first revival of concentration camps in Europe since World War II. It generated massacres and ethnic cleansing, culminating in Srebrenica in 1995, the mass destruction of cities such as Vukovar, Mostar, and Sarajevo, the latter of which was under siege for almost four years. When asked during the siege what he thought about the fall of the Berlin Wall, a Sarajevo citizen said that, on the one hand, it was a good thing, on the other hand, unfortunately, “the wall fell on our heads.”² It is estimated that there were over 200,000 deaths and approximately 3 million refugees and war-affected people in Bosnia and Herzegovina alone.³ The brutality of destruction and ethnic killing that was generated in the former Yugoslavia in the wake of the collapse of socialism, followed by the “subsequent rekindling of ethnic and religious hatreds,” plays a significant, if not a critical role in framing and filling postwar Yugonostalgia and its representations.⁴

Among extremely diverse manifestations of Yugonostalgia, the “posthu-

I would like to thank Vladislav Beronja, Tatjana Aleksić, Herbert Eagle, Andrew Herscher, Kerstin Barndt, and the anonymous readers for *Slavic Review* for their helpful suggestions and comments on various drafts of this article.

1. After Josip Broz Tito’s break with Iosif Stalin in 1948, Yugoslavia was the only socialist country situated outside the eastern bloc until 1960, when Albania stepped out as well.

2. Igor Štiks, “The Berlin Wall Fell on Our Heads,” *Up and Underground* 17/18 (2010): 58.

3. Maureen Taylor and Michael L. Kent, “Media Transitions in Bosnia: From Propagandistic Past to Uncertain Future,” *Gazette* 62, no. 5 (2000): 357.

4. Zala Volčič, “Yugo-Nostalgia: Cultural Memory and Media in the Former Yugoslavia,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24, no. 1 (2007): 27. According to Volčič, these are crucial differences between Yugonostalgia and other forms of nostalgia for socialism, such as Ostalgie and Soviet nostalgia.

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mous” book *Lexicon of Yu Mythology* represents an interesting case for several reasons.⁵ First, as the epithet “posthumous” suggests, the aforementioned geographical, regional, and historical specificities that frame Yugonostalgia are inscribed in the fifteen-year-long history of the entire project of the *Lexicon*. Second, the book exemplifies a distinct postsocialist and postmodern hybrid, emerging from the semantic overlapping of different genres such as lexicon, encyclopedia, myth, and history and interwoven with various discourses of collective and personal memories of the socialist past. Third, it is both a collection of reminiscences of various “things Yugoslav” and a verbal and visual exhibition catalogue of the memories that the various contributors provided and enhanced through the constant pendulum of their writings, which swing from nostalgic to ironic modes. Following these three features—the history of the project, the book as an exhibition catalogue, and the political role of Yugoslav cultural memory—my aim is to show that these collected and arranged remnants of the Yugoslav past could serve as sites for the archeology of the future. My reading of the *Lexicon of Yu Mythology* fits within the already extant field of analyses of the project, while simultaneously examining Yugonostalgia in the *Lexicon*, not as a regressive idealization of Yugoslav socialist past, but as a critical intervention in both the contemporary postsocialist politics of memory and the politics of emancipation.⁶ I will point to the clear political role that such memory—as a conflation of irony and nostalgia—owing to the editors and selected contributions, has *within* and *as* the exhibition catalogue.

Genealogy of the *Lexicon*

The project of writing the *Lexicon of Yu Mythology* started in 1989, in the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall, when the well-known writer and cultural

5. Vladimir Arsenijević et al., *Leksikon Yu Mitologije* (Belgrade, 2005; hereafter *LYM*).

6. The corpus of critical literature on *LYM* is not insignificant. For the texts in English, see Nicole Lindstrom, “Yugonostalgia: Restorative and Reflexive Nostalgia in Former Yugoslavia,” *East Central Europe/ECE* 32, nos. 1–2 (June 2005): 231–42; Iva Pauker, “Reconciliation and Popular Culture: A Promising Development in Former Yugoslavia,” *Local-Global* 2 (2006): 72–81; Volčić, “Yugo-Nostalgia,” 21–38; Jessie Labov, “*Leksikon Yu Mitologije*: Reading Yugoslavia from Abramović to žmurke,” in Tatjana Aleksić, ed., *Mythistory and Narratives of the Nation in the Balkans* (Newcastle, Eng., 2007), 22–48; Monika Palmberger, “Nostalgia Matters: Nostalgia for Yugoslavia as Potential Vision for a Better Future,” *Sociologija* 50, no. 4 (2008): 355–70; Mitja Velikonja, *Titostalgija: A Study of Nostalgia for Josip Broz*, trans. Olga Vuković (Ljubljana, 2008). For the texts in Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian, see Teofil Pančić, “Knjiga smeha i pamćenja,” *Vreme*, 27 May 2004, at www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=379992 (last accessed 5 December 2012); Rade Dragojević, “Depo Jugoslavenskih užitaka,” *Glas Slavonije*, 25 July 2004, at www.glas-slavonije.hr/24453/2/Depo-jugoslavenskih-uzitaka (last accessed 5 December 2012); Dean Duda, “U raljama nostalgije,” *Feral Tribune*, 28 September 2004, at feral.audiolinux.com/tpl/weekly1/section3.tpl?IdLanguage=7&NrIssue=997&NrSection=14 (last accessed 5 December 2012); Stef Jansen, *Antinacionalizam: Etnografija otpora u Beogradu i Zagrebu* (Belgrade, 2005); Mitja Velikonja, “Povratak Otpisanih: Emancipatorski potencijali jugonostalgije,” *Peščanik.net*, 5 November 2009, at pescanik.net/2009/11/povratak-otpisanih/ (last accessed 5 December 2012); Tanja Petrović, *Yuropa: Jugoslovensko nasleđe i politike budućnosti u postjugoslovenskim društvima* (Belgrade, 2012).

critic Dubravka Ugrešić, together with the editors of the Zagreb magazine *Start*, issued a call for contributors to compile a lexicon of Yugoslav pop culture.⁷ At that time, which closely preceded the disintegration of the country, popular culture represented a largely unexplored and unacknowledged aspect of life in Yugoslavia. Thus, the project was designed foremost to involve all citizens who wished to contribute to a process of identifying, articulating, and commenting on Yugoslav popular culture.⁸ The tense political struggles of the time, fueled by nationalistic rhetoric and followed by Slovenia's and Croatia's secessions, however, deafened the first call for contributions. Because of the outbreak of civil war in Yugoslavia in 1991 the *Lexicon* project was relocated afterwards to a Web site, where in the mid-1990s it took on a new "second life." The first, original version of the Web site was posted on the Internet around the same time that Ugrešić was writing her novel *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* and a collection of essays *The Culture of Lies*. In a letter posted on the original Web site, Ugrešić informs the visitor about the urgent need to revive the project: "Let our virtual lexicon be a communal work of those who do not agree with what the authorities in post-Yugoslav states have achieved through force: the confiscation of memory."⁹

While at the start the goal of the *Lexicon* was to provide a tangible account in published form that would represent the memories of lived experience in a particular culture, by post-1990 it had become a political statement by ex-Yugoslavs who did not wish their social and cultural history to be erased from public memory. Although the original intention behind the project was "a search for self-identity in a time of transition," as a Web site in the post-Yugoslav era it became "a virtual museum of memories, lost languages, and untenable subject positions."¹⁰ As the current editors of the *Lexicon* put it, "from the question *Who are we*, we have arrived at the question *Who were we?*"¹¹ Almost immediately after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the nationalistic politics of the new states started their deliberate "confiscation of memory": reinterpretation or absolute negation of the past. The propaganda of the newly formed national states shiftily redesigned a fifty-year-old *historical truth* into a

7. "The *lifestyle* magazine of Yugoslavia. Ran from the late sixties to the early nineties." Arsenijević et al., *LYM*, 369; emphasis in the original. Dubravka Ugrešić was an editor of the *Pojmovnik ruske avangarde* (Glossary of the Russian Avant-Garde), the renowned scholarly essay series covering various issues related to the Russian avant-garde. One of the important theoretical concepts that the publication addressed was the Russian notion of *byt* (everyday life) and *bytology*. See Aage A. Hansen Löve, "Bytologia," in Aleksandar Flaker et al., eds., *Pojmovnik ruske avangarde* (Zagreb, 1985), 4:9–27. For the importance of the notion of everyday life in nostalgia studies, see Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994); Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, 2001).

8. The initial call for participation can also be found at haw.nsk.hr/arhiva/vol2/786/17710/www.leksikon-yu-mitologije.net/index.php.html (last accessed 5 December 2012).

9. Dubravka Ugrešić, "O čemu se radi," on the Lexicon of Yu Mythology Web site (old version, dated 23 July 1999), at haw.nsk.hr/arhiva/vol2/786/17710/www.leksikon-yu-mitologije.net/ocemu.php.html (last accessed 5 December 2012).

10. Labov, "Leksikon Yu Mitologije," 24.

11. Arsenijević et al., *LYM*, 4. Emphasis in the original.

historical lie, thus crushing the “Partisan myth” and assigning the Partisans’ lost place of honor to their former enemies—Ustašas, Četniks, and anticommunists.¹² The new political leaders, whom Ugrešić calls the “Great Manipulators,” “dismantled the old system and built a new one out of the *same* pieces,” simultaneously offering “a new Utopia: the nation.”¹³

Yet, for all those ex-Yugoslavs who were openly opposed to the oppression of so-called national homogenization that prompted the federation’s violent disintegration, the civil war was an essential signifier of their *exile*. The rupture of their previous life, signifying the *loss* of their collective identity, was perpetrated by all those who proclaimed national homogeneity to be a better collective ethos than the multinational togetherness they had lived out for a full fifty years. This is why many ex-Yugoslavs, mostly those in the diaspora, answered the call of the *Lexicon* editors and started to contribute entries on the Web site, lamenting the loss of multicultural diversity, the “many-colored carpet” of Yugoslavia.¹⁴ In her novel, Ugrešić calls all these people from the no longer existing state, “walking museum exhibits.”¹⁵ The Web site of the *Lexicon* thus became a virtual museum, which the stateless people finally recognized as the only remaining space able to supplement and satisfy their need for a place where their ghostly memories could be collected, exposed, and exhibited. Moreover, cyberspace mirrored the stateless status of many émigrés from former Yugoslavia, while at the same time figuring as both the repository and the conduit for their memory beyond “the humiliating footnotes” that refugees, emigrants, and exiles were left with. According to the editors of the printed version of the *Lexicon*, soon after they posted the Web site “the individual and collective memories started to pour together with forgotten names of domestic popular culture. . . . [People who sent their entries] tried as best and as precisely as they could to write and convey their thoughts and memories, demonstrating the importance of this project for

12. The “Partisan myth” was built on the concept of the “brotherhood and unity” of the communist resistance movement led by Tito. The Partisan movement forged Yugoslavia in the course of World War II as a *revolutionary* creation, fighting not only against fascism but also against the monarchical construction of Yugoslavia. The war that the Partisans were waging was “not only aimed at defeating the fascist armies, but also at smashing all the political monstrosities that historical fascism has installed, supported, or provided with ideological references.” Ozren Pupovac, “Against the Post-Socialist Reason,” *Prelom: Journal for Images and Politics* 8 (2006): 14. The Ustaša was an anti-Yugoslav, ultranationalist, and terrorist organization that came to power in the Independent State of Croatia, a puppet state established by fascist Italy and Nazi Germany during World War II. The Ustašas assisted both the Italian and German occupation forces in Yugoslavia in fighting against Yugoslav Partisans and persecuted the Jews, Roma, and Serbs who were collectively declared enemies of the Croatian people. The Četniks were officially the royalist Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland in World War II. Although initially a resistance movement, the Četniks functioned as a Serb nationalist militia that collaborated with the Axis occupation and ended up primarily fighting the Partisans.

13. See Dubravka Ugrešić, *The Culture of Lies: Antipolitical Essays*, trans. Celia Hawkesworth (University Park, 1998), 39–40, 194. Emphasis in the original.

14. Aleš Debeljak, *Twilight of the Idols: Recollections of a Lost Yugoslavia* (New York, 1994), 35.

15. Dubravka Ugrešić, *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*, trans. Celia Hawkesworth (New York, 1999), 234.

them.”¹⁶ Finally, the material from the Web site was selected, edited, and published in 2004 by the publishing houses Rende in Belgrade (Serbia) and Post-scriptum in Zagreb (Croatia), as a book entitled *The Lexicon of Yu Mythology*, which has since gone through several editions.

How to Read the Title, *Leksikon Yu Mitologije*?

Both the Web site and the published version of the *Lexicon of Yu Mythology* contain much, but of course not all, of the material that accounts for about fifty years of Yugoslav cultural history. These text entries, photographs, drawings, and illustrations are dedicated to the vast array of phenomena concerning everyday life in the former Yugoslavia. Some of them describe either the celebrated or the disdained personalities of different professions (folksingers, directors and screenwriters, a few politicians, musicians, sportsmen, and so on). Others cover art phenomena (animation, comic books, film) or topics that involve deeply ingrained personal memories, such as children’s games. Heterogeneous phenomena of Yugoslav pop-culture alternate with each other: the entries on female arm-wrestling champions and hairstyles are followed by references to mass-market print culture, sports, fictional characters, and gadgets, and the extraordinary list of female “stars,” many of whom initiated budding Yugoslav teenage males into the realm of sexual fantasy. There are many references to prominent public spaces, urban subculture and slang, or entries referring to the experience of mandatory service in the Yugoslav People’s Army. In addition to an entry on the literary phrase “Blue Jeans Prose,” coined by the Yugoslav literary critic and avant-garde scholar, Aleksandar Flaker, one can find plenty of terms and entries related to various products of material culture manufactured in Yugoslavia, ranging from laundry detergent to cars, from children’s magazines to journals of political theory, from graphic design to cakes. It is interesting that the entries concerning music—rock, pop, and folk stars, clubs and concert halls, posters, magazines, radio stations, and music movements—greatly outnumber other entries and dominate the book. There are numerous references to the socialist state’s rituals and spectacles (such as entries on youth labor actions, baton relay races, or parades honoring Josip Broz Tito or Yugoslav military power), and socialist iconography and slogans that the state used to legitimize and sustain its rule.

For any critical reading, what is excluded from the Web site and the book becomes potentially as important as what is included. For example, except for Miroslav Krleža, there are no acknowledged Yugoslav writers (such as the Nobel Prize winner Ivo Andrić, or the internationally acclaimed Meša Selimović and Danilo Kiš) or scientists (except the world-famous Nikola Tesla, who spent almost all his life abroad). Similarly, the number of entries on politicians is rather small—only a few qualified for the *Lexicon*, either due to their cult of personality, as in the case of Marshal Tito, or due to their contentious status among citizens, as in the case of Stipe Šušteršič, the Croatian minister of education who implemented a contemptuous educational reform in 1977. There are almost no references to architectural sites or monuments, except the very

16. Arsenijević et al., *LYM*, 5.

short and descriptive entry on the sculptor Vojin Bakić, and a photograph of Mlodrag Živković's monument to the battle of Sutjeska, which marked a turning point for Yugoslavia during World War II. There are no entries on major historical events, as one would expect to find in a standard historical lexicon or encyclopedia; if they are mentioned, it is as a subsidiary reference within some other entry written in an informal fashion, often colored by a mood that is mocking and warm, ironic and nostalgic. As one of the critics noted, both the Web site and the book obviously differ from academic histories and standard historical editions, which neglect minor and unimportant things while simultaneously concentrating on so-called well-known and influential individuals and (mostly) politically important events from national history.¹⁷ The entries in the *Lexicon* do not present themselves as an authoritative, fixed source of knowledge, as is the case with standard or historical encyclopedias, but rather as a work of personal memories, often combined with critical remarks on the permeable myth of ex-federation. Obviously, the deliberately sifted personal memories and visual documents compose the content of the *Lexicon of Yu Mythology* book.

On the other hand, one of the main features of both the Web site and the book is that the authorship is collective. The *Lexicon of Yu Mythology* truly repeats the historical practice of composing dictionaries and encyclopedias.¹⁸ As the editors of the *Lexicon* proclaim and the texts on the Web site pages foreshadow, a large number of the terms are composed on the principle of "crossbred" interests: the Serbian or Slovenian authors wrote, largely affirmatively, about Croatian, Bosnian, or Macedonian persons and phenomena and vice versa. Furthermore, the resulting (both Web- and book-) pages present a genuine mixture of Cyrillic and Latin scripts, ekavian and ijekavian spellings, as well as other vocabulary, signaling the diversity of the contributors' ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, the book comes closest to the program of the socialist Yugoslav superstructure, functioning also as a sociopolitical summary of the privileged Cold War country that swung on a pendulum between east and west. The book tries to reinvigorate the idea of a common identity for citizens of the Yugoslav state—Yugoslavism—embedded in the concept of "brotherhood and unity" and its formal policy of equality among Yugoslav constituent republics and nationalities. As a shared sense of class identity, Yugoslavism was constructed with the aim to both contain and transcend more local forms of identification tied to ethnic and religious identity, thus functioning as the "Yugoslav civil religion of brotherhood and unity."¹⁹

One could also read the *Lexicon* as an idiosyncratically composed work of fiction, however, since there is a clear signifier of "fictional code" in the very

17. Dragojević, "Depo Jugoslavenskih užitaka."

18. As Labov notes, the *Lexicon* was compiled in the same way as religious texts in medieval Europe and as "in the most famous incarnation of this genre, the French *Encyclopédie*." Labov, "*Leksikon Yu Mitologije*," 37. But while the authors of the encyclopedias in the Enlightenment period were intellectuals and proto-scientists, the authors of the *Lexicon* vary by profile and profession.

19. Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States* (Oxford, 2002), 100.

title of the project—that of *mythology*.²⁰ The editors deliberately chose this word instead of the word *history*, signaling that the latter term became problematic in defining their project. Moreover, the editors circumvented place in the title of the project: they did not use the word *Yugoslavia*, but its abbreviation, *YU*, which presently denotes a nonexistent country, or ex-Yugoslavia.²¹ By reducing the name of the country to a sign, they turned the former state into a mythical entity. By choosing the guiding principle of “mythology” and not “history,” they indicated that one should not search for the roots of the collective Yugoslav identity in history as “an eternal image of the past,” but instead in historical materialism, which according to Walter Benjamin, “supplies a unique experience of the past.”²² In other words, the *Lexicon* deviates from the project of historicism, which has an experience of the past and regards it as an object eternally present. Instead, it is close to Benjamin’s historical materialism, which has an experience with the past that is a unique constellation. Therefore, the “historical objects and phenomena” described in the *Lexicon*, cease to be objects of and become participants in a historical experience. The condition for this confrontation of the present with the past is a “constructive” rather than an epic narrative.²³

Hence, although collective authorship is inherent in the *Lexicon*, its foundation reposes on subjective experience rather than on a meticulously fact-based version of history. Instead of an official history of Yugoslavia, the *Lexicon* provides a polyphony of unique voices, which testify to their particular experiences of everyday life in former Yugoslavia. Just as Benjamin’s historical materialism is firmly grounded in the present, so are these voices in the *Lexicon*. The uniqueness of these voices reflects not only their specific relationship to the past but also the *present* moment in which those experiences are written down. First, the uniqueness of these voices reflects their physical, psychological, and political dislocation from their experience of the past. Second, it often adds a self-conscious layer as an expression of this dislocation. Third, a dislocation or a distance from the past acts as a double expo-

20. One can certainly claim that the *Lexicon* has a precursor in Roland Barthes’s *Mythologies* (1957), the classic example of analyzing the “myths” circulating in everyday life. Both *Mythologies* and the *Lexicon* take great relish in exploring cultural artifacts and phenomena and enact a paradox in their imaginative and playful readings of culture in a heavily ideologized world that tries to abolish precisely such imaginative play. In addition, an informative and punchy journalistic style full of improvisations on relevant cultural issues rather than carefully considered theoretical discourse is characteristic of both books. Further, both works express nostalgia and irony simultaneously. Just as Barthes demands that the intellectual distance himself from the mass and, accordingly, maintain a sarcastic or ironic detachment from “mass culture,” so the contributors to the *Lexicon* retain the ironic mode of writing. On that account, the *Lexicon* not only expresses skepticism about a perfect socialist past in former Yugoslavia but also undermines a faith in newly nationalist mythologies manufactured out of the *same* pieces as the demolished socialist system.

21. This abbreviation was used for the stickers that Yugoslav vehicles would have attached to their windshields when abroad, and also for the Internet domain that was popular among Yugo-nostalgia Web sites until 2010, when it was phased out.

22. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1968), 262.

23. See Howard Caygill, “Walter Benjamin’s Concept of Cultural History,” in David Ferris, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin* (Cambridge, Eng., 2004), 90.

sure through nostalgia and irony of personal memories. More important, the material basis of mythology is a place where one can locate both Benjamin's "theory of historical mythology" and the project of writing the *Yu Mythology*. In his most cited essay, the "Theses on the Philosophy of History," as well as in his *Arcades Project*, Benjamin contrasts his theory of historical mythology with the common notion of mythological history (to which both the surrealists and the fascists were prone). As Joseph Mali points out in his commentary on the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin unearthed the layers of myth that surround material objects, demonstrating "that history was not really determined by certain mythical beliefs, images and tales," as it might seem at first glance, "but rather that certain historical conditions of material and anthropological necessities produced these mythic forms and compulsions."²⁴ In this context, one can read the recognitions of everyday, cultural, and mass-produced objects that the *Lexicon* offers as the "historical conditions of material and anthropological necessities" that produced the belief-system and the myth of Yugoslavia. The *Lexicon* thus presents the system of Yugoslav everyday life (an equivalent of the untranslatable Russian *byt*), both its rules and its absurdity, its smells, tastes, and colors, imbued with an ideological system of established habits, rituals, mechanisms, and signs.

The content of the *Lexicon* presents popular Yugoslav culture as a purely symbolic reality and as a support for a particular collective memory.²⁵ By evoking visual and textual reflections on the meaning of the past for the present, the *Lexicon* appears to have a kind of materiality akin to that of a ruin. Similar to the ruin, the *Lexicon* is a sign of rupture, an emblem of destruction that retains "a suggestive, unstable semantic potential" since its *nostalgic* and *ironic* modes "blur boundaries, both spatially . . . and temporally" thus reflecting the ruin's "blurred edges."²⁶ These two modes of writing in the *Lexicon* define the ruin of Yugoslav socialism through creative appropriation, taking pleasure from ruin-gazing while simultaneously lamenting the process of ruination. As a self-reflective postmodern hybrid genre, the *Lexicon of Yu Mythology* contains the "transgressive force of ruins," thus embodying "one of the master tropes of modern reflexivity, precisely because it encapsulates vacuity and loss as underlying constituents of the modern identity."²⁷ As a "site of memory" that is inherent to modernity itself, as a ruin of Yugoslav socialist modernity, the *Lexicon* has originated a place of reference for a future cultural archeology of everyday life in Yugoslav socialism.

24. Joseph Mali, *Mythistory: The Making of a Modern Historiography* (Chicago, 2003), 268.

25. The author of a seminal study on collective memory, Maurice Halbwach, argues that it is "in very large measure a reconstruction of the past achieved with data borrowed from the present, a reconstruction prepared . . . by reconstructions of earlier periods wherein past images had already been altered." For the cultural critic Svetlana Boym, collective memory is one of the "common landmarks of everyday life" that "constitute[s] shared social frameworks of individual recollections." See Maurice Halbwach, *On Collective Memory*, trans. and ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago, 1992), 47; Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 53.

26. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle, "Introduction," in Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle, eds., *Ruins of Modernity* (Durham, 2010), 6–8.

27. *Ibid.*

Browsing the *Lexicon* as an Exhibition Catalog

Recent critical examinations of the *Lexicon* have indicated its potential for a plurality of readings. For example, Jessie Labov proposed three possible modes of reading the *Lexicon* (as a work of fiction, a museum, and a wiki) among which I find the model of wiki quite appealing, because it underlines the differences between the Web site and the book, as well as their particularities.

Undoubtedly, the Web site of the *Lexicon* functions as a virtual museum with an endless space for exhibition(s) of personal memories for people of former Yugoslavia who shared the same social and cultural history. Because cyberspace is theoretically infinite, the existing collection is always open for new contributions, regardless of whether they stand closer to idealization or to demonization of once existent myths.²⁸ Also, the potential audience for the *Lexicon*—as Labov demonstrates—provides an example of how some might disagree with existing material and explanations on the Web site and, therefore, desire to supplement them. This desire to add their own personal experience to the official record, and thereby improve it, supports Labov's conclusion that we might consider the Web site as an ongoing process that develops gradually. Therefore, as Labov asserts, the Web page of the *Lexicon* is a wiki, where "the accretion and deletion of information never ends. It can continue indefinitely."²⁹

On the other hand, Labov considers the printed version, "a snapshot—or a screen shot—of an ongoing process."³⁰ Unlike the infinity of the Web site, the book is a finite text that captures a specific stage of the ongoing Internet-based project. At the same time, it also documents contributors' personal experiences through the inclusion of posted historical material. As mentioned before, three different "snapshots" of the Web site have been made—each retrospectively revising the content of the previous ones. Thus, each paper edition must be amended to include subsequent online changes. Moreover, in the final pages of all current editions one can find a renewed call for participation in replenishing the Web site.³¹ We might have expected this more, for each "snapshot's" novelty depends entirely upon its exhibition as new content. In that regard, contributors to the Web site personify the exhibitors, while the printed volumes represent the exhibition catalogues.³²

The "exhibition catalogue" testifies to the remarkable *artistic* and *curatorial zeal* of the editors, who were eager to arrange and design the printed vol-

28. Judging by the range of postings—by tone and subjective bias in the content of the entries—the entire project of the *Lexicon* is evaluated in radically different manners on the Web. There one can find entries and comments that are not included in the book—particularly those that are both extremely nationalist and highly negative toward the Yugoslav heritage.

29. Labov, "Leksikon Yu Mitologije," 37.

30. Ibid.

31. Arsenijević et al., *LYM*, 461.

32. The *Lexicon* Web site has developed into a network (leksikon-yu-mitologije.net; postyu.info; www.youtube.com/leksikonyumitologije; twitter.com/#!/LeksikonYU; plus.google.com/110613281598295879013/posts) and editors are currently working on the third edition of the book, which differs from the original volume.

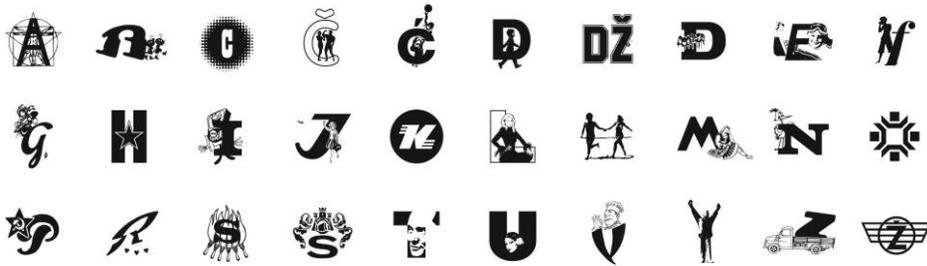


Figure 1. The alphabet letters inside the exhibition catalogue. Illustrator Dragan Mileusnić carefully selected the elements that compose these diverse “graphic icons.” Thus, one can find four historical figures, two males (a politician and a sportsman) and two females (both pop music celebrities); many logos for companies or their material products (that the former country exported and its citizens widely consumed); one monument (devoted to a national hero from World War II); the logo for the Winter Olympic Games (held in Sarajevo in 1984); the logo for a music magazine, and a few state symbols.

ume in a professional and fitting manner. The catalogue considers in detail all aspects and contexts within which Yugoslav popular culture emerged. Starting from the covers of the book, which represent Yugoslavia’s tricolor flag with a star, and moving to the introduction of the book, each design is reminiscent of the everyday life Yugoslavs built and shared. The introduction is followed by the alphabetical content, the historical timeline, and the illustrations, respectively. The seriousness of the entire project emerges from these elements, as does the editors’ conscious endeavor not to track the path of official history but to provide an interactive motley of historical and cultural (arte)facts that anchor individual memories within a common but fluid historical experience. As the historical timeline makes clear, the *Lexicon* covers fifty years of Yugoslav cultural history. The design of letters in the book’s alphabetical contents shows how bits and pieces of material culture participate in forming a(n alphabetical) “chain of signification” recognizable to those acquainted with the “unique experience” of Yugoslav cultural heritage (see figure 1). Each letter of the alphabet, on the one hand, becomes a graphic icon in its own right and, on the other, acts as an organizing principle of the book, enabling the exhibition catalogue to have the structure of a lexicon. Moreover, each letter signifying the beginning of a new chapter is glossed at the side of the page.

Between the historical timeline and the opening chapter that begins with the letter A, one can find a simple but descriptive illustration, acting as an inventive symbol for the exhibition catalogue: a broken egg with its edges outlining the borders of the former Yugoslavia (see figure 2). This illustration is a semantically rich sign. On the one hand, it signifies Jajce, the town in northern Bosnia where Tito and the Partisans founded the former Yugoslavia in 1943 (the Serbo-Croatian word *jajce* means “[a little] egg” in English), and on the other, because the egg is broken, it signifies the disintegration of the country in the 1990s. The illustration’s symbolic potential clearly identifies two essential landmarks of ex-Yugoslavia: the birth and death of its mythology.

The *artistic* arrangement of the exhibition catalogue contributes to its un-

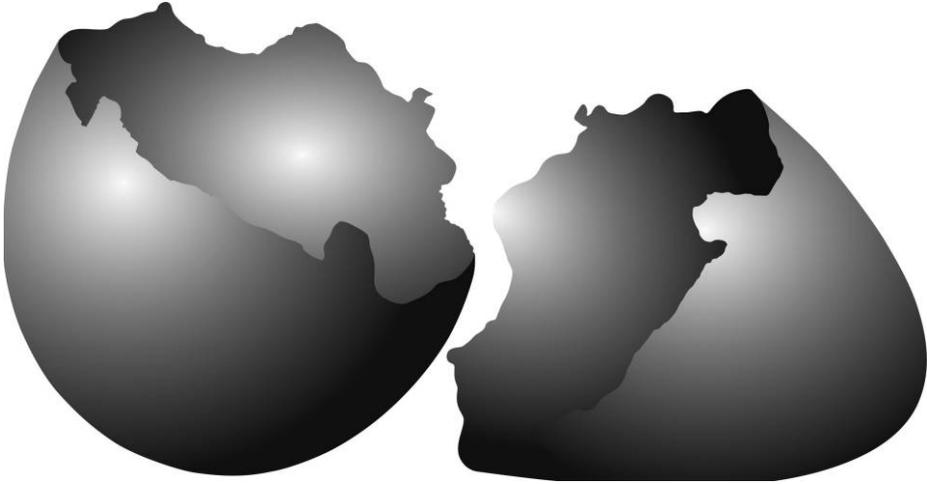


Figure 2. The “Yugoslav-broken-egg”: Mileusnić’s illustration as a symbol of the exhibition catalogue. It is worth noticing here that the famous Yugoslav “Black Wave” film director, Dušan Makavejev, also used the breaking of an egg as an effective symbol in the opening scene of his masterpiece *W.R.: Mysteries of the Organism* (1971), which also found a place in the *Lexicon* as one of its entries. In that memorable scene, we see three comrades playing with several yolks, moving them from hand to hand. The reference to the country of Yugoslavia is alluded to by the following: three pairs of hands—the six republics of the former socialist federation that are now independent states—participate in the same game.

conventional character. Apparent peculiarities of the catalogue’s conceptual design created by the editor-curators, however, very soon disclose themselves as meaningful symbols, replete with various references to different layers within the catalogue. In other words, the “graphic icons” of the alphabet trigger the readers’ memories and call them to play with a complex network of meanings, allusions, and correspondences between the content of different textual entries or “verbal photographs,” various visual illustrations, and all other types of logos and icons within the book. For example, the following comment accompanies the logo of the letter *H* inside the *Lexicon*: “The flag of former Yugoslavia,” while the adjoining page features illustrations of the Yugoslav blazon, as well as blazons of all six republics of the former Yugoslavia.³³ The recognizable element that one can find on the former federation’s blazon is a motif of six torches. The editors employed this motif in designing the logo of the letter *S*, glossed by the following: “Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), born under the fire sign of Sagittarius. The motif of six torches in the blazon indicated from the very beginning that there could be a fire.”³⁴ Obviously ironic, the last sentence underlines a detachment from the terrible events that followed the end of Yugoslavia and emphasizes the self-

33. Arsenijević, et al., *LYM*, 154–55.

34. *Ibid.*, 350.

reflection of the authors of the exhibition catalogue. Generally, *self-reflection* is one of the key characteristics common to the great number of individual memories collected and exhibited in the virtual museum. Consequently, the catalogue of this virtual museum positions itself within a paradigm of “the ironic museum,” an idea originally developed by Stephen Bann in his book *The Clothing of Clío*.³⁵ According to Michael Fehr, Bann defined the ironic museum “as a museum able to work within two different rhetorical tropes, metonymy and synecdoche.” While the latter technique functions as one “of dispersal and isolation,” the former works as one “of integration or combination of different things into a whole.”³⁶

This dual function of the rhetorical tropes with which the ironic museum is able to work is also essential to the textual comments that accompany the graphic icons. For example, the editors glossed the graphic sign for the letter *G* as “The industrial paraphrase of ‘Madonna with child’: Gavrilović’s Jelica with a salami in her hands”; and the letter *M* as “Morava—the cigarettes, product of the tobacco industry Niš, made ‘according to the taste of millions of smokers’ and without information on tar content.”³⁷ Both textual comments following the “graphic icons” resonate ironically. The example of the letter *G* isolates the “child” from the “Madonna with child” and substitutes the “salami” instead, thus creating a sort of travesty by dispersion of meaning: filling the elevated form (a Christian icon) with a low content (a food product). The example of the letter *M* juxtaposes a common cliché of tobacco advertisements (made “according to the taste of millions of smokers”) with information that advertisements for tobacco products would certainly omit. Moreover, the absence of information on presumably high tar content is a metonymy for the brand name, because there is contiguity between them: from what is given we can infer that this brand of cigarettes is highly damaging to the consumers.³⁸

As theoreticians have already argued, texts or images dominated by metonymy and its subclass synecdoche “usually possess a lower figurality rate than those dominated by metaphor.”³⁹ Therefore, they are able to establish evocative connections with other texts and images by substitution based on contiguity, and consequently make possible a surprising network of meanings. Such a network of meanings, made between the content of diverse textual entries and a variety of visual illustrations, becomes denser the more one browses through the exhibition catalogue. For example, the short text beside the “graphic icon” of the letter *Z*—“Crvena Zastava [Red Banner]: special vehicles and trucks were arriving on Yugoslav roads from the production lane in Kragujevac”—(in)directly refers, together with the designed letter-icon, to

35. Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clío: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France* (Cambridge, Eng., 1984).

36. Michael Fehr, “A Museum and Its Memory—The Art of Recovering History,” in Susan A. Crane, ed., *Museums and Memory* (Stanford, 2000), 35.

37. Arsenijević et al., *LYM*, 143, 236.

38. On advertising and marketing in socialist Yugoslavia, see Patrick Hyder Patterson, “The Truth Half Told: Finding the Perfect Pitch for Advertising and Marketing in Socialist Yugoslavia, 1950–1991,” *Enterprise & Society* 4, no. 2 (2003): 179–225.

39. Franco Morreti, “Ulysses and the Twentieth Century,” in Frank Lentricchia and Andrew DuBois, eds., *Close Reading: The Reader* (Durham, 2003), 336.

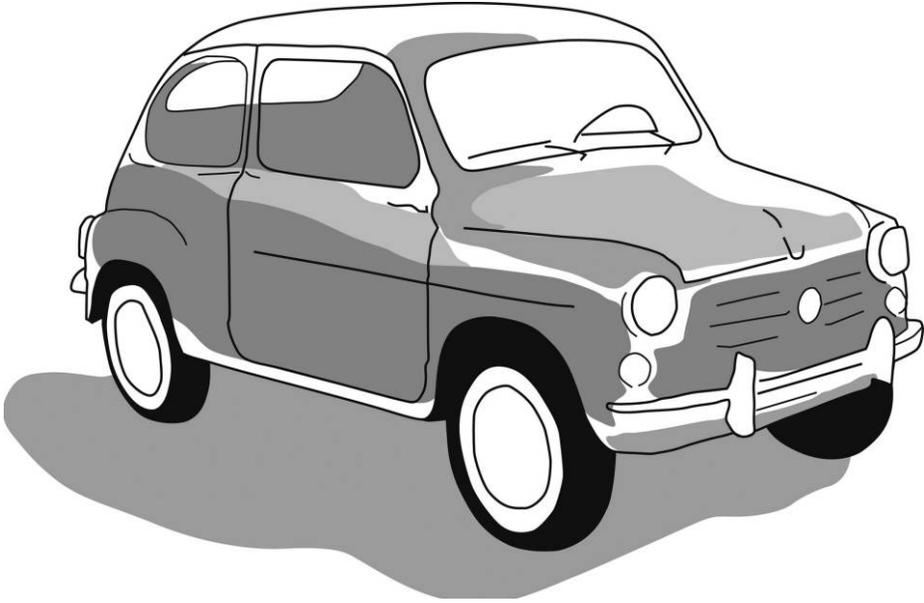


Figure 3. The extent of the importance of the Fića is also shown in the entry *Reckless Youth* (*Grlom u jagode*), which refers to one of Yugoslavia’s most popular, “most beloved, most watched and best-made TV series.” At the endpoint of the hero’s *Bildung*, in the last episode, he purchases his very own (though used) Fića and finally “becomes a man.”

the entries such as “Fiat 1300” or “Fića,” the car models produced in Kragujevac.⁴⁰ Here is the entry for Fića (see figure 3):

A mode of transportation with wheels, or more generously an “automobile.” Although originally intended for the transportation of miniature passengers on short distance trips, entire families (with their suitcases, aunts, and pots full of stuffed peppers thrown in for random consumption) traveled to visit their relatives at the other end of the country. The purchase of a Fića in the 1960s was an event equal to a birth or death in the family. A new Fića would be initiated into the family in the following way: the owner would take on board an unbelievable quantity of neighborhood children and drive them around the block. Then he would perform the following rite: 1. the ritual washing of the car; 2. meticulous gluing of the sticker with the letters “YU” written on it; 3. ornamentation of the interior with miniature cleats or boxing gloves. In the meantime, his comrade-in-marriage would sew a protective cover, onto which the owner would paint the registration number on both sides, on the front and the back—and just to be sure—on the roof.

And just as the drivers of the Fića concluded that they had achieved everything they possibly could and that life was beautiful, the new model *Zastava 1300* [The Banner 1300, known also as the Fiat 1300] appeared on the market. The owners of these road menaces—adding insult to injury—introduced seat covers (which were not manufactured for the Fića). The most

40. Arsenijević et al., *LYM*, 427.

valuable were those made from fake fur, to which the drivers of the Fića could only respond with hairy steering wheel covers. A special envy was reserved for the roomy platform behind the backseat of Zastava 1300 (not present in the Fića), on which one could comfortably place at least two ornamental pillows (advertising one's allegiance to a favorite soccer team) and a dog with a bobbing head. Attempts by Fića drivers to compensate with additional stickers (such as tigers butting their heads) were not successful.

Nevertheless, the drivers defended their integrity to the last breath, even when their Fića was in mortal danger: urban legends tell of a certain case in which, from the window of his apartment in New Belgrade, a retired officer with a hand-held rocket launcher blew up an older teenager when the boy tried to snatch his windshield wipers.—Dejan Novačić.⁴¹

Evident from the very first sentence is the entry's humor, an outcome of its ironic style. The entire description of this specific and essentially Yugoslav material product for broad consumption is, on the one hand, based on a distinctive contrast that intensifies "comic relief" and, on the other hand, anchored in a familiar and shared collective memory of the Fića, as one of the most popular and most important products in the former state. In other words, the entry's ironic style obscures its latent nostalgia for the modes of Yugoslav everyday family life in the 1960s, so that evaporation of the nostalgic feelings leaves a bitter odor of irony. For instance, it is easy for a reader to sense the characteristic mixture of irony and nostalgia in the representation of both the "importance of purchasing a Fića" and its "initiation into the family." In the second paragraph, the contrast between two competing cars (Fića and Zastava 1300) adds to the humor through reference to kitsch items connected to familiar car culture (such as "fur seat covers," "hairy steering wheel covers," or "ornamental pillows"). But the contrast also emphasizes the acceleration of time, where the outdated products lose in the game against new ones and simultaneously acquire a nostalgic aura.

Already established as a familiar symbol of Yugoslav identity in the 1960s and 1970s and as a recognizable national product, the Fića still resonates with cultural, historical, economic, and political meanings. Despite the fact that socialist Yugoslavia was one of the fastest growing economies in the world during the 1950s, products of material culture were not easily purchased or replaced until the following decade(s). The 1960s was a time of growth and rapid expansion for the Yugoslav economy, as well as a time of success for its foreign policy. The salaries and real purchasing power of ordinary Yugoslavs increased substantially, while more open relations were developed with the capitalist west, including economic and cultural exchanges.⁴² All these factors were crucial in the development of a consumption-based vision of good

41. *Ibid.*, 137.

42. For example, all visas were abolished by 1967, and ordinary Yugoslav citizens could travel to the west with relative ease, as well as take loans based on western credit. During the 1960s, Yugoslavia also introduced a more liberal, open, and decentralized political system within which, according to Sabrina Ramet, the first liberal voices appeared, advocating greater decentralization. See Sabrina Ramet, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia, 1962–1991* (Bloomington, 1992), 84–85. About improved living standards in 1960s, see Patterson, "The Truth Half Told," 187.

living, which historian Patrick Hyder Patterson calls “the Yugoslav Dream.”⁴³ As the first Yugoslav car, the Fića was not only proof of the Yugoslav potency for material production but also a “socialist state symbol” of a passionate faith that each new day would bring a better future. The Fića acquired an almost mythical importance for citizens of the former state in the 1960s and 1970s, because it was replete with the common peoples’ hopeful projections into the future, often more realizable than utopian (“This year we’re buying a car, and next year we’ll go to the seashore”).

Nevertheless, consumers’ purchasing power in a socialist country such as Yugoslavia was finite and regionally unbalanced. “Even with policies that favored salary increases and bonuses founded by borrowing and the payout of enterprise profits,” writes Patterson, “there were constraints on how much workers could be paid, and thus on what they could afford.”⁴⁴ Contrary to the image of a radiant future promised by socialism, the last paragraph of the entry on Fića radically diminishes expectations of the Yugoslav Dream. It brings up an almost surreal urban legend related to Fića, with its ghastly end, which implicitly triggers associations of the civil war in Yugoslavia in the 1990s and provokes the question of how much the rapidly developing consumerism, which had helped keep Yugoslavia together, also helped to tear it apart, hastening the dissolution of the federation in the 1990s.

Irony is above all a powerful device employed in the rare entries that have as their subject symbolically loaded phenomena, persons, or events. Such is the case with the short entry on Tito. The entire story of Tito’s life is given as a postmodern “pastiche of official anecdotes . . . and unofficial opinion about those anecdotes.”⁴⁵ As a medley of various ingredients, the entry employs the postmodern technique of pastiche, brimming with irony, provocation, and parody, thus producing a sort of “semiological guerilla” à la Umberto Eco, directed against officially sanctioned revisions of Yugoslav history. The last paragraph is a parody of a historical event—Tito’s death—that questions a fact of history by fictionalizing it: “Tito died in Ljubljana, and after he stayed a while in Zagreb, the funeral was held in Belgrade. Because he was a dictator, nobody was sad when he died. Nor did anyone go to the funeral. Especially not from around the world. It was shown this way on TV, but of course they were always lying.—Dejan Novačić.”⁴⁶

On the following pages, the exhibition catalogue features an interesting two-page collage of various historical documents (photographs and excerpts from newspapers) contradicting the last paragraph of the entry.⁴⁷ The historical records of Tito’s funeral confirm that it was one of the most attended

43. Patterson defines it as “a Yugoslav version of the Good Life, a modest and moderated but nonetheless satisfying approximation of the consumption-driven abundance that had remade the capitalist West in the years after the Second World War.” Patrick Hyder Patterson, “Yugoslavia as It Once Was: What Tourism and Leisure Meant for the History of the Socialist Federation,” in Hannes Grandits and Karin Taylor, eds., *Yugoslavia’s Sunny Side: A History of Tourism in Socialism (1950s–1980s)* (Budapest, 2010), 367.

44. Patterson, “Yugoslavia as It Once Was,” 393.

45. Labov, “Leksikon Yu Mitologije,” 28.

46. Arsenijević et al., *LYM*, 396.

47. *Ibid.*, 398–99.

events in recent history.⁴⁸ It is also universally claimed that the majority of Yugoslavs cried when Tito died. By juxtaposing the historical documents of Tito's death with the entry's parody of this event, the editors point toward what Labov has effectively summarized: what is parodied is not Tito, "but the *post-Yugoslav* revisionist history."⁴⁹ The entry represents Tito as some sort of Hollywood celebrity and expresses a warm sympathy toward the mythical "father of the Nation," rather than a severe reprimand. Stripping away the veil of the intangible aura created around the leader's cult of personality, the author of the entry discloses *the legend and myth* that surround "the Greatest Son of Yugoslav Nations," as Tito was once called, as crucial elements underpinning the personality cult that Yugoslavs built and nourished so successfully for so long.⁵⁰ The author implies that *Titoism* in the former state was a "strong regime of imaginary," while affectionately identifying and ironically exposing the space/place this *regime* occupied in the fabric of ruined Yugoslav socialism.⁵¹

On the very same page, one can also find a short entry titled "Tito's Speeches." It is not clear whether these "gnomic" sentences from Tito's speeches are historically accurate or just humorous fictional anecdotes full of irony. Nevertheless, the (un)intended irony in "Tito's Speeches" perfectly reflects the tone of parody from the previous entry, making the borders between fiction and history more permeable: "From one of Tito's speeches: 'They accuse us today of receiving this American wheat. But I claim that this wheat is better than the Soviet wheat that we didn't receive at all.' From another of Tito's speeches: 'Today, we have what many people don't have. And many people have what we don't have. But that is not important.'—Mića Marković."⁵²

48. Tito's magnificent funeral was "attended by a vast number of renowned political and public figures from around the world. There were 206 foreign delegations from 123 countries. . . . Practically all world statesmen were there, save for President Carter. Over the 64 hours while he lay in state, 465,000 people filed past to pay their last respect." Velikonja, *Titostalgija*, 15.

49. Labov, "Leksikon Yu Mitologije," 28.

50. Over thirty or so years, Tito enjoyed the privilege of living in the Brijuni archipelago, spending up to four months a year in the place that, both in reality and in the imagination of Yugoslav citizens, embodied the "dream world" of luxury, escape, and exoticism that no one else had a chance to nurture. Croatian writer Slavenka Drakulić describes Tito's activities in Brijuni: "Tito not only relaxed. He spent his holidays working—as the head of state, chairman of the communist party and commander of the military. At the same time he played host to political leaders from Fidel Castro to Queen Elisabeth, Indira Gandhi to Willy Brandt, Leonid Brezhnev to the Persian tsar Reza Pahlavi—and many, many others. Stars fascinated Tito, and many popular personalities, from opera singers like Mario del Monaco, to Valentina Tereskova, the first woman in space, were invited to Brijuni too." After defending Tito's image from the revisionists' attempts to represent the former leader as "a manipulator, liar, and traitor," Drakulić concludes her article in the following way: "Tito is just one example of how, in the former Yugoslavia, we still have too many myths and too much ideology instead of facts, of history." Drakulić, "Tito between Legend and Thriller," *Eurozine*, 25 September 2009, at www.eurozine.com/articles/2009-09-25-drakulic-en.html (last accessed 5 December 2012).

51. Ugo Vlasisavljević, "Tito's Greatest Gift: The Vacant Seat of Power," in Radonja Leposavić, ed., *VlasTITO Iskustvo: Past Present* (Belgrade, 2004), 93.

52. Arsenijević et al., *LYM*, 396.



"ONE BORSCH AN' YOGHOURT, ONE CAMEL'S MILK, ONE SALAMI GAVRILOVIC, ONE INDIAN CURRY, ONE FUFU WITH CREAM, ONE HOT TOMALLEY WITH CHILI SAUCE, ONE SHISHKEBAB, AND ONE STOMACH POWDER FOR ME, FRED"

Figure 4. John Bertram Musgrave-Wood's caricature printed in *Time* magazine, 26 September 1960. Tito is sitting third from the left, and the bold text from the comment below refers to "the internationally known Yugoslav delicacy"—Gavrilović's salami. Metonymy and synecdoche, again, serve as the rhetorical devices for irony, as well as a link between illustrations and "verbal photographs" within the *Lexicon*.

The first of the two examples wittily thematizes SFRY's distinctive policy of neutrality during the Cold War. In the background of an implicit polarity between the eastern and western political blocs or, more precisely, between the USSR and the United States, Yugoslavia emerges ("we" in the entry) as an honorary member of the so-called Third World, with its autonomous foreign policy that relied on its formal leading role in the Non-Aligned Movement (see figure 4).⁵³ The Cold War bipolarity is humorously deconstructed by supplementing one of the binary elements with a third, where a synecdoche (the "wheat" which stands for America) enables this "logic of supplement" and again creates the irony.

The second example from Tito's speech can easily be linked with the entry titled "The Seven Miracles of Communism." The almost mythical title of this entry implies the remembrance of life in the former state, where people supposedly enjoyed nearly all the privileges of both communism and capitalism: "1. Everyone was employed. 2. Although everyone was employed, no one actually worked. 3. Although no one actually worked, all plans were accomplished at least 100%. 4. Although the plan was accomplished above 100%, the stores

53. Technically Yugoslavia would have belonged to the Second World, in terms of its development, but because of its significance for Third World countries and its being a founder of the Non-Aligned Movement, it was considered an "honorary" member of the Third World. On the three-world schema, see Alfred Sauvy, "Trois Mondes, Une Planète," *L'Observateur*, 14 August 1952, 14. For an analysis of this schema, see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), 333–34. See also George Walter Hoffman and Fred Warner Neal, *Yugoslavia and the New Communism* (New York, 1962); Susan L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War* (Washington, D.C., 1995).

were empty. 5. Although the stores were empty, everybody had everything. 6. Although everyone had everything, everybody stole. 7. Although everybody stole, they never lacked anything.—Anonym.”⁵⁴

These seven “verbal snapshots”—composed of a sequence of paradoxes and brimming with irony—create a nearly utopian picture of everyday life in the former state. Undoubtedly, Yugoslavia was a country oscillating between communism and capitalism. The Yugoslavs had many things that tied them to the people of other communist countries: communist iconography, parades and spectacles proclaiming the aesthetics of totalitarian kitsch, massive celebrations, and monuments.⁵⁵ Concurrently, however, they enjoyed some things that the people of other communist countries could only dream of, things that mostly belonged to the capitalist world: open borders, a passport that allowed them to travel without visas, American movies, self-management, a much higher standard of living, and comparatively liberal media. These “distinct characteristics” of Yugoslav socialism created the image of Yugoslavia as the country that rapidly gained considerable currency both at home and abroad. Moreover, these features were affiliated instantaneously with the system of self-management socialism that was neither a totalitarian communist nor an exploitative capitalist one. With its distinct version of socialism, Yugoslavia represented what historian Patterson described as a “kinder, gentler implementation of socialist rule that managed to keep its citizens tolerably content, often even happy, and to welcome, impress, and even inspire visitors from the outside the communist world.”⁵⁶ Through its hyperbolized verbal images, the entry “Seven Miracles of Communism” intensifies the true *feeling* of living in the SFRY, unerringly described by Patterson as: “having a reasonable facsimile of the consumption-centered Good Life without having to work too hard for it. . . . The superior living standards and purchasing power of the West were understood to have been bartered away in return for reduced work hours, diminished stress, increased security, and greater worker sovereignty. To many, this seemed a good trade.”⁵⁷ In the former socialist federation, the possibilities for enjoying such reliable provision of *experiential* wealth were feasible, palpable, and long-lasting.⁵⁸

54. Arsenijević et al., *LYM*, 355.

55. Similar to the Soviet state, Yugoslavia was built on and reproduced a *discourse of victory*, introducing Soviet-style administrative socialism with its cult of physical work, collectivism, anticapitalism, and a five-year economic plan aiming to build a socialist country through massive voluntary work. In its early stage after World War II, Yugoslavia adopted the Soviet strategy of socialist modernization: the countryside received electricity, private property was nationalized, private entrepreneurship was reduced, and heavy industry was promoted at the expense of producing consumer goods. After Tito’s break with Stalin in 1948, Yugoslavia started capitalizing on the history of its own independent and authentic revolution. It opened up to the west and introduced workers’ self-management, “a form of conceptual syncretism leaning towards fusion of Marxist, Proudhonist, Blanquist, and other mutually often antagonistic socialist ideas.” Oto Luthar et al., eds., *The Land Between: A History of Slovenia* (Frankfurt am Main, 2008), 459.

56. Patterson, “Yugoslavia as It Once Was,” 367.

57. *Ibid.*, 367–68.

58. For more on the workings of consumerist abundance in Yugoslavia, see Patrick Hyder Patterson, “The New Class: Consumer Culture under Socialism and the Unmaking of the Yugoslav Dream, 1945–1991” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2001). The entry “Seven Miracles of Communism” is not only an expression of nostalgia for Yugoslav so-

Some of the “verbal photographs” in this interesting catalogue contain explicit and overtly ironic allusions to the civil wars in the 1990s. Such is the short entry referring to the Eurovision Song Contest held in Zagreb. The SFRY earned the right to host the Eurovision competition after the group Riva (Boardwalk) won the contest in Lausanne in 1989 with the song “Rock Me,” bringing to the socialist country its greatest Eurovision success. As Dean Vuletić writes, “This win came just before the disintegration of the Yugoslav federation in 1991; indeed, between the 1989 and 1990 contests, socialist regimes fell throughout Eastern Europe, and Slovenia and Croatia held their first multiparty elections that brought pro-independence parties to power (in Croatia, these elections even took place in the very month that Eurovision was staged in Zagreb).”⁵⁹ The title of the entry (“Let’s go crazy!”) is, actually, the title of the song sung by the pop-singer Tatjana Matejaš (Tajči) at the 1990 Eurovision held in the Croatian capital: “The imperative sung by the sweetheart Tajči at the 1990 *Eurovision* in Zagreb. Millions of her fans completely misunderstood her lyrics.—Boris Koroman.”⁶⁰ Drawing upon the grammatical mode of the verb from the title of the song, the author of the entry almost pities all Yugoslavs (“millions of her fans”) for completely misunderstanding the lyrics. This apparent tone of tender pity contains a subtly hidden sting of irony, however: the Yugoslavs did not misunderstand the lyric, but rather understood it literally, acting the way the imperative commanded or instructed. This witticism draws its effect from the impending breakdown of meaning suggested by the command “let’s go crazy,” consequently fostering an ambivalent discursive activity. In other words, the witticism ridicules that which it simultaneously perpetuates—the empty notion of collective madness that is seen as the main culprit for the violence that ensued. The ironic doubleness of the entry thus both criticizes and endorses the apparent absence of any responsibility for the crimes committed during the war.⁶¹

cialism but also reflects a broader phenomenon—nostalgia for socialism more generally. According to sociologist Mitja Velikonja, there is a common *feeling* that all different nostalgias for socialism share: “Underneath its amorphous, amoeba-like appearance, it is possible to detect its basic structure and characteristics, which are summed up in everyday statements heard in practically all corners of postsocialist Europe: *after all, it was not so bad, or, we were poor but we didn’t lack anything, or, we had nothing but we were happy.*” Velikonja, *Titostalgija*, 33. Emphasis in the original.

59. Dean Vuletić, “European Sounds, Yugoslav Visions: Performing Yugoslavia at the Eurovision Song Contest,” in Breda Luthar and Maruša Pušnik, eds., *Remembering Utopia: The Culture of Everyday Life in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Washington, D.C., 2010), 123. Vuletić discusses the importance of Yugoslavia’s participation in Eurovision during the 1960s and 1970s for its citizens, offering insights into what “Yugoslavia’s citizens thought about their relations with the rest of the world as well as their own cultural and political identities” (136).

60. Arsenijević et al., *LYM*, 155.

61. The same equation of war violence with an irrational, uncontrollable, and unstoppable madness can be found in Srđan Dragojević’s film *Pretty Villages, Pretty Flame* (1996), which depicts the destruction of Bosnia through scenes of violent looting and burning by soldiers. Representing the civil war in Yugoslavia “as some great arena of madness,” the scenes are accompanied by the well-known pop-rock song, “All of Yugoslavia Dances Rock’n’Roll” (Električni orgazam) from the end of 1980s. The song successfully recalls the Yugoslav rock’n’roll clichés of 1980s rebellion and the “Balkan/Yu stereotype” of the

Overall, all of the *Lexicon* entries that contain more or less direct allusions to the 1990s circumvent explicit commentary on the terrors of war or the atrocities and crimes committed during the ethnic conflicts. Nevertheless, the political tenor of the *Lexicon of Yu Mythology* cannot be denied. Not only it is evident in exhibiting the objects and phenomena of Yugoslav cultural history, but more important, in exposing the significance of a prevalent *feeling* both shared by people who participated in the creation of the *Lexicon* and rendered through *Yugonostalgia*.

The Political Role of Yugoslav Cultural Memory

The previously mentioned entry “Reckless Youth” is of seminal importance for any critical discussion of the *Lexicon of Yu Mythology*, since its editors recognized the television series *Reckless Youth* as “the first and the most important endeavor toward the articulation of modern Yugoslav culture and the precedent of this lexicon.”⁶² In other words, both the series and the *Lexicon* share the common interest in the mundane and ordinary aspects of life under socialism. Through the nostalgic rendition of socialist past(s) both are trying to recover the cultural and material practices of everyday life as well as to comment on discourses that frame those practices. They both seek to regain what Raymond Williams calls the “structure of feeling” as the culture of a period, which is grounded in the everyday, rigid, and habitual, in the mundane details of ordinary life.⁶³ Finally, both perform such recovery by accessing this “structure of feeling” through individual memories, the material, documentary culture, and a broader spectrum of voices. This is one among the numerous entries in the *Lexicon* in which nostalgic rendering of the socialist past is purified from any ironic undertones. The director’s warm recollection from the beginning of the entry reveals how his generation’s coming of age was inseparable from the prospect of a better future that the golden 1960s successfully rendered: “One of our most beloved, most watched and best-made TV series. Srđan Karanović: ‘I can say, from today’s perspective, that I am very happy because I grew up in the 60s. I do not remember any political pressures placed on my parents, on my friends, or me at the time. We lived very modestly, though we had a feeling that everything around us and within us [was] progressing towards something better, and that is a fantastic feeling.’ —Goran Tarlać.”⁶⁴

wild, untamed, hedonistic, and irrational “rebel soul.” The song thus turns the scenes of destruction into celebration and fun, simultaneously perpetuating the existing stereotypes of passionate and “dangerous” Southern Slavs. Moreover, during these scenes of destruction death remains invisible. As Pavle Levi argues in his analysis of the film, “no killing seems to take place, and no one seems to die.” According to Levi, Dragojević’s film “reflected the [Serbian] nation’s dominant sociopolitical and cultural trends, which never allowed for the damaging effects of ethnic madness to be thoroughly addressed.” Pavle Levi, *Disintegration in Frames: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Cinema* (Stanford, 2007), 139–58.

62. Arsenijević et al., *LYM*, 152.

63. Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Harmondsworth, Eng., 1965), 61–63; Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, 1977), 132.

64. Arsenijević et al., *LYM*, 151–52.

Karanović's affectionate reminiscence only reiterates the strong nostalgic potential the television series had from the very beginning. In the ten-part series, each episode represents one year in the "golden decade" and narrates the lives of a group of friends as they come of age in the capital of SFRY. *Reckless Youth* successfully recreates what Karanović calls "a fantastic feeling"—an all-embracing sentiment of progress toward a better future. In this "feeling" one should recognize the "structure" of a relatively consistent communal way of looking at the world and sharing a number of referent points, which are the basis for everyday action and discourse.

One of the reasons the series succeeded in its nostalgic rendition of "the carefree time of youth" and "the careless vibe of the 1960s, the lingo, the architecture, and the prospect of better future," according to Martin Pogačar, was the recognizable formulaic frame employed in each of the episodes. "The same opening and closing credits in each episode," writes Pogačar in his essay on *Reckless Youth*, "create an impression that the story neither has a definite beginning nor an end. Thus, it creates a never-ending circle of repetition, which serves the story and its nostalgic character very well: the series is positioned outside 'real' time and space, into the never-ending past open to endless possible futures."⁶⁵ Likewise, the *Lexicon of Yu Mythology* successfully recovers both the specific feeling of a multiform way of life under socialism and the forms of subjectivity produced by the socialist modernization process. This recovery/idealization is enabled mainly by the creation of a complex network, within which the interaction between textual and visual documents of the material culture creates a circuit similar to the endless "circle of repetition" in the television series. Exterior signs of Yugoslav cultural and material life (visual documents) are combined with lived memories, so that the book becomes a "site of memory," that is, a space with a residual sense of a specific Yugoslav continuity. The *design* and structure of the *Lexicon* allow for the collectively created and shared network to function metonymically. Metonymy provides substitutions based on a web of established associations, thus turning a continuity of the socialist everyday life into contiguity.

In his analysis of the television series, Pogačar recognizes that *Reckless Youth* has a Bildungsroman narrative. He also asserts that the series is more than a mere "exercise in nostalgia," since it addresses the important social issues of the time, "providing simultaneously the implicit critique of the system." Nevertheless, he concludes, if the structure of the series renders the pasts endlessly desirable, it simultaneously marginalizes its existing potential for critique.⁶⁶ Similarly, many critics charge that the exorbitant nostalgic rendering of the Yugoslav socialist past in the *Lexicon* lessens its potential critique of that past. In his review of the *Lexicon of Yu Mythology*, scholar and cultural critic Dean Duda argues that the book is "a marvelous hibernated frame of private and public utopia, a projection that allows no conflict" and that "invents a tradition of cultural harmony and produces Yugoslav pop-cultural imaginary as a perfectly non-conflicting formation." According to Duda, the

65. Martin Pogačar, "Yugoslav Past in Film and Music: Yugoslav Interfilmic Referentiality," in Luthar and Pušnik, eds., *Remembering Utopia*, 211.

66. *Ibid.*, 211–12.

Lexicon is “a particular *Bildungsroman* of the generation born between 1960s and early 1970s, in the decade of dynamic production of wealth and prosperity.” The authors of the *Lexicon*, Duda argues, are “captives of nostalgia, of the idea of a ‘golden age,’ and of emigrant mourning [*sevdah*],” and thus “tainted by the Peter Pan syndrome, they are hesitant to grow up.”⁶⁷

Both Pogačar and Duda discard the critical potential of nostalgia on the basis of its “idealization of the past,” while at the same time neglecting the relationship that emerging nostalgic discourses have toward the present.⁶⁸ Yet nostalgia is always more a polemical narrative about what the present lacks than about the nature of the past. Reminiscences about an overrated past serve first and foremost as a critique of an underrated present. Therefore, one has to reply to such charges that the real strength of the nostalgic discourse in the *Lexicon*—particularly in this and numerous similar entries that have been emptied of irony—is not solely in its potential to pin down the political, social, economic, and often symbolically disguised maladies in the former socialist state, but in an implicit critique of contemporary maladies and those who restlessly encourage present-day social ills to grow and spread.

Yugonostalgia, especially because it is both interwoven with and treated with irony and humor, represents another version of what Svetlana Boym calls “reflective nostalgia”: a specific junction of longing and critical thinking, linking compassion with judgment and critical reflection.⁶⁹ As journalist and cultural critic Teofil Pančić observes, “between [entries on] Dušan Makavejev and *Eurocream* there is no real symbolic difference: both belong to the world of modernity in which the postwar generations *matured and formed*, believing naively that backwardness is impossible.”⁷⁰ In other words, Pančić agrees with Duda that the concept of *Bildung* played a crucial role in the founding of the entire *Lexicon* project. Through *Bildung*, the editors wanted to answer the

67. Duda, “U raljama nostalgije.” The contributors to the *Lexicon*, Duda argues, are acting as “privileged witnesses and actors from the golden age of decadent socialism,” who are shaping “the material mythological offer of commodities” from the period. Thus, Duda and Volčić position *Yugonostalgia* similarly: as another cultural side effect of post-Yugoslav transitional societies. According to Volčić, *Yugonostalgia* is “seized upon by the emerging commercial culture in the postsocialist era, which mobilized the sense of lost past as a means of promoting consumption.” See Volčić, “Yugo-Nostalgia,” 25. For the answer to these and similar charges against *Yugonostalgic* discourses, see Velikonja, *Titostalgija*, 129.

68. Interestingly, both critics avoid commenting on the concrete historical contexts in which those nostalgic projects came into existence. For example, Pogačar neglects the context of the 1970s, when the nostalgic gaze on the earlier decade was largely a consequence of the turbulence the Yugoslav political system was experiencing at the time. During the decade when the series was made and widely aired on television, ethnic tensions escalated for the first time, resulting in protests such as Maspok and the Croatian Spring in 1971 in Zagreb. In addition, in 1974, Yugoslavia’s new, revised constitution claimed more rights and independence for the individual republics and provinces (this was regarded as a move against Serbia’s hegemony in Yugoslavia) and the right to unilaterally secede from the Federal Republic. On the other hand, Duda avoids commenting on what the term *Yugonostalgia* meant in the public discourse of the new independent post-Yugoslav states.

69. See Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 49–50.

70. Pančić, “Knjiga smeha i pamćenja.” Emphasis added.

questions Who are we? and Who will we be? But that is also why the *Lexicon* contains the implicit critique of the nationalist projects, where the bloody, yet glorious past of the *homogeneous nation* is revived. Such Bildung of new *pure* nations demands the destruction of the old multinational and multicultural ones, thus inevitably pushing the citizens into backwardness.

Accordingly, the exhibition catalogue is the healthy core of a nostalgic selection from the baggage of individual memories and collective representations, and also a critical reminder of the painful wound of Yugoslav's "Big Defeat" at the beginning of the 1990s. This is exactly the basis on which these popular cultural phenomena have often been dismissed: the accusation that they are nostalgic, or "Yugo-nostalgic." The term *Yugonostalgia* or the label *Yugonostalgic* came into existence in the post-1990, post-Yugoslav world. From the nationalist point of view at the time, all those intellectuals—those Yugonostalgics—who once said something critical about the then-present regimes, were recognized as "skeptics," "public enemies," and "national traitors," "who are guilty because they have publicly declared their antinationalist, anti-war and individual standpoint."⁷¹ This resistance to hegemonic discourses of selective memory and nationalistic amnesia is another reminder why the entire project exemplifies the political role of memory.

The *curatorial practices* that shaped the *Lexicon*—the selection of entries, their juxtaposition, editing, and design—exhibit "Yugoslaviana" as the closest frame of reference for the realized utopian ideals of a *just* society for the majority of its members.⁷² Yugoslavs lived for several decades in their own country, building not only that country but also a certain complex of values. The ideology and practice of "self-management socialism" alongside the people's famous "Yugoslavism" was built into the foundations of that system of values. As Ugrešić points out, Yugoslavism "implied a multinational and multicultural community and was reinforced over the years not only by Tito's popular slogans—'Preserve brotherhood and unity like the apple of your eye'—but also by the practice of daily life. Today those same peoples claim that they lived in a *prison of nations*, and that it was that idea, the idea of Yugoslavism—not *they themselves*—which is responsible for the present brutal war."⁷³ The nationalist Great Manipulators in the newly made states in the post-Yugoslav world were troubled not only by the idea of Yugoslavism but also by the fact that the massacred Yugoslav collective body, still giving feeble vital signs, exposed their *responsibility* in the tragic Yugoslav spectacle. Hiding behind statements that the idea of Yugoslavs as people was an endless utopia, a "Bosnian pot" within which various national dishes broiled on the heat of the party, the Great Manipulators made this still functional idea yet another victim of resurrected nationalism, which scattered fear and brutal hatred in the aftermath of bloody "ethnic passions."

As one of the reactions to these accusations, Pančić, being also one of

71. Ugrešić, *Culture of Lies*, 74, 77–78.

72. Ugrešić ascribes the name "Yugoslaviana" to "the mythology of everyday life which the citizens of former Yugoslavia built and shared for fifty years." See Ugrešić, *Culture of Lies*, 232.

73. *Ibid.*, 68. Emphasis in the original.

the contributors to the *Lexicon*, offered the term *normal-nostalgia* as more pertinent than *Yugonostalgia*.⁷⁴ It is the desire for a normalization of life that compels people to revisit the last period of “normality” they experienced, as they perceive it now.⁷⁵ Such a return is in the first place “reflective.” As Boym elaborates, “[reflective nostalgia] does not pretend to rebuild the mythical place called home; it is ‘enamored of distance, not of referent itself.’ This type of nostalgic narrative is ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary. . . . the past opens up a multitude of potentialities, nonteleological possibilities of historic development.”⁷⁶ Although “normal-nostalgia” itself has a utopian dimension, it is no longer directed only toward the past, but rather “sideways,” simultaneously launching, in Michael Janover’s words, “ironic retrievals of the past that can serve as critical measures of the present but in conscious awareness that there can be no return.”⁷⁷ In an imaginative experience of “normal-nostalgia” that establishes the retracting lenses of constructive critique, according to Janover, we rediscover memory “as unexplored potentialities of past experiences.”⁷⁸ Therefore, both Boym and Janover contend that in remembering the past, we also remember what *could have been* and, through recognizing these *unrealized paths*, we can affect the present. In the case of *Yugonostalgia*, the phenomenon is an implicit critique of the current sociopolitical realities in which former Yugoslavs now live. *Yugonostalgia* is an affirmation that recent history could have been different, that the path taken was not the only possible one.

Furthermore, the real prospect that the likewise irony-less nostalgic discourse offers us is to look back to the times that looked ahead. Its power is not exclusively in the critique of present conditions, but rather in its *emancipating effect* on a social body and the creative imagination of its members. As sociologist Mitja Velikonja writes in his study on *Titostalgia*, the simple fact that nostalgia “searches for and anticipates a world that would be *more just than the present one*, makes nostalgia a potential engine and means of emancipation.” That is why, according to Velikonja, nostalgia should be seen not only “as re-action, but also as action,” as an active engagement that “doesn’t restrict itself to criticism of the present world but also constructs an alternative world and aspires for the realization of a different reality of existence.”⁷⁹

The editors of the *Lexicon* claimed the series *Reckless Youth* as “the precedent of this lexicon” because of the progressive ideological orientation of the former socialist society. Yugoslav socialism brought a rapid modernization of the society, so that people now affiliate it with the rapid development, industrialization, urbanization, secularization, and emancipation of underprivileged groups. Nostalgia for Yugoslav socialism implies that the present lacks a prospective perspective, simultaneously proposing that we should return

74. Pančić, “Knjiga smeha i pamćenja.”

75. The social anthropologist Stef Jansen provides a very similar account of *Yugonostalgia*. See Jansen, *Antinacionalizam*, 254–58.

76. Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 50.

77. *Ibid.*, xiv. Michael Janover, “Nostalgias,” *Critical Horizons* 1, no. 1 (2000): 117.

78. *Ibid.*, 128.

79. Velikonja, *Titostalgija*, 128, 123. Emphasis in the original. For more on the emancipating potentials of nostalgia, see Velikonja, “Povratak Otpisanih.”

to the time(s) that possessed such a perspective and in which people lived with the feeling that they were advancing toward a better future. “Underlying the nostalgic longing,” Velikonja argues, “is a desire for a *better world* . . . Progressives and various futurists sought it in the future; esoterics have found it in parallel worlds; nostalgics have found it in the past; and yugo- and tito-nostalgics in *Tito’s times*.”⁸⁰ The creative, anti-mimetic, eclectic, ironic, parodic, deliberately profane, playfully postmodern and witty design of the *Lexicon of Yu Mythology*, together with the self-reflective, intertextual, and provocative editorial comments disseminated between its covers, successfully performs and reaffirms the emancipating (and antinationalistic) impact nostalgia has on the imagination among the new, post-Yugoslav generations. As a particular yearning for an alternative society where rectitude, equality, and solidarity are endlessly anticipated, Yugonostalgia in the *Lexicon* actively engages the social imagination in materializing its emancipating potential.

80. Velikonja, *Titostalgija*, 122. Emphasis in the original.