

## Yugoslav Disco

Digging into an “Excluded”  
Musical Culture of Late Socialism

Magdalena Fürnkranz, Juri Giannini (eds.)



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*YUGOSLAV DISCO*  
*Digging Into an “Excluded” Musical Culture of Late*  
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Dance troupe *Lokice* with Tito in White Villa at Brioni residence, New Year 1979  
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## EDITORIAL

# YUGOSLAV DISCO: DIGGING INTO AN “EXCLUDED” MUSICAL CULTURE OF LATE SOCIALISM

MAGDALENA FÜRNKRANZ (VIENNA)/JURI GIANNINI (VIENNA)

One of the editors of this issue of *TheMA* attended a press conference in Vienna back in 2023. During small talk with a journalist from Belgrade, the editor told her that he was working on a project about disco culture in the former Yugoslavia. The Serbian journalist was surprised about the subject and the editor was equally surprised to realize that she didn't know anything about this topic or any of the music acts mentioned, even though her age revealed that she was probably in her teenage years at the peak of disco culture in Yugoslavia. Instead, she was familiar with all the groups and protagonists of the Yugoslav new wave scene. Indeed, that shouldn't have been so surprising! This issue of *TheMA* is the result of a study day that took place in May 2022 at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna.<sup>1</sup> And one of the questions that triggered this study day was precisely the observation of the absence of disco culture from the canons of Yugoslavia's alternative music and popular music at all, despite the huge success and popularity of disco culture in Yugoslav society at the transition of the 1970s–1980s: Many protagonists of the Yugoslav disco scene were stars; discotheques were opening everywhere in the country; as a consequence of the huge impact of the movie *Saturday Night Fever* after its Yugoslav premier in 1978, local cinema distributors were offering other disco movies in their programming portfolio; magazines were dedicated to the disco topic; disco lifestyle and culture were gaining in importance and visibility and spreading all over the country, and a proper disco fever was arising. Nevertheless, disco music didn't make it into the canon of Yugoslav pop music. Scrutinising this absence, we wanted to examine the peculiarities of the genre in its appearance in the culture and society of Yugoslavia from the late 1970s until the early 1980s. Among other things, we were interested in the question of how the hedonistic and consumerist side of the genre could fit in with the country's socialist ideals and way of life. But this was precisely the point, because these apparent contradictions best illustrate the singularity of the genre's development outside the context of its own

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1 <https://www.mdw.ac.at/imi/?PageId=4337>; <https://sargfabrik.at/veranstaltungen/stayin-alive-socialist-disco-culture> (both accessed on July 8, 2024).

origins and the characteristics of Yugoslav culture and society in the last decades of its existence. As repeatedly highlighted in the academic literature, Yugoslav popular music and disco (as its part) is a dynamic cultural phenomenon, mirroring and emphasizing the dynamics and contradictions of the society where it took place.<sup>2</sup> Marko Zubak, the most relevant and active researcher dealing with the subject, has curated exhibitions<sup>3</sup> and written several articles on the various facets of disco culture in ex-Yugoslavia,<sup>4</sup> and, of course, also hypothesised possible causes, that could have led to its exclusion from the canon and historiographical narrative of Yugoslav popular music, dominated instead (in its alternative format), as already mentioned, by punk, rock, and new wave, genres which entered at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s their most creative period.<sup>5</sup>

One of the plausible reasons for disco's exclusion is probably its commercial and hedonistic essence.<sup>6</sup> One has to keep in mind that disco emerges as a subversive genre (rooted in African American and queer culture)<sup>7</sup> and was subsequently com-

2 See for example the articles in Danijela Š. Beard and Ljerka V. Rasmussen (eds.): *Made in Yugoslavia. Studies in Popular Music*. New York and London: Routledge, 2020.

3 [https://www.academia.edu/14084625/Stayin\\_Alive\\_Socialist\\_Disco\\_Culture](https://www.academia.edu/14084625/Stayin_Alive_Socialist_Disco_Culture); <https://sargfabrik.at/veranstaltungen/stayin-alive-socialist-disco-culture> (both accessed on July 8, 2024).

4 Marko Zubak: "The Birth of Socialist Disc Jockey: Between Music Guru, DIY Ethos and Market Socialism", in: *Popular Music in Eastern Europe: Breaking the Cold War Paradigm*, ed. Ewa Mazierska. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 195–214; Marko Zubak: "Socialist Night Fever: Yugoslav Disco on Film and Television", in: *Popular Music and the Moving Image in Eastern Europe*, ed. Ewa Mazierska and Zsolt Gyófi. New York: Bloomsbury, 2019, pp. 139–154; Marko Zubak: "'Absolutely Yours': Yugoslav Disco Under Late Socialism", in: *Made in Yugoslavia: Studies in Popular Music*, ed. Danijela Š. Beard and Ljerka V. Rasmussen. New York and London: Routledge, 2020, pp. 89–98; Marko Zubak: "Yugoslav Disco: The Forgotten Sound of Late Socialism", in: *Global Dance Cultures in the 1970s and 1980s: Disco Heterotopias*, ed. Flora Pitrolo and Marko Zubak. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, pp. 195–221.

5 See the following articles in Beard and Rasmussen: *Made in Yugoslavia: Vesna Andree Zaimović: "The Sarajevo Pop-Rock Scene: Music from the Yugoslav Crossroads"*, pp. 36–48; Aleksandar Žikić: "Belgrade Rock Experience: From Sixties Innocence to Eighties Relevance", pp. 61–74; Branko Koselnik: "Jugoton: From State Recording Giant to Alternative Producer of Yugoslav New Wave", pp. 75–88; Ana Petrov: "Bijelo Dugme: The Politics of Remembrance Within the Post-Yugoslav Popular Music Scene", pp. 111–120; Gregor Tomc: "'Comrades, We Don't Believe You!' Or, Do We Just Want to Dance With You?: The Slovenian Punk Subculture in Socialist Yugoslavia", pp. 194–205.

6 For general considerations about the exclusion of disco culture from musical critical discourses of popular music see Sarah Thornton: "Strategies for Reconstructing the Popular Past", in: *Popular Music* 9/1 (1990), pp. 87–95.

7 See for example Tim Lawrence: *Love Saves the Day: A History of American Dance Music Culture, 1970–79*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003; Alice Echols: *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2010; Tim Lawrence: "Epilogue: Decolonising Disco – Counterculture, Postindustrial Creativity, the 1970s Dance Floor and Disco", in: *Global Dance Cultures in the 1970s and 1980s*, ed. Pitrolo and Zubak, pp. 303–338.

modified (as is the case for the most examples of subversive cultural phenomena!)<sup>8</sup>. Yugoslavia's disco is clearly influenced by the commercialised, mainstream side of the genre, but we will demonstrate in one of the articles of this TheMA that several transformations of the models taking place in the transfer process show plenty of innovative and subversive potential. As Zubak notes, when "this form of mainstream disco emerged in Yugoslavia in the late 1970s, it mesmerized audiences. Unaware of disco's queer origins, they readily accepted its aura of escapism, apparently at odds with egalitarian and grassroots socialist values."<sup>9</sup> As a consequence,

the emergence and subsequent popularity of disco in Yugoslavia should have been ideologically problematic: unlike rock 'n' roll or punk, disco lacked any sort of progressive social agenda that could justify its acceptance. The hedonistic and consumerist aspects of disco negated the egalitarian socialist ethos, yet disco was swiftly embraced and domesticated in Yugoslavia. This speaks of the country's developed entertainment and media infrastructure, which provided the necessary conditions for disco's rise as a commercially viable style. In other words, disco was both a reflection and a product of the continued Westernization, ideological transformation, and major economic, social, and political reforms that shaped socialist Yugoslavia.<sup>10</sup>

A decadent infrastructure for wealthy, well-off, privileged people or wannabe VIPs may emerge as a framework for the disco culture, but similar to *Saturday Night Fever's* plot, this culture offers spaces of emancipation and affirmation to marginalized social groups, because on the dance floor everyone is equal. Quoting Boban Petrović, one of the most important representatives of the Yugoslav disco funk scene from the late 1970s and operator of one of the first discotheques in Belgrade, „Disco club is the party everyone can attend“<sup>11</sup>.

8 See for example M. Elizabeth Blair: "Commercialization of the Rap Music Youth Subculture", in: *The Journal of Popular Culture* 27/3 (1993), pp. 21–33; Sarah Thornton: *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995; Sarah Hanks: "Selling Subculture: An Examination of Hot Topic", in: *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood*, ed. Shirley R. Steinberg and Joe L. Kincheloe. Boulder: Westview Press, 1997, pp. 155–190; Katina R. Stapleton: "From the margins to mainstream: the political power of hip-hop", in: *Media, Culture & Society* 20/2 (1998), pp. 219–234; Dylan Clark: "The Death and Life of Punk, The Last Subculture", in: *The Post-Subcultures Reader*, ed. David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl. Oxford: Berg, 2003, pp. 223–236; Lauren M. Alfrey: *The search for authenticity: How Hipsters transformed from a local subculture to a global consumption collective*. Master thesis, Georgetown University, 2010.

9 Zubak: "“Absolutely Yours”", p. 90.

10 Ibidem.

11 Bege Fank [Predrag Vukčević]: "Cosmopolitan Smile of the Last Belgrade Player", interview with Boban Petrović printed in the booklet of a reissue of his two albums *Žur* and *Zora* made by the label Everland (<https://www.discogs.com/release/31035301-Boban-Petrovi%C4%87-%C5%BDur-Zora>,

Symbolising an idea of community too, and not only an elitist one, disco culture developed to an important field of action for the young urban working-class and for the Roma minorities. One of them, the 18 years old Hamed Đogani represented Yugoslavia at the 1980 World Disco Championship in London after winning the national selections in Zagreb.<sup>12</sup> Đogani became part of Yugoslav cultural memory, being also celebrated by an entry in the *Lexicon of YU Mythology*.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, as a cause of the exclusion, it must also be considered that musically Yugoslav disco is a curious amalgam merging different apparently incompatible stylistic levels and musical sources: funk and big band jazz meet the tradition of estrada<sup>14</sup>; local folk influences and pop enter the glittering world of the dance hall. Zubak interprets this stylistic ambiguity as one of the further explanations of the “poor coverage in Yugoslav pop historiography”<sup>15</sup>:

Besides only a few true disco albums, there are a number of crossover tunes and individual disco tracks scattered on non-disco albums or B-sides of singles. Yugoslav disco united various and often unrelated musical streams and artists from diverse backgrounds. As such, it cut across established musical categories (*zabavna*-pop, rock, folk, even jazz), evading stylistic definition.<sup>16</sup>

In their role as gatekeeper, local music critics showed themselves sceptical and suspicious toward this chameleonic local variant of disco sound, and advocated other styles, namely the afore-mentioned rock, punk, and new wave. We could thus close the circle by returning to the beginning of this editorial, mentioning the surprise of an actual Belgrade journalist, when confronted with the issue of Yugoslav disco, she couldn't do anything with it at all.

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accessed on July 17, 2024). The interview is accessible online here: <https://www.psychedellicbaby-mag.com/2024/03/boban-petrovic-interview-zur.html> (accessed on August 22, 2024).

12 Footage of the London competition can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnItx-0mlgdA> (accessed on July 7, 2024). Đogani performs at approx. minute 12:37.

13 Đorđe Matić: “Đogani, Hamed”, in: *Leksikon YU mitologije*, <http://www.leksikon-yu-mitologije.net/dogani-hamed/> (accessed on July 7, 2024).

14 The term “Estrada” (Russian [Эстрада] for ‘stage’, adopting the French word *estrade* [‘stage for performing’]) is a crucial one in the history of popular music of the former European socialist countries. It is an umbrella term designating small forms of entertaining variety arts like singing, dancing, circus, clownery, magic arts, etc. At the same time, it is used tout court to label the entire show business of pop entertainment music (music industry). Musically speaking, estrada cannot be clearly defined, as it encompasses different genres, styles, and fashions chronologically changing and evolving. For Yugoslav estrada see Jelena Arnautović: “Networking *Zabavna Muzika*: Singers, Festivals, and *Estrada*”, in: *Made in Yugoslavia*, ed. Beard and Rasmussen, pp. 15–24.

15 Zubak: “‘Absolutely Yours’”, p. 91.

16 Ibidem.

This state of exclusion has slowly been changing in recent years, thanks to the academic debate, which integrates disco music studies in its discourses,<sup>17</sup> and the increasing importance of ‘crate digging’ as a cultural practice, scholarly methodology, and epistemic tool potentially generating knowledge.<sup>18</sup> While academic research is increasingly recognising the complexity and diversity of disco cultures, many collectors, DJs, producers, and music addicts search in flea-markets, record stores, antiquarian bookshops, basements, and archives for forgotten tunes of the past, acting like de facto archaeologists, “preserving and revitalising forgotten music scenes in the digital age.”<sup>19</sup> These ‘archaeological discoveries’ are often brought to the market by music producers and music labels in the form of samplers or reissues: In the case of Yugoslav music, it is worth mentioning the catalogues of the Dutch-Austrian label Everland and the Croatian label Fox & His Friends Records.<sup>20</sup>

The relevance of ‘digging’ explains the second part of the title of this issue of *TheMa*: Digging into an “excluded” musical culture of late socialism. As a matter of fact, the immersion into this unexplored and fascinating topic offered a lot of discoveries and surprises: Yugoslav disco culture in all its facets embodies the contradictions and ambivalences of the late socialism, whose complexity cannot be captured by Cold War dualistic interpretative patterns (oppression vs. dissent, mainstream vs. subcultural, etc.). It opens up horizons for reflection on many topics – the articles in this issue of *TheMA* deal with some of these: gender and diversity; the star system and associated phenomena like machismo, femininities, sexualisation, and transgression; questions of musical style; collective memory and nostalgia and its connections to commodification. However, a few aspects were not treated, or only treated peripherally and are desiderata for further research: With popular music

17 See the bibliography quoted in footnote 7, further: Flora Pitrolo and Marko Zubak (eds.): *Global Dance Cultures in the 1970s and 1980s: Disco Heterotopias*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022; Tim Lawrence: “‘Work that Body’: Disco, Counterculture and the Promise of the Transformation of Work”, in: *Music as Labour: Inequalities and Activism in the Past and Present*, ed. Dagmar Abfalter and Rosa Reitsamer. New York and London: Routledge, 2022, pp. 66–80.

18 See particularly Flora Pitrolo and Marko Zubak: “Introduction: Disco Heterotopias – Other Places, Other Spaces, Other Lives”, in: *Global Dance Cultures in the 1970s and 1980s*, ed. Pitrolo and Zubak, pp. 12–18.

19 Anton Spice: “Watch the World’s First TED Talk on the Culture of Record Digging”, <https://thevinylfactory.com/news/watch-ted-talk-record-digging/> (accessed on July 17, 2024). On the cultural practice of digging see also <https://thevinylfactory.com/features/crate-digging-dont-do-it-stefan-glerum-comic/> (accessed on July 17, 2024); Gábor Vályi: *Digging in the Crates: Practices of Identity and Belonging in a Translocal Record Collecting Scene*. PhD diss., Goldsmiths, University of London, 2010, online under: <https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/3421/> (accessed on November 23, 2023).

20 <https://everland-music.com/produkt-schlagwort/yugoslavia/>; <https://foxandhisfriends.org/> (both accessed on July 17, 2024).

being frequently analysed through music genres connected to a specific nationality, defined by specific aesthetics and socio-cultural conventions, being shaped over decades, its historiography seems especially challenging. Based on a national focus connected with social memory and mass culture, the history of a music genre connected to a nation accompanies the process of modernization and cultural massification of the countries in which they originated. Regarding the economical dynamics of disco culture, as part of market socialism, investigating Yugoslav disco sheds light on a commercialised and ‘decadent’ era of late Yugoslav socialism.

It would be for instance interesting in this regard to map and contextualise the physical and non-physical spaces of popular music in late socialist Yugoslavia, like youth clubs, concert venues, and discotheques, just to mention a few physical examples of them.<sup>21</sup> Public and private spaces had an important role in shaping lifestyles and the examination of their functions naturally help in understanding and deciphering the dialectic between the capitalist entertainment business and the socialist framework, between escapism and politics. Related to spaces, it is also fruitful to investigate the overlap of public and private spheres in defining the essence of the ‘underground’ lifestyle in the late 1970s. A great example in this regard is the video material shot to accompany Boban Petrović’s 1981 disco-funk LP *Žur* (‘The Party’).<sup>22</sup> Directed by Mihajlo Vukobratović for RTV Beograd in 1982, *Ružičasti žur Bobana Petrovića* (‘Boban Petrović’s Pink Party’) was broadcast only once in Yugoslavia in the early hours of New Year’s Day 1983 before the original tapes were lost by the archives of Belgrade’s Radio and Television.<sup>23</sup> Thanks to Swedish television, who bought this film and broadcast it as part of the programme *Fönster mot TV-världen* (‘Window on the world of television’), this valuable document has been preserved.<sup>24</sup> The images portray a huge real disco party in a private space, emphasising the quest for hedonistic and lascivious pleasure and placing in the foreground the bodies, the outfits, the dancing moves, the sexual approaches, and the eccentricity of the party’s participants. As Zubak notes, “[s]uch images of decadence and affluence were often used against disco by its new wave and punk detractors.”<sup>25</sup>

21 For a general introduction see Sara Cohen, Robert Knifton, Marion Leonard, and Les Roberts (eds.): *Sites of Popular Music Heritage. Memories, Histories, Places*. New York: Routledge, 2015 (= Routledge Studies in Popular Music 4).

22 See Zubak: “Socialist Night Fever”, pp. 149–151. For information about the LP and a listening link see: <https://www.discogs.com/master/607204-Boban-Petrovi%C4%87-%C5%BDur> (accessed on July 22, 2024).

23 Zubak: “Socialist Night Fever”, pp. 151.

24 The complete video material is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLA3F37B470D9F65D0>; [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLji0q-a4Sd3faPOGK\\_eYP5I\\_qtcQlGw4j](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLji0q-a4Sd3faPOGK_eYP5I_qtcQlGw4j) (both accessed on July 22, 2024).

25 Zubak: “Yugoslav Disco”, p. 212.

Another interesting topic in relation to disco culture is the investigation of transatlantic and intercontinental transfer processes, thus challenging ideas of Yugoslavia as a diverse miniature universe bound together by a collective fate. In fact, cosmopolitanism and the acceptance of imported popular culture was part of the everyday Yugoslav life after WWII. Due to Radio Luxemburg<sup>26</sup> as well as many local rock radio shows, music magazines such as *Džuboks* ('Jukebox')<sup>27</sup>, and tv-shows such as *Koncert za ludi, mladi svet* ('A concert for a crazy, young world')<sup>28</sup>, the Yugoslav youth was familiar with US popular music. Transatlantic transfer concerns musicians who emigrated to the US to build a career or – at least – to record albums. In the case of Yugoslav disco, *Arian* (PGP RTB – 2120453), one of the most famous disco productions,<sup>29</sup> as well as Boban Petrović's *Žur* (ZKP RTVL – LD 0722) were recorded in the United States with local studio musicians. But the agendas of socialist internationalism also led to cultural relationships and exchanges with Africa, South America, and Asia, and it would be equally fascinating – as a counterpart to the examination of transcontinental and Western transfer processes – to trace the role played by black and non-European musicians active in Eastern Europe during the socialist period. Indeed, plenty of (amateur) musicians from Africa, South America, and Asia used to study in the former socialist countries and some of them tried to be in some way musically active.<sup>30</sup> Just to mention one example, the disco funk band Zdravo (led by Boban Petrović) used to perform with the daughters of Zaire's ambassador as backing singers, who were even pictured on the cover of the first single of the band.<sup>31</sup>

26 See for example Kristian Kolar: "An Unlikely Cultural Revolution – The Impact of Radio Luxembourg on Yugoslav Culture", in: *In Memoriam Hugo Keiper: Anglistischer Forscher, Lehrer, Freund: eine Würdigung*, ed. Volker Horn, assisted by Bernadette Keiper-Fimbinger. Graz: Keiper, 2023, pp. 175–185.

27 See for example Radina Vučetić: "Džuboks (Jukebox): The First Rock'n'roll Magazine in Socialist Yugoslavia", in: *Remembering Utopia: The Culture of Everyday Life in Socialist Yugoslavia*, ed. Breda Luthar and Maruša Pušnik. Washington: New Academia Publishing, 2010, pp. 145–164.

28 See for example Marko Perić: *Koncert Za Ludi, Mladi Svet*. Belgrade: RTS, 2017.

29 See also Zubak: "'Absolutely Yours'", p. 91.

30 A DFG-funded project with the title *Schwarze Musik in der Region (ehemaliges) Jugoslawien* ('Black Music in the Region of (Former) Yugoslavia'), led by Linda Cimardi is currently underway at the Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg (see: <https://gepris-extern.dfg.de/gepris/projekt/495453014>; <https://www.musikwiss.uni-halle.de/drittmittelprojekteundforschung/drittmittelprojekte/yugoslavregion/>, both accessed on August 21, 2024). See also Linda Cimardi: "Black Popular Music in Yugoslavia", in: *The Routledge Handbook of Popular Music and Politics of the Balkan*, ed. Catherine Baker. London: Routledge, 2024, pp. 451–461.

31 Cover and listening link here: <https://www.discogs.com/release/1241801-Grupa-Zdravo-Vikend-Fobjia-Roditeljski-Savet/image/SW1hZ2U6MTcyNjU5OQ==> (accessed on August 16, 2024).

The three articles in this Special Issue use an interdisciplinary approach to the phenomenon of Yugoslav disco by combining musicology with cultural studies, gender studies, popular music studies, contemporary history, and social studies.

Juri Giannini's and Magdalena Fürnkranz's article challenges the importance of transfer processes between "East" and "West" by dealing with three case studies from the former Yugoslav disco repertoire: Kim Band's "Jugoslavija" intertextually alludes to the Bee Gees song "Stayin' Alive" and Hair's "Aquarius" by adding a certain national twist in its lyrics and therefore characterizing Yugoslavia's individuality in the disco era. "Normalna Stvar" by Sarajevo's vocal trio Mirzino Jato, the most successful disco band in the former Yugoslavia, tried to translate and establish the concept of the German band Boney M. in a new context by adopting a similar habitus to the German model including a raspy lead singer, female background singers, and misogynist album covers. Neda Ukraden's "Ljubav Me Čudno Dira" mashes an estrada-like song with the synth sample from Donna Summer's "I feel love". Furthermore, Ukraden's pose on the cover of the record enters into a dialogue with the Donna Summer "I remember yesterday"-cover. Giannini and Fürnkranz combine theories of intertextuality taken from the field of literary studies by Gérard Genette with its reception in popular music studies by concentrating on the works of Serge Lacasse and Isabelle Marc. Ultimately, the authors show processes of adaptation and transformation of specific models of Western music. Despite the corpus of literature on Eastern European popular music, many of the engaging authors remain stuck in the binary schemata of the Cold War, a schematic thinking has become even stronger after the end of the Cold War. Giannini's and Fürnkranz's article approaches the topic without prejudice via the idea of transfer processes – alluding to Western models is not a matter of dissent, but of something more complex.

Adriana Sabos's article deals with commodification, especially the production of sexy femininities within the Yu-disco culture by examining the band Lokice. The dance troupe was founded in 1977 by the Belgrade dancer and architect Lepasava Stefanović, better known as Lokica, and challenged the status quo with ideas of an open sexuality in an interplay between objectification and empowerment. Celebrity culture offers a fertile ground for the discussion of the construction of femininities and gender relations regarded as part of the broader process of social positioning, expectations, and tensions in late socialism. Perceived as public figures, female stars were obligated to embody, on the one hand, the complex dynamics between consumerism and the entertainment industry and, on the other hand, the values and ideas of socialist morality.

Sabo examines the processes of employing the kindred tropes of sexiness, sexuality and eroticism in the production of femininities as well as their function in investigating the music industry in Yugoslavia, furthermore she takes a look in its relationships with the female body. She argues that Yugoslav popular culture adopted the commodification of a Western form of styling and representations of the female body by referring to American disco. Sabo's article offers a rich analysis of Lokice's television appearances, selected interviews and newspaper articles, and songs from the band's album *Ja sam dinamit* ('I am dynamite'). Lokice's femininities were produced in accordance to specific norms of heterosexiness requiring the disciplining of women's bodies to satisfy the demands of a patriarchal society. Overall, Sabo's article contributes to the understanding of how femininities were produced within the Yugoslav disco culture and the music market in general by concentrating on the female body in accordance to the ideas of sexiness or eroticism deeply connected to the structures of the music market, and the profit-making possibilities.

The nostalgia for Yugoslavia and its cultural utterances emerged immediately after the dissolution of the country. After the fall of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the reception of its popular music was politically charged and understood as a statement against the nationalist and chauvinist tendencies of the successor states. The phenomenon of Yugonostalgia was therefore often used as one of the possible reading grids for discussions and debates about the culture, especially the popular culture of former Yugoslavia.

There are many very productive activities and performance practices related to nostalgia that shape the other side of the coin, namely commodification: Yugo-nostalgia can be used for commercial purposes and be a means for the commodification of feelings and memories through sentimental recollections and kitschy elements. This can lead to capitalistic practices.<sup>32</sup> The practice of digging is also partly associated with nostalgia linked to a search for the unknown, coping with nostalgia, even if it is a (manic) turn to the past as well as a rediscovery of Yugoslav disco music connected with fond memories of the old united country, which lived its motto of peace, unity and brotherhood. Against this backdrop, it was crucial for us to include a current examination of the phenomenon of nostalgia in this Special Issue of *TheMA*. Even though Tanja Petrović's article "A Problem with Yugo-nostalgia. Yugoslav Socialist Experience and Post-Yugoslav Left" barely deals with music or culture, especially disco culture, it represents an interesting framework

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32 See for example Ana Petrov: "Yugonostalgia as a Kind of Love: Politics of Emotional Reconciliations through Yugoslav Popular Music", in: *Humanities* 7/4 (2018), <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0787/7/4/119> (accessed on July 22, 2024).

with which to approach the subject matter. Precisely because of this, the subject of Yugonostalgia is essential in partially understanding why a phenomenon like disco in the former Yugoslavia is now gaining in relevance. Tanja Petrović's article challenges ideas of nostalgia in post socialist debates and discusses the ongoing important and often heated discussion on Yugonostalgia and how it relates to the new left in the post-Yugoslav region and its political efficiency. The term 'nostalgia' emerged in the everyday, journalistic, and academic discourses soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the socialism in Eastern and Southeastern European societies. The term designates a range of diverse practices of reviving aspects of the socialist past as well as encompassing products of the popular culture but also everyday objects, visual symbols or recognisable figures. Nostalgia for socialism in post-Yugoslav societies and its diasporas is still relevant today. Labelled as Yugo-nostalgia, it hasn't lost its importance in social and scholarly debates. Petrović focusses on discourses of the political and intellectual futility and the theoretical incapacity of Yugonostalgia. The author approaches them from a present-day political perspective and within those intellectual genealogies in which Socialism is understood and revisited as a political project and social experience of the twentieth century. She addresses two related sets of issues relevant for understanding "the problem with Yugonostalgia": the epistemic status of the experience of (state) Socialism, and the political potentiality of emotions in the specific post-socialist context that is seen by the post-Yugoslav left as politically unproductive, anti-revolutionary, and damaging for the future-oriented politics of the left.

Lastly, this Special Issue of *TheMA* includes interviews with Mirza Alijagić (Mirzino Jato) and Leposava Lokica Stefanović (Lokice) conducted by Marko Zubak. Both interviewees give insight into their stardom, their role models, their everyday lives as musicians, focusing on their dual roles as disco star and opera singer in the case of Alijagić or disco star and architect (Stefanović), their touring, media appearances, the recording environment, the commodification of disco music as well as female bodies, gender roles, and sexism in the music business. The interviews complement the contributions "'Disco Ladies'. Production of Sexy Femininities Within the Yu-Disco Culture: The Example of Lokice" by Adriana Sabo, and Giannini's and Fürnkranz's "East-West Transfers in Popular Music (Three Case Studies from the Yugoslav Disco Repertoire)" by providing an insight into the working realities of the protagonists covered in the articles.

One of the intentions of this issue of *TheMA* is to open up space to reconsider Yugoslav disco. The included articles both continue and extend a conversation begun by our popular music studies and musicology forebears, drawing attention to progress made, but also inviting us to develop new ways of theorising Yugoslav disco in the contexts of gender studies, cultural transfer, and questioning the role of nostalgia.

Since dealing with an uncanonised repertoire primarily means discovering new music, it seemed to us to be an immense priority to also create playlists where it is possible to listen to the music mentioned in the articles (accessible via the QR Code at the beginning of two of the articles) and discover further examples from the amazing repertoire of Yugoslav disco music (open the QR Code at the end of this editorial's bibliography).

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## PLAYLIST



- Dado Topic: “Floyd”  
Boban Petrovic: “Svetski osmeh”  
Miša Blam: “Dobro Jutro”  
Tamara: “Hajde”  
Igor Savin i Orkestar Stanka Selaka: “Noćni Klub”

Miki Petkovski: "Buđenje"  
Grupa Zdravo: "Vikend Fobija"  
Rok Hotel: "Disko"  
Zdenka Vučković: "Ja ću preživjeti (I Will Survive)"  
Mirzino Jato: "Bez rezultata"  
Arian: "Do posljednjeg daha"  
Lokice: "Disco lady"  
Dubravka Jusić: "Stani, stani"  
Clan: "Motor hocú mama"  
Mirzino Jato: "Normalna stvar"  
Sandra Kulier: "Da Li Biste Bili Ljubazni"  
Krunoslav Slabinac: "Južni vjetar"  
Nenad Vilović & Grupa ST: "To nije tvoj stil"  
Data: "Opsesija"  
Oliver Mandić: "Moja Draga Voli Kurosavu"  
Arian: "Lutaš Velikim Gradom"  
Mirzino Jato: "Apsolutno Tvoj"  
Cod: "Moja Mala Na Popravni Pala"  
Boban Petrović: "Djuskaj"  
Makadam: "Ko Prijatelj Njene Kuće"  
Zdravko Čolić: "Pusti, pusti modu"  
Cice Mace: "Sta se to događa"  
Suzana Mančić: "Mamin sin"  
Pepel in kri: "Disko zvezda"  
Oliver Mandić: "Nije Za Nju, Nije Za Nju"  
September: "Za Tvoj Rođendan"  
Duo Snoli: "Prava prilika"  
Zorica Milosavljević: "Disko Par"  
Zdravko Čolić: "I'm Not a Robot Man"  
Beti Đorđević: "Nasloni Glavu"  
Neda Ukraden: "Ljubav me čudno dira"  
Boomerang: "Na Zapadu Ništa Novo"  
Oto Pestner: "Novi svijet u 2035"  
Boom Selekcija: "Žuljaš Me"  
Ljubomir Sedlar: "New York, New York"  
Kim Band: "Jugoslavija"



# EAST-WEST TRANSFERS IN POPULAR MUSIC (THREE CASE STUDIES FROM THE YUGOSLAV DISCO REPERTOIRE)

MAGDALENA FÜRNKRANZ (VIENNA)/JURI GIANNINI (VIENNA)

**Abstract:** *Mostly interpreted and judged using binary patterns, popular music in the former socialist countries was simplistically labelled either as politically conformist, if aligned to the cultural political doctrines, or received as transgressive, when adopting imported models from the “West”. This interpretation grounds on a basic ideological assumption which considers the “East” as official and regressive and the “West” as unofficial and progressive, and makes it therefore rather difficult to reflect on one of the main issues of popular music history, namely the roles of emulation or imitation and originality. By considering the importance of transfer processes between “East” and “West”, this paper deals with three case studies from the former Yugoslav disco repertoire. By combining theories of intertextuality developed in the field of literary studies by Gérard Genette and its reception in popular music studies through Serge Lacasse with Isabelle Marc’s seminal article on musical transfer in popular music, we show some processes of adaptation and transformation of special models of Western music.*

★ ★ ★



## RETHINKING THE COLD WAR PARADIGM

The interest in and the academic debate around Eastern European popular music has increased in recent decades, particularly after the fall of the iron curtain. This has led, on the one hand, to the production of several thematic scholarly publications,<sup>1</sup>

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1 See for example the volumes of the series *Jazz under State Socialism* (ed. Gertrud Pickhan and Rüdiger Ritter), <https://www.peterlang.com/series/jazz> (accessed on September 14, 2023); the monographs of David Mac Fyden on Soviet and Russian Music, <https://www.davidmacfadyen.com/reviews>

and on the other hand, to the publication of books about musical scenes written in Western languages by local insiders.<sup>2</sup> Mostly interpreted and judged by Western scholars adopting the binary pattern of cold war rhetoric, popular music in the former socialist countries was often simplistically labelled either as politically conformist (if aligned with the cultural political doctrines) or transgressive, respectively dissident (when adopting imported models from the “West”).<sup>3</sup> This interpretation not only fails to illuminate all the possible nuances between black and white in the complexity of musical production, reception, and agency, but in its basic ideological assumption (Eastern popular music as official and regressive with popular culture being managed by state institutions and Western popular music as unofficial and progressive), it makes it even more difficult to reflect on some of the main issues of popular music history and theory, namely the roles of intertextuality, emulation, and originality,<sup>4</sup> the importance of cultural transfer,<sup>5</sup> as well as social, cultural, and

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(accessed on January 16, 2024); further: Ewa Mazierska (ed.): *Popular Music in Eastern Europe: Breaking the Cold War Paradigm*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016; Ewa Mazierska and Zsolt Győri (eds.): *Crossing National Borders in Eastern European Popular Music* (= *Popular Music History* 11/1 [2016]); Ewa Mazierska and Zsolt Győri (eds.): *Eastern European Popular Music in a Transnational Context: Beyond the Borders*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019; Ewa Mazierska and Zsolt Győri (eds.): *Popular Music and the Moving Image in Eastern Europe*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2019; Danijela Š. Beard and Ljerka V. Rasmussen (eds.): *Made in Yugoslavia: Studies in Popular Music*. New York and London: Routledge, 2020; Clemens Günther and Christiane Schäfer (eds.): *Putting the Empire to Music: The Phenomenon of Vocal-Instrumental Ensembles (VIA)* (= *Apparatus*. Film, Media and Digital Cultures and Eastern Europe 13 [2021]), <https://www.apparatusjournal.net/index.php/apparatus/issue/view/23> (accessed on September 14, 2023); Patryk Galuszka (ed.): *Eastern European Music Industries and Policies after the Fall of Communism: From State Control to Free Market*. London: Routledge, 2021.

- 2 The most famous case is represented by the two books by Artemy Troitsky originally published in English and translated in several Western languages. Artemy Troitsky: *Back in the U.S.S.R.: The True Story of Rock in Russia*. London: Omnibus Press, 1987; Artemy Troitsky: *Tusovka: Who's who in the new Soviet rock culture*. London: Omnibus Press, 1990.
- 3 This interpretation was mainly propagated by the influential books of S. Frederick Starr (*Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917–1980*. New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1983), Timothy W. Ryback (*Rock Around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and Soviet Union*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), and Sabrina P. Ramet (ed.: *Rocking the State: Rock Music and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia*. Oxford: Westview Press, 1994). For a basic critical confrontation with dualistic patterns of thinking in ethnomusicology and popular music studies see Jocelyne Guibault: “Globalizzazione e localismo”, in: *Enciclopedia della musica: L'unità della musica*, ed. Jean-Jacques Nattiez, Vol. 5. Torino: Einaudi, 2005, pp. 138–156.
- 4 See for example Ralf von Appen and Steffen Peter: “Musik-Recycling. Formen der Intertextualität in populärer Musik am Beispiel von Irving Berlin und KRS-One”, in: *Zwischen Transfer und Transformation: Horizonte der Rezeption von Musik*, ed. Michele Calella and Benedikt Leßmann. Wien: Hollitzer, 2020 (= *Wiener Veröffentlichungen zur Musikwissenschaft* 51), pp. 193–213.
- 5 See for example Fernand Hörner: “Vom Italowestern zum Hip-Hop: Französisch-italienisch-amerikanischer Musiktransfer und einige grundsätzliche Überlegungen zur Übersetztheit von Kultur”, in: *Lied und populäre Kultur/Song and Popular Culture* 57 (2012), pp. 361–373; Jin-Ah Kim (ed.): *Entgrenzte*

economic negotiations processes.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, in the last few years, numerous researchers have questioned and revised the main historiographic narrative related to the music of those geographic and socio-political contexts: The historian Jonathyne Briggs has convincingly argued how the mechanics of vernacular music and practices of youth cultures in East and West after World War II had a lot of similarities in their methods of functioning, and in attributing signification to the relationships between “high” and “low” culture, even if the political systems held opposing ideologies. In a similar way to the “West”, rock and roll could be imagined in Eastern Europe as part of the society, even as part of the Communist society.<sup>7</sup> Film studies scholar Ewa Mazierska challenged the topoi of cold war interpretation focusing on the important role of transfer culture, of the transnational character and circulation of popular music, and the possibility of non-western influences,<sup>8</sup> showing how “the affective investments into western genres were not exclusively political but involved general aspects of identity formation”<sup>9</sup>, and investigating what was adopted during the transfer and “how it was transformed in the process of cultural translation and reworked at local level”<sup>10</sup>.

Considering the relevance and particularities of transfer processes between East and West, it is appropriate to highlight the independence of Eastern European popular music, as it was a subject for Eastern academic composition<sup>11</sup> and Eastern contemporary jazz,<sup>12</sup> and treat intertextual relationship with music and musical agency from other parts of the world as a matter of academic investigation and not merely as an (imported) ideological and political subtext.<sup>13</sup>

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*Welt? Musik und Kulturtransfer*. Berlin: Ries & Erler, 2014; Isabelle Marc: “Travelling Songs: On Popular Music Transfer and Translation”, in: *IASPM Journal* 5/2 (2015), pp. 3–21.

- 6 See for example Thomas Cushman: *Notes from Underground: Rock Music Counterculture in Russia*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995; Alexei Yurchak: *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006; William Jay Risch (ed.): *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc: Youth Cultures, Music, and the State in Russia and Eastern Europe*. Lexington: Lanham, 2015.
- 7 Jonathyne Briggs: “East of (Teenaged) Eden, or, Is Eastern Youth Culture So Different from the West?”, in: *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc*, pp. 267–284, here p. 281.
- 8 Mazierska and Györi: *Crossing National Borders*, p. 5.
- 9 Ibidem, p. 6.
- 10 Ibidem.
- 11 See for example Michael L. Klein: *Intertextuality in Western Art Music*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.
- 12 See for example Leo Feigin (ed.): *Russian Jazz: New Identity*. London et al.: Quartet Books Limited, 1985; William Minor: *Unzipped souls: A Jazz Journey through the Soviet Union*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995.
- 13 For further challenging and refuting of the Cold War paradigm, see also Cathleen M. Giustino, Catherine J. Plum, and Alexander Vari (eds.): *Socialist Escapes: Breaking Away from Ideology and Everyday Routine in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013.

In the specific case of disco music and disco culture, the frame of interpretation could be slightly different, since disco was misunderstood as a non-political genre, only rooted in commerce and hedonistic entertainment,<sup>14</sup> not taking into account the importance of this culture for ethnic and sexual minorities and for the working class.<sup>15</sup> This was one of the reasons, in contrast with rock, punk, jazz, and new wave (all of them considered in a certain sense to be subversive genres), leading to the exclusion of disco music from the canon of the Yugoslav underground culture.<sup>16</sup> Disco culture, operating within grey areas and transcending the polarizing definitions of conformist or progressive, official or subcultural, repression or dissent, is another paradigmatic example of challenging the above mentioned binary matrix used for the interpretation of popular culture under socialism.

In this article, we tie to the scholars negotiating the Cold War Paradigm approach. In dealing with three songs from the former Yugoslav disco repertoire, we want to show how special models of Western music have been adopted and how they have been transformed. In doing so, we refer to the theories of intertextuality developed in the field of literary studies by Gérard Genette and its reception in popular music studies through Serge Lacasse,<sup>17</sup> and to an Isabelle Marc's seminal article on musical transfer in popular music.<sup>18</sup>

## INTERTEXTUALITY AND POPULAR MUSIC

Dualistic ways of thinking have to be challenged not only when dealing with popular culture in former socialist countries. Ethnomusicologist and popular music scholar Jocelyne Guibault criticises binary oppositions such as global/local or homogeneity/diversity in general as rigid and unusable categories.<sup>19</sup> Instead, she

14 See Sarah Thornton: *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995, p. 210.

15 See Tim Lawrence: "Disco and the Queering of the Dance Floor", in: *Cultural Studies* 25/2 (2011), pp. 230–243.

16 Marko Zubak: "Yugoslav Disco: The Forgotten Sound of Late Socialism", in: *Global Dance Cultures in the 1970s and 1980s: Disco Heterotopias*, ed. Flora Pitrolo and Marko Zubak. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, pp. 195–221, here p. 196.

17 Gérard Genette: *Palimpsestes: La Littérature au second degré*. Paris: Le Seuil, 1982 (the quotes in this article are from the English translation: *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); Serge Lacasse: "Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music", in: *The Musical Work. Reality or Invention?*, ed. Michael Talbot. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000, pp. 35–58; Lori Burns and Serge Lacasse (eds.): *The Pop Palimpsest: Intertextuality in Recorded Popular Music*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018.

18 Marc: "Travelling Songs".

19 In turn, Isabelle Marc quotes Jason Toynbee and Byron Dueck, who highlight in their edited book *Migrating Music* (London: Routledge, 2011, p. 5) the function of "[t]ranscultural flows in the

emphasizes their entanglement. Globalisation is seen as a moment of circulation, characterizing music that has transcended borders, in terms of ethnicity, nation states, socio-economic groups, religious denominations, or language groupings.<sup>20</sup> As already noted in the case of popular music, one should always consider the importance and linking strategies of the musical economy, but nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that intertextuality and cultural transfer are omnipresent factors in the history of Western (art) music. Artefacts referring to earlier ones, be it by means of quotation, allusion, etc. can be regarded as a common cultural practice: The widely used music history textbook *A History of Western Music* by J. Peter Burkholder et al. is even constructed around this basic principle.<sup>21</sup> Using the words of musicologist Ulrich Konrad one could interpret the narration of music history as a history of composing texts after texts,<sup>22</sup> asking to what extent the reception of the old represented something new.<sup>23</sup>

A critical approach to issues of reception in music history using theories of intertextuality has become much more influential in recent years.<sup>24</sup> The motives behind intertextuality are diverse: Borrowing and referencing can be due to homage, persiflage, one's own historical reflections, and plagiarism, or as a dissociation statement, or for didactic reasons in order to learn from role models. In academic composition, intertextuality between 'works' could be motivated by overcoming compositional problems, connecting to a certain style and expression, playing with musical memories, or seeking to participate in the expressive content of historical

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realm of popular music" as "forms of homogenization" that "impos[e] an arguably Western, or Anglo-American, canon on the rest of the world". However, these transcultural flows "can also be interpreted as part of a much more complex, rhizomatic flux, that reaches not only from the centre to the margins of Western culture, but in every direction". (Marc: "Travelling Songs", p. 4).

20 Guibault: "Globalizzazione e localismo", p. 151.

21 See for example J. Peter Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca: *A History of Western Music*, Ninth Edition. New York et al.: Norton, 2014, p. xxxi; Burkholder also deals with this issue as historiographic premise in his review of *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pope, in: *Notes* 63/4 (2007), pp. 844–848; and in his article "Changing the Stories we tell: Repertoires, Narratives, Materials, Goals, and Strategies in Teaching Music History", in: *College Music Symposium* 49/50 (2009/2010), pp. 116–128. Significantly, Burkholder even wrote the foreword for Burns and Lacasse: *The Pop Palimpsest*. Here he traces several parallels between strategies of intertextuality in Western classical tradition and popular music.

22 Ulrich Konrad: "Können Notentexte miteinander in Dialog treten? Überlegungen zu Intertextualität und Musikhistoriographie", in: *Zwischen Transfer und Transformation*, ed. Calella and Lessman, pp. 55–82, here p. 81.

23 See also Appen and Steffen: "Musik-Recycling", p. 194.

24 See for example Michele Calella: "Musikhistorische Rezeptionsforschung jenseits der Rezeptionstheorien", in: *Zwischen Transfer und Transformation*, ed. Calella and Lessman, pp. 11–27; and Konrad: "Können Notentexte miteinander in Dialog treten?".

texts through recourse to them.<sup>25</sup> In the case of popular music, intertextuality is not only linked to problems of an aesthetic nature, but also opens up various questions in terms of copyright, economic impulses, calculation,<sup>26</sup> or even artists' personae as "intertexts" that interact with each other and with individual recordings.<sup>27</sup>

Theories of intertextuality help explore concepts of emulation by creating a framework for examining the relationship between two cultural texts. Genette defines intertextuality as "a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say, eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another"<sup>28</sup>. By relying on Genette's definition, Lacasse discusses a subset of intertextuality that more accurately describes the emulation of a song: "hypertextuality". He defines it as "the production of a new text (hypertext) from a previous one (hypotext)"<sup>29</sup>. Not merely classifying these texts, the concept of hypertextuality also crafts a framework for examining the ways in which they are listened to, interpreted, and interacted with. Intertextual theories contribute to the exploration of how each artist, through drastic recontextualizations, can create new meanings as well as subvert the dominant paradigms of an original song. Lacasse concludes that the main difference between hypertextual transformation and imitation consists of the former dealing with hypertexts that derive from a specifically given – or sometimes many – hypotexts, whereas imitative practices are not concerned with a specific hypotext.<sup>30</sup> In the process of emulating, the artist, who was once the listener of the hypotext, becomes the author of the hypertext. From this perspective, we can consider that a secondary text in relation to the original one establishes a hypertextual relation with the hypotext whenever it functions as its complement or is endowed with a narrative function itself, with its purpose being the deepening of the meaning of the hypotext with new information. This transgressive act challenges the power dynamics among author, text, and reader or in other words, the original musician, the original song, and the listener of that song. John Fiske examines the power relations between these three entities:<sup>31</sup> In his first

25 Konrad: "Können Notentexte miteinander in Dialog treten?", p. 64.

26 Simon Obert: "'Bittersüße' Zuschreibungen: Autorschaft in populärer Musik zwischen Copyright, ökonomischem Kalkül und ästhetischer Tradition", in: *Wessen Klänge? Über Autorschaft in neuer Musik*, ed. Hermann Danuser and Matthias Kassel. Mainz: Schott, 2017 (= Veröffentlichungen der Paul Sacher Stiftung 2), pp. 135–145, here p. 142.

27 Serge Lacasse: "Toward a Model of Transphonography", in: *The Pop Palimpsest*, ed. Burns and Lacasse, pp. 9–60, here p. 19.

28 Genette: *Palimpsests*, p. 1. *Palimpsests*, p. 1.

29 Lacasse: "Intertextuality and Hypertextuality", p. 40.

30 Ibidem, pp. 43–44.

31 John Fiske: "Television: Polysemy and Popularity", in: *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 3/4 (1986), pp. 391–408, here p. 392.

step, he determines two concrete characteristics about the ambiguities of popular cultural texts: such texts usually represent the dominant ideologies and material social position of society; additionally, they contain a level of ambiguity in which beings lying outside of the dominant social position are able to ascribe interpretations that represent their subjectivity. Subsequently, Fiske argues that the struggle between the dominant paradigm of the text and alternative interpretations reflect the power structures of our society: a society's diverse subcultures are defined only by their relations that are possibly oppositional to the centres of domination, subsequently the multiple meanings of a text that is popular in that specific society can be defined only by their relationship that is possibly oppositional to the dominant ideology as it is structured into that text. The text's structure of meanings can be a miniaturization of the structure of subcultures in society: This means that both exist in a network of power relations, wherein the textual struggle for meaning can be described as the precise equivalent of the social struggle for power. Fiske uses the example of the author-reader relationship to illustrate his idea. While the author, in our case the songwriter, works to create clear meanings in their text and impose them upon their reader, the reader, in our case the creator of a hypertext, can overlay its own meanings, and subvert the dominant paradigm of the (song) text or the song's overall structure. Consequently, the power relationship between text and reader equals the relationship between the dominant and subordinate classes in society. In both instances, authority attempts to enforce itself, but is met with a range of diversely fruitful strategies of resistance or modification that change, challenge, subvert, or reject the authoritatively suggested meanings. Although many scholars critique Fiske for overstressing the reader's agency and the potential for resistance in consumer culture,<sup>32</sup> his notions are acutely relevant to the imitation of songs. The act of emulation with distance, unlike mere covers, tributes, or stylistic interpretations, can consequently be viewed as an approach of resistance against the dominant paradigm of the original song as the one-time listener becomes the author who actively projects new meanings.

Meanwhile, Marc develops a special approach in dealing with issues of intertextuality relating to popular music building on the metaphor of travelling,<sup>33</sup> a meta-

32 See for example Nicholas Garnham: "Political Economy and Cultural Studies: Reconciliation or Divorce", in: *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12 (March 1995), pp. 62–71; Marjorie Ferguson and Peter Golding (eds.): *Cultural Studies in Question*. London: Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997.

33 Marc: "Travelling Songs". The metaphor of the travel and of travelling for the understanding and interpretation of reception and transformation processes in popular music is also crucial in Ewa Mazierska (ed.): *Relocating Popular Music*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; and in Jace Clayton: *Uproot: Travels in 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Music and Digital Culture*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2016. For the interpretative metaphor of the travel in ethnomusicology see also Bruno Nettl: *The*

phor which also fits for the interpretation of intertextuality in disco music, since this genre “acquired different forms, meanings and functions as it was adopted and re-imagined outside of its Anglophone manifestations”<sup>34</sup>. Marc identifies four main forms of transcultural flow in the context of popular music that are suitable for the translation of the materiality of one specific song and a change from the song’s original meaning. According to Marc these layers include:

a) the cultural reception of an imported song in its original version; b) a musical reprise with completely new lyrics and which bears almost no cultural traces of the original; c) the translation or adaptation of lyrics that, although currently a limited practice, was very popular a few decades ago, and d) the emulation of imported musical styles or genres to different degrees, according to varying musical and cultural strategies.<sup>35</sup>

Marc notes that travelling songs cannot be described as globally uniform; in contrast, they are modified by different contexts of production and reception. By referring to the construct of the “great Anglo-American model” in the context of popular music, Marc sees potential to not only challenge but replace this concept by “that of a rhizomatic, ever-evolving logic of transfers”<sup>36</sup>. Even though Marc doesn’t mention the term “intertextuality”, the process of shaping a text’s meaning by another text is discussed.

We are especially interested in understanding the ‘ontology’ of these intertextual relationships, the dialectic of one’s own and foreign values, and the dynamics of the transformation processes. In the following section, we ask whether in the case of disco and in the case of Yugoslavia, which actually had a more open or better commercially directed roadmap, considering for example the pluralism of its record industry in comparison to those of the other countries of Eastern Europe, special models of Western music have travelled and have been transformed, adapting to a certain ‘zeitgeist’.

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*Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-one Issues and Concepts*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005, p. 113 and Adela Peeva’s 2003 documentary movie *Whose is this song* (<http://www.adelamedia.net/movies/whose-is-this-song.php>, accessed on January 18, 2024).

34 Flora Pitrolo and Marko Zubak: “Introduction: Disco Heterotopias-Other Places, Other Spaces, Other Lives”, in: *Global Dance Cultures in the 1970s and 1980s*, ed. Pitrolo and Zubak, pp. 1–28, here p. 1.

35 Marc: “Travelling Songs”, p. 8.

36 *Ibidem*, p. 13.

## THREE TRAVELLING SONGS IN YUGOSLAV DISCO CULTURE

Music production (independently from its stylistic fields<sup>37</sup> and geographic and cultural areas) is frequently inspired by or borrows from leading musical phenomena of the so called ‘zeitgeist’: In the three examples we discuss in this chapter, this could be the “disco-ish”, a terminology introduced by Marko Zubak as a common denominator to characterise disco music in former Yugoslavia and meaning “crossover tunes that were obviously influenced by strands of Western disco music but often only half-adopted them, blending the disco sound with the musician’s own stylistic background”<sup>38</sup>.

In a recently published book on disco culture and globalization, Flora Pitrolo and Zubak theorized the relevance of “crate digging” as a possible knowledge instrument, and as a scholarly methodology in dealing with disco culture and other musical phenomena.<sup>39</sup> Crate digging is a complex agency: it is a term used by DJs and music collectors to refer to the act of checking record stores, flea markets, or thrift shops for second hand music on vinyl.<sup>40</sup> As a matter of fact we started listening to a set of records found in flea markets. In narrowing the sample regarding its diversity, we decided in a second step to each choose a song by a male and female star as well as a song interpreted by a band. We deliberately decided to exclude *Arian* (PGP RTB – 2120453), one of the most famous disco productions from the former Yugoslavia,<sup>41</sup> from the selection, because his album, although released in Yugoslavia, was recorded in the United States with local studio musicians.<sup>42</sup> The same reasoning led us to exclude another seminal disco production from former Yugoslavia, Boban Petrović’s *Žur* (ZKP RTVL – LD 0722).<sup>43</sup>

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37 On the stylistic field’s concept see Magdalena Fürnkranz and Harald Huber: *Aufführungsrituale der Musik: Zur Konstituierung kultureller Vielfalt am Beispiel Österreich*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2021, pp. 26–30.

38 Zubak: “Yugoslav Disco”, p. 196.

39 Pitrolo and Zubak: “Introduction”, pp. 12–18.

40 See Gábor Vályi: *Digging in the Crates: Practices of Identity and Belonging in a Translocal Record Collecting Scene*. PhD diss., Goldsmiths, University of London, 2010, online under: <https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/3421/> (accessed on November 23, 2023).

41 See <https://www.discogs.com/master/1195549-Arian-Arian> (accessed on January 12, 2024).

42 See also Marko Zubak: “‘Absolutely Yours’: Yugoslav Disco Under Late Socialism”, in: *Made in Yugoslavia*, ed. Beard and Rasmussen, pp. 89–98, here p. 91.

43 See <https://www.discogs.com/master/607204-Boban-Petrovi%C4%87-%C5%BDur> (accessed on January 12, 2024). See also Marko Zubak: “Socialist Night Fever: Yugoslav Disco on Film and Television”, in: *Popular Music and the Moving Image in Eastern Europe*, ed. Mazierska and Györi, pp. 139–154, here p. 149.

A key point in the narrative of Yugoslav disco is the summer of 1978, when the German group Boney M. toured through the country, and when John Badham's movie *Saturday Night Fever* had its Yugoslav premier.<sup>44</sup> The music scene reacted to these two events with the creation of spaces for this kind of music, namely discotheques, and above all with intertextual musical work, with their music becoming hypotexts.

The first example of intertextual work we present and investigate is the tune "Jugoslavija"<sup>45</sup> by the Belgrade based Kim Band, a song included into the album *Ne, zaista žurim*. The band led by Macedonian trombone player Kire Mitrev<sup>46</sup>, recorded and mixed the LP in the studios of Radio Beograda between autumn 1979 and winter 1980 and published it on the Radio Label in 1981 (PGP RTB – 2320096).<sup>47</sup>

After a short (14") brass intro over a four on the beat rhythmic pattern, the tune opens with a riff similar to the intro of the song "Stayin' Alive" from *Saturday Night Fever's* opening credits.<sup>48</sup> The way the riff is played is much more subtle, complex and developed than in the hypotext, bringing innovative potential into the hypertext, since Kim Band consisted of trained jazz musicians.<sup>49</sup> The loop could be a reference to the prominent ostinato riff in "Stayin' Alive", and possibly also the use of falsetto in singing the repetition of the word "Jugoslavija" (for example at around 0:34) could be seen as an allusion to the typical Bee Gees' singing technique. Even if the riff returns several times in "Jugoslavija" (from about 0:14, 1:20, 1:30, 2:23, 2:50, 3:23, 3:30, 3:55, 4:05), the opening intertextual allusion to "Stayin' Alive" is very short. With the beginning of the lyrics "Jugoslavija" (at around 0:30), the music shifts, both in terms of melody and harmony, to another hypotext, namely to "Aquarius" from the musical and movie *Hair*.<sup>50</sup> Thus, "Jugoslavija" intertextually alludes to two very famous examples of the time.<sup>51</sup> The time between the releases of the three songs supports this hypothesis, since

44 See Zubak: "‘Absolutely Yours’", p. 91 and Zubak: "Yugoslav Disco", p. 204. The Yugoslav Label PGB RTB licensed the soundtrack in 1978, <https://www.discogs.com/release/979328-VariouS-Saturday-Night-Fever-The-Original-Movie-Sound-Track> (accessed on January 18, 2024); see also Zubak: "Socialist Night Fever", p. 141.

45 Kim Band: "Jugoslavija", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfiQ8nH4hJ0> (accessed on October 18, 2023).

46 See Kire Mitrev: Artist Website, <http://kiremitrev.com/curriculum-vitae-english/> (accessed on November 23, 2023).

47 KIM Band: *Ne, zaista žurim* Cover, <https://www.discogs.com/master/1141105-KIM-Band-Ne-Zaista-%C5%BDurim> (accessed on November 23, 2023).

48 Bee Gees: "Stayin' Alive" (Official Music Video), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNFzfwLM72c> (accessed on January 18, 2024).

49 Mitrev for example had a grant for studying at Boston's Berklee School of Music in 1980 and the funky jazzy big band sound is clearly audible in the arrangement of the tune.

50 "Aquarius", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISYwosO04fg> (accessed on January 18, 2024).

51 Remarkably, another tune from the soundtrack of the film *Saturday Night Fever* uses a similar riff. The song in question is Walter Murphy's "A Fifth of Beethoven" from 1976, which nota bene

the two movies had been launched in 1978 and 1979 in Yugoslav cinemas, just two years before the release of the LP. The closeness to the model of *Hair* seems also to have been supported by the paratextual dimension of the LP cover of *Ne, zaista žurim*, where the musicians adopt poses and multicoloured outfits similar to the actors and their clothing in some scenes of the Miloš Forman's movie:



Example 1: KIM Band: *Ne, zaista žurim* Cover<sup>52</sup>

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was released a year before “Stayin’ Alive” (1977). Listen for example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7SzwugqiXc> (accessed on February 16, 2024) at 0:11. This example shows that intertextuality certainly even took place within the same cultural and national context.

52 Source: <https://www.discogs.com/master/1141105-KIM-Band-Ne-Zaista-%C5%BDurim> (accessed on February 16, 2024).

The clothing and hairstyles are multifaceted and point to a certain diversity that prevails in the band. The women wear boots and coats to suit the weather conditions, while the men wear jackets and coats. The women's hairstyles correspond to the classic blow-dry hairstyles of the time, but are not perfectly arranged due to the movement and the outside setting of the photo shoot, rather than in a studio. This may well be intentional and symbolize a form of movement, flow or willingness to change as opposed to the rigid conventions of socialism. Even though the album cover gives the impression that the band is a motley bunch, hierarchical structures are recognisable with the band leader being positioned in the middle, surrounded by his fellow band members. The rather colourful and cheerful arrangement, which can certainly be framed as a Western form of staging, is subverted by the background, which is presumably an open warehouse. The steel of the ceiling and the construction vehicles in the background refer to Yugoslavia as an industrial location, one of the pillars of socialist states. This interplay with Western and socialist values gives the album cover a certain twist that can be interpreted as subversive.



Example 2: Film Still: *Hair* (1979), directed by Miloš Forman (ca. 4:50)<sup>53</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cb8luHdpR84> (accessed on February 16, 2024).



Example 3: Film Still: *Hair* (1979), directed by Miloš Forman (ca. 2:55)<sup>54</sup>

In the two stills from *Hair*, we see a vivid hustle and bustle of different characters who are dressed colourfully and have different hairstyles. Nevertheless, the film displays anger, worry, and rectitude, related to demands for changing gender roles and identities, and class struggles that are tied to battles amongst cultural hegemonies. The lines of difference range significantly from rich and poor, and traditional and modern, as well as social perceptions of gender differences. With these lines of difference noted, issues of ethnicity and race challenge the duality of traditional and modern, that lead to some sort of rural-urban divide. In contrast to late socialism's industry, the movie *Hair* deals with nature and negates productiveness. Set in the spirit of the hippie counterculture of the Vietnam era, the film introduces various race and class issues of the 1960s and therefore avoids any kind of hierarchy, in contrast to Kim Band's album cover.

<sup>54</sup> Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cb8luHdpR84> (accessed on February 16, 2024).

Even the textual dimension of “Jugoslavija”<sup>55</sup>, apart from the same chorus structure in the handling of the repeatedly sung word “Jugoslavija” (the same way the word “Aquarius” is repeated), creates a hypertextual link to *Hair*. Yugoslavia in the late 1970s, the time when the song was produced, was, in the minds of the song’s authors, a land of peace and harmony, a land of openness and collectivity, as stated in the opening of the text (“Jugoslavija/Zemljo moja, zemlja tvoja”). The peculiarities caused by the constellation of “Aquarius”<sup>56</sup> – similar to “Jugoslavija”, the best possible constellation – are parallel, leading to peace, colours, brightness, love, harmony, understanding, etc. By linking the hypotext to the layers of meaning, we can recognise a clear relationship between the utopian dimensions that predominate in both songs.

Turning back to the fundamental issue of transfer between West and East, the travelling of this song is more than representative: Not only was a Czechoslovakian director (Miloš Forman) responsible for the movie in 1979, but a Czechoslovakian band, the Matadors (credited in Germany as “The Broadway Matadors”) were engaged as the backing band for the West German version of the musical in 1968–1969. These recordings were soon thereafter edited and marketed in Yugoslavia in the 1970s.<sup>57</sup>

The second example we discuss, “Normalna Stvar” by Mirzino Jato, is more difficult to read in the frame of negotiating emulation or innovation, since this song seems to be more a kind of translation. The Sarajevo vocal trio Mirzino Jato, the most successful disco band in the former Yugoslavia, tried to translate and set the idea of the German band Boney M. within a new context. Mirza Alijagić, the male frontman of the group, was an opera-trained singer who could vocally emulate the typical bass timbre of the German model. The band adopted a similar habitus to the German model including a male front man and female background singers,<sup>58</sup> a

55 “Jugoslavija/Zemlja moja, zemlja tvoja/Mirno jutro jarkih boja/Jugoslavija/Pesma moja, pesma tvoja/Mora, reka, gora moja!/Moja!/Tvoja!/Moja!” (“Yugoslavia/My country, your country/Peaceful morning of bright colours!/Yugoslavia/My song, your song/The seas, the rivers, the mountains/Mine!/Yours!/Mine!”). Transcription and translation: Olja Janiuš.

56 “When the moon is in the Seventh House/And Jupiter aligns with Mars/Then peace will guide the planets/And love will steer the stars/This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius/Harmony and understanding/Sympathy and trust abounding/No more falsehoods or derisions/Golden living dreams of visions/Mystic crystal revelation/And the mind’s true liberation/Aquarius”.

57 The Broadway Matadors Hair: “Good Morning Starshine”, <https://www.discogs.com/release/2379229-The-Broadway-Matadors-Su-Kramer-Reddy-Hair-Good-Morning-Starshine> (accessed on January 18, 2024); The Broadway Matadors Hair: “Aquarius”, <https://www.discogs.com/release/2377875-The-Broadway-Matadors-Shirley-Thompson-Su-Kramer-Hair-Aquarius> (accessed on January 18, 2024).

58 But differently from Boney M., Mirzino Jato consisted of two singers, namely Zumreta Midžić and Gordana Ivand, instead of three background singers.

raspy lead singer, and misogynist album covers. And most important of all, unlike Boney M., Mirzino Jato sang for real. This desire for translation obviously finds an echo in the musical production. Their most famous song “Absolutno tvoj”, published in 1979 as a 7" vinyl (PGP RTB – S51854) and on the LP *Šećer I Med* (PGB RTB – LP 55-5383),<sup>59</sup> “was the result of a conscious attempt to translate Boney M’s sound”<sup>60</sup>, but at the same time, as in the example already discussed, the attempt to emulate resulted in some sort of individualisation and innovation. The song “Normalna Stvar”<sup>61</sup> is not a cover, but took aspects from the German model to create something new. Mirzino Jato didn’t in fact create “Normalna Stvar” from one single song, but took hypotextual models from Boney M.’s different stylistic features. The drum intro and riff are strongly reminiscent of “Rasputin”, as well as the way the male soloist interacts with the female backing singers. Nevertheless, the concept of travel is not only going in one direction, considering the way the “fictional” group Boney M. dealt in the aforementioned song with stereotypes from Russian music, such as contrapuntal interaction of the voices and exotic instrumental timbres.<sup>62</sup> At the same time different innovations take place: the textual dimension (lyrics) seems more important than in Boney M.’s music, with catchy lyrics written by the prolific Yugoslav pop lyricist Marina Tucakovic.<sup>63</sup>

59 Mirzino Jato: *Normalna Stvar*, <https://www.discogs.com/master/820178-Mirzino-Jato-Normalna-Stvar> (accessed on January 14, 2024); Mirzino Jato: *Šećer I Med* (PGB RTB – LP 55-5383), <https://www.discogs.com/master/706469-Mirzino-Jato-%C5%A0e%C4%87er-I-Med> (accessed on January 22, 2024).

60 Zubak: “Yugoslav Disco”, p. 205.

61 Mirzino Jato: “Normalna Stvar”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8iS3friN4A&t=3s> (accessed on January 22, 2024).

62 See Jeffrey Marsh Wright II: “*Russia’s Greatest Love Machine*”: *Disco, Exoticism, Subversion*. Master thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007, p. 28: “In ‘Rasputin,’ [producer] Farian eschewed his conventional formula of Caribbean reggae, dance, and Afro-diasporic associations, and instead constructed a set of cultural references that, to the Western ear of his current audience, were Russian. Sonic, visual, and textual markers impart the associations and fit into the cultural and political Western landscape of the late 1970s in a powerful way. In particular, the modal inflections, open contrapuntal interaction of the voices, exotic instrumental timbres, and rich visual images come together to create a musical product that is imbued with a sense of distance and ‘otherness’”. Furthermore, “Rasputin” clearly borrows (quotes) from a Turkish song from the 1950s: see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFwCw1mZd1g> (accessed on February 16, 2024).

63 “Kraj rijeke Lim rodio se sin/Osrednje lijep i osrednje fin/Pijani kum, ko to da zna/Dade mu tad ime Čabrija/U školi je on bio loš/U ljubavi i gori još/Čabrija hej, savjet je naš/Ime promijeni, baksuzno je baš/Danas je normalno to/Što na primjer, ne zoveš se Džo/Normalna stvar, normalna stvar/Strana imena moderna su sad/Vrvi od njih i selo i grad/Strana imena moderna su sad/Normalna stvar, normalna stvar/Kad mogu svi, što ne bi i ti/Uspjeh je tvoj garantovan s tim/Kad mogu svi, što ne bi i ti/Riješio sam ja – reče Čabrija/Puk’o mi je film i svega sam sit/Zašto da svijet spopada smijeh/Mjesto kuma ja, ja da plaćam ceh/U školi sam beskrajno loš/U ljubavi i gori sam još/Iskren je, znam, savjet vam vaš/Promijenit’ ću ime, baksuzno je baš/Danas je normalno to/Što

Meanwhile, “Normalna Stvar” results in a kind of satirical folk tale set in the Socialist presence, as a reflection on tradition and modernity. Using idioms of local folk music and playing with folkloristic stereotypes also shimmer ironically through the song. This is audible from the beginning of the song on, employing an intro and further intermezzi with violin and modality. The drum break (at the beginning, but also from 2:23), however, is similar to the intro of “Rasputin”<sup>64</sup>. Besides, the Boney M. song’s intro includes a synthetic violin melodic line (starting from 0:42). Strong intertextual relation can be found in the coordination of solo singing and the background vocals. In the song “Ma Baker”<sup>65</sup> – incidentally, explicitly constructed by using the Tunisian song “Sidi Mansour”<sup>66</sup> as hypotext – we find similar turns regarding phrasing and the interplay of lead and back vocals. It can therefore be said that stylistic levels from Boney M. are used in a targeted manner. Consequently, the translation works by using stylistic elements that are building up a new context.

Also in this second case study, the iconography of the single’s cover refers to the hypotext. The pose and the outfit (white togas) of the three musicians from Sarajevo echo the staging of the Boney M. members on the cover of the 1978 single *Mary’s Boy Child/Oh My Lord/Dancing in The Streets* (Hansa International – 100075):

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se ne bi’ ja prozvao Džo/O, Čabrija” (‘A son was born near the river Lim/Moderately beautiful and moderately nice/Drunk godfather, who would have known/He named him Čabrija/He was bad at school/In love even worse/Čabrija hey, it’s our advice/Change the name, it’s really bad (jinx)/Today this is normal/Why, for example, your name is not Joe?/Normal thing, normal thing/Foreign names are fashionable now/Both the village and the city are teeming with them/Foreign names are fashionable now/Normal thing, normal thing/When everyone can do it, why wouldn’t you?/Success is yours guaranteed with it/When everyone can do it, why wouldn’t you?/I have decided – said Čabrija/I’m furious and fed up with everything/Why should the world burst out laughing/Instead of godfather, I should pay for the guild/I am extremely bad at school/In love even worse/It is honest, I know, your advice/I’m going to change my name, it’s really bad (jinx)/Today this is normal/Why wouldn’t I call myself Joe/O, Čabrija’). Transcription and translation: Olja Janiuš.

64 Boney M.: “Rasputin”, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nl\\_Eo2QzqU4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nl_Eo2QzqU4) (accessed on January 22, 2024).

65 Boney M.: “Ma Baker”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3XcNskAxp0> (accessed on January 22, 2024).

66 “Sidi Mansour”, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ISg\\_Q7Ueg8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ISg_Q7Ueg8) (accessed on February 16, 2024).



Example 4: Mirzino Jato: *Normalna Stvar* Cover<sup>67</sup>

67 Source: <https://www.discogs.com/de/release/6867296-Mirzino-Jato-Normalna-Stvar> (accessed on February 16, 2024).



Example 5: Boney M.: “Mary’s Boy Child/Oh My Lord” Cover<sup>68</sup>

In an angelic setting, Mirzina Jato embodies the classic gender stereotyping in pop music genres. The man, as bandleader, stands in the middle, surrounded by the female backing singers. It may seem like just another 1970s disco cover; one whose blatant sexism is undeniable. The album cover can be described as a political statement about the hedonism of disco culture. The female singers represent slaves to overwhelming lust, passion, women that are objectified in mainstream music.<sup>69</sup> The authors want to add, that on the cover of Mirzino Jato’s LP *Šećer I Med* (1979), the three female singers are blurred and therefore visibly eliminated from the band’s

68 Source: <https://www.discogs.com/master/103266-Boney-M-Marys-Boy-Child-Oh-My-Lord/image/SW1hZ2U6NDY1MjYwNTc=> (accessed on February 16, 2024).

69 See also Adriana Sabo’s article in this volume.

artistic output.<sup>70</sup> Putting the male star in the middle, respectively foreground, of the cover, the image generates a dimension of significance, completely different from the cover of Kim Band, where the idea of collectivity and the utopia of equality and unity in and through socialism stood in the centre. In the second case study, we observe – in analogy with the iconography of Boney M. – a constellation of machoism, with the male star in the middle and the female backing vocalists as decorative elements, with disco’s cultural influence reshaping dominant modes of masculinity and representing an uncertain response to the demands of the second wave feminism movement that challenged masculine ideals. The question if the cover of the second LP by Kim Band *Za Kim Zvona Zvone*<sup>71</sup> intertextually alludes to Mirzina Jato (maybe in spite of the great success of the Sarajevo band) – whereby the colourful and dynamic reference to the disco production is missing – or to Boney M. should remain unanswered, but it could be an interesting hypothesis on which to think further.

As our last case study, we present another intertextual relation, this time identifying the hypotext in the typical Georgio Moroder style which one can hear in Donna Summer’s “I feel love” from 1977.<sup>72</sup> One year after Donna Summer’s huge success, Yugoslav pop singer Neda Ukraden recorded the song “Ljubav Me Čudno Dira” (PGP RTB – ALS 52784, 1978).<sup>73</sup> As in the other example discussed, the song departs from a hypotext, but develops itself into an autonomous (and in a certain sense unexpected) tune, by mashing up an estrada-like song and the “I feel love” synth sample. And even in this case, the artist’s pose on the cover of the record refers, more precisely forms a dialogue, with the cover of the hypotext, showing both stars in more or less the same pose and displaying a similar gaze:

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70 Mirzino Jato: *Šećer I Med* album cover, <https://www.discogs.com/master/706469-Mirzino-Jato-%C5%A0e%C4%87er-I-Med> (accessed on January 22, 2024).

71 Kim Band: *Za Kim Zvona Zvone* cover, <https://www.discogs.com/release/1223902-KIM-Za-Kim-Zvona-Zvone> (accessed on January 22, 2024).

72 Donna Summer: “I Feel Love”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHfrdQ8h2Pw> (accessed on January 24, 2024).

73 Neda Ukraden: “Ljubav Me Čudno Dira”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6SALw0YU5mY> (accessed on January 24, 2024).



Example 6: Neda Ukraden: “Pisma Ljubavi/Ljubav Me Čudno Dira” Cover<sup>74</sup>

74 Source: <https://www.discogs.com/de/release/11922404-Neda-Ukraden-Pisma-Ljubavi-Ljubav-Me-%C4%8Cudno-Dira> (accessed on February 16, 2024).



Example 7: Donna Summer: *I Remember Yesterday* Cover<sup>75</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Source: <https://www.discogs.com/de/master/26565-Donna-Summer-I-Remember-Yesterday> (accessed on February 16, 2024).

While Donna Summer's pose provokes gender stereotypes by wearing colourful make-up and having her hair styled in a certain disco-type look, we can assume that she lies on a bed wearing some sort of negligée, remembering yesterday as reference to the album's title. The back of the album cover<sup>76</sup> depicts Summer wearing a long dress, revealing its bottom part to be the supposed bed linen of the front cover. Her sexualized pose with bare legs spread and red boots corresponds to stereotypes of Black women in pop music. We do not find this interplay with codes and symbols in Neda Ukraden's styling. Although the pose and the gaze on the front cover are similar, Ukraden's make-up looks more like an homage to Marlene Dietrich:



Example 10: Marlene Dietrich in 1933,  
photographed by Paul Cwojdzinski<sup>77</sup>

76 Donna Summer: *I Remember Yesterday*, Cover backside, <https://www.discogs.com/master/26565-Donna-Summer-I-Remember-Yesterday/image/SW1hZ2U6NTU4MTA3Nw==> (accessed on January 24, 2024).

77 Source: Bundesarchiv, Bild 102-14627/CC-BY-SA 3.0, CC BY-SA 3.0 DE>, via *Wikimedia Commons*, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv\\_Bild\\_102-14627,\\_Marlene\\_Dietrich.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_102-14627,_Marlene_Dietrich.jpg) (accessed on October 15, 2024).

It is not the provocative pose, but the mischievous smile that is subverted by the black and red colouring of the cover. The singer represents the female dandy, sporting a tomboy-look, rather than that of the seductive disco diva.

It should further be mentioned – considering the intertextual affinity between the two songs and the ever-present intertextual relationships in popular music – that “I feel love” arises from intertextual work itself.<sup>78</sup> Showing how Giorgio Moroder used an unauthorised rhythmic effect developed by the German composer Eberhard Schoener on the Moog Synthesizer (the so-called Black & Decker effect)<sup>79</sup> as the ground loop of the song, Kiene Brillenburg Wurth introduces the concept of “distributed creativity” as an alternative model to the traditional idea of authorship. In the case of “I feel love”, she highlights the “shift from personal to distributed creativity”<sup>80</sup>, and a paradigmatic shift from invention to transformation (interpreting mutation processes as models of creation).<sup>81</sup> “Ljubav Me Čudno Dira” is part of this network of intertextualities.

In her disco tune, Donna Summer performs the experience of love on a level that transcends the lyrics.<sup>82</sup> She repeats the same few lines (“It’s so good”; “I’m in love”) over and over, singing them with spiritual conviction, while the use of a Moog synthesizer gives the song some sort of futuristic feel. In contrast to Summer’s sensual song, Neda Ukraden narrates a tragic love story in the so-called estrada tradition. The narrator misses her supposed male partner, is searching for him and longs for him even at night, when the city comes alive, a clear reference to disco culture. This mixture of disco sound and the lyrics, which are more reminiscent of a love song, marks the special relationship between the hypo- and the hypertext.<sup>83</sup>

78 Kiene Brillenburg Wurth: “‘I Feel Love’. Music Mutation in the electronic age”, in: *Material Cultures of Music Notation: New Perspectives on Musical Inscription*, ed. Floris Schuiling and Emily Payne. London: Routledge, 2022, pp. 195–207.

79 See <http://www.mig-music.de/releases/schoener-eberhard-5/> (accessed on January 14, 2024).

80 Brillenburg Wurth: “‘I Feel Love’”, p. 195.

81 Ibidem, p. 196.

82 “Ooh, it’s so good, it’s so good/It’s so good, it’s so good, it’s so good, it’s so good/Ooh, heaven knows, heaven knows/Heaven knows, heaven knows, heaven knows/Ooh, I feel love, I feel love/I feel love, I feel love, I feel love/I feel love/I feel love/Ooh, fallin’ free, fallin’ free/Fallin’ free, fallin’ free, fallin’ free/Ooh, you and me, you and me/You and me, you and me, you and me/Ooh, I feel love, I feel love/I feel love, I feel love, I feel love/I feel love/I feel love/I feel love.../You might also like/Ooh, I’ll get you, I’ll get you/I’ll get you, I’ll get you, I’ll get you/Ooh, what you do, what you do, what you do/What you do, what you do, what you do/Ooh, I feel love, I feel love/I feel love, I feel love, I feel love/I feel love.../”

83 “Čim otvorim oči/Prije no što lice umijem ja/I prije no što ustanu svi/Ja pomislim gdje si ti/Dok šetam po gradu/I izloge posmatram ja/Zaželim da ti silno čujem glas/I da ti se javim u isti čas/Nije fer, nije fer, nije fer/Nije fer, nije fer, nije fer/Što me ljubav čudno dira/Što mi ljubav ne da mira/Nije fer/Čim otvorim vrata/I umorna uđem u svoj stan/Ja ti se javim u isti čas/Da budem s tobom i ovaj dan/A noć kad se spusti/I nekuda žurno izlaze svi/I kad oživi cio grad/O tebi sanjam,

## 'FADING OUT'

In the last chapter, we showed through three case studies that intertextual (inter-phonographical) relations take place on several levels. Accordingly, this marks the aspect of innovation, also taking place in the above examples on several levels using different strategies. Referring to Burkholder, it is fascinating “to trace what one song draws from another and how each person – artist or producer, musician or consumer – uses old threads to weave new meanings”<sup>84</sup>. We conclude our chapter with a summary of what kind of takeovers and transformations and what new levels of meaning could be read and interpreted in the case studies presented in the previous section, and put them again in the context of the chosen methodological frameworks.

Turning back to the methodological premises presented in the first and second section, we may now assume that our examples have dealt with issues of reception, but certainly not with plagiarism. At the same time, we could not find any political issues relating to a cold war dynamic. Alluding to Western models is not a matter of dissent, but something more complex. Besides the gender politics, traditional gender stereotypes that were perpetuated but also subverted in the analysed examples, it was Kim Band’s “Jugoslavija” that challenged national politics. The song describes Yugoslavia as a peaceful country for everyone, with metaphors celebrating the country’s rich nature by combining it with disco music. “Jugoslavija” intertextually alludes to “Stayin’ Alive” and “Aquarius” by adding a certain national twist in its lyrics and therefore characterizing Yugoslavia’s individuality in the disco era.

Working with the theoretical suggestions taken from the texts of Lacasse and Marc, we could recognise phonographic and extraphonographic relationships between hypo- and hypertexts: we identified phonographic relations in the sense of relations between recordings (in our cases it concerned mostly hyperphonographical relations, referring to “a phonogram that derives from a previous phonogram (hypophonogram) following a process of formal and/or thematic transformation”<sup>85</sup>);

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čak i tad/Nije fer, nije fer, nije fer” (‘As soon as I open my eyes/Before I wash my face/And before everyone gets up/I think where are you?/While walking around the town/And I look at the shop windows/I really want to hear your voice/And to call you at the same time/It’s not fair, it’s not fair, it’s not fair/It’s not fair, it’s not fair, it’s not fair, it’s not fair/That love touches me strangely/That love does not give me peace/It’s not fair/As soon as I open the door/And tired I enter my apartment/I will call you at the same time/To be with you this day as well/And when the night descends/And everyone is hurrying out somewhere/And when the whole city comes alive/I dream about you, even then/It’s not fair, it’s not fair, it’s not fair’). Transcription and translation: Olja Janiuš.

84 J. Peter Burkholder: “Foreword: The Intertextual Network”, in: *The Pop Palimpsest*, ed. Burns and Lacasse, pp. v–xviii, here p. xviii.

85 Lacasse: “Toward a Model of Transphonography”, p. 18.

but we could also recognise extraphonographic relations between “phonograms and their surrounding material”<sup>86</sup>. It is necessary to distinguish between quotations and allusions, the first being a “piece of a source text that has been pasted into a host text”; the second “an excerpt of a text that refers to a source text more or less explicitly”<sup>87</sup>.

In the three analysed examples, quoting is taking place at an indirect level: the “Saturday Night Fever”-riff, the “I Feel Love”-synthetic groove and different quotes from Boney M.’s repertoire are recognisable, but not declared in the hyper-texts in any way as quotes. They seem to be more part of a common vocabulary, which has been – by using Marc’s terminology – “cannibalized”<sup>88</sup> and used as pre-text for transformation and innovative expression.

These strategies could also be interpreted as what Lacasse identifies as “archiphonography”, namely “the most abstract and implicit of the transcendent categories, the relationship of inclusion linking each text to the various kinds of discourse of which it is a representative”<sup>89</sup>. As a musical discourse, archiphonography could be seen as a stylistic umbrella term, namely as different manifestations of the previously mentioned idea of “disco-ish”.<sup>90</sup> In the case studies, intertextuality in this sense would be generally manifested in the manipulation of conventions and codes of the genre. Their breaking as well as the introduction of new elements (the estrada, the ethnographic, the big band jazz sound) are on the one hand specific innovative moments in the songs, but are on the other hand also targeted and intentional strategies for playing with the conventions of the genre to create new nuances of meanings. In this context, it is also fruitful to challenge the concept of fidelity. Marc observes how “music transfers imply a devouring of the other, the original, that is both violating, even destroying, it and honouring it”<sup>91</sup>. Using the metaphor of cannibalism for musical appropriation and calling this a “cannibalistic approach”, an active act for both respecting and transgressing the models, Marc explains,

why it seems so difficult to perceive isomorphism in global popular music as something more than just a limited, superficial resemblance. Isomorphism means sameness. However, as we have seen, in musical transfers, sameness is just apparent, even in direct imports where the materiality of the song, especially its lyrics and its instrumentation, stays unaltered. At stake here is the concept of fidelity,

86 Ibidem, p. 43.

87 Ibidem, p. 26. See also ibidem, p. 10 and David Metzger: *Quotation and Cultural Meaning in Twentieth-Century Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 6.

88 Marc: “Travelling Songs”, p. 13.

89 Lacasse: “Toward a Model of Transphonography”, p. 11.

90 See ibidem, pp. 16–17.

91 Marc: “Travelling Songs”, p. 13.

central and much discussed in translation studies, yet questionable and indeed questioned and [...] inadequate in the case of musical transfer.<sup>92</sup>

Marc further points out that

music changes, often dramatically, when transferred from one culture to another, generating specific soundscapes in each culture. Its significance changes because the heteroglot social, historical and aesthetic conditions to which it was originally linked would have changed too.<sup>93</sup>

In the case of emulation, intertextual references can be regarded as an intended focus on reception and follow a certain motivation. They are an offer for decryption that the reader can or cannot utilize depending on their level of knowledge. As part of reception and interpretation, hypotexts are both transformed and alienated. We can assume that most of the disco dancers were familiar with the hypotexts and were therefore able to make certain associations with elements of Western pop culture. But it is precisely this interplay with lyrics that have a completely different meaning, that are embedded in other linguistic contexts, but are accompanied by melodies that are familiar from Western contexts, to perhaps produce a feeling of national unity (while still generating nostalgia in post-socialist contexts),<sup>94</sup> and contribute to the analysed songs' success.

One finds related strategies in addressing other kinds of genres and repertoires. Sabrina Ramet comes to similar conclusions in dealing with Yugoslav rock music, stating that emulation of models is newly contextualized emphasising elements of "yugoslavness". These can vary, being references to folk music, as can the importance of the lyrics and the insertion of unexpected blends.<sup>95</sup>

Accordingly, we demonstrated that the importance of paratextual (paraphonographical) relationships<sup>96</sup> between hypo- and hypertexts deals with the images on the covers and the way the artists are presented on them. As Lacasse notices, "[p]aratextual elements [...] play a crucial role in the mediation of the work to the public"<sup>97</sup>. In our case, paratextual dimensions are visible on the LP cover of Kim Band's *Ne, zaista žurim*, where the musicians adopt poses and outfits similar

92 Ibidem.

93 Ibidem, p. 15.

94 See also Tanja Petrović's article in this volume.

95 Sabrina P. Ramet: "Shake, Rattle, and Self-Management: Rock Music and Politics in Socialist Yugoslavia, and After", in: *Kazaaam! Splat! Ploof! The American Impact on European Popular Culture since 1945*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet and Gordana P. Crnković. Lanham et al.: Rowmann & Littlefield, 2003, pp. 173–197, here pp. 174–175.

96 See Lacasse: "Toward a Model of Transphonography", p. 10–11, here p. 31.

97 Ibidem, p. 32.

to Miloš Forman's *Hair*, in Mirzino Jato's staging of the band using elements of the (misogynist) album covers of Boney M., such as similar outfits, namely white togas or poses, that objectify female singers or the pose of Neda Ukraden on the "Pisma Ljubavi/Ljubav Me Čudno Dira" cover that resembles Donna Summer's pose on the *I Remember Yesterday* cover.

Translation, adaption, importation, fake, reformulation, absorption, imitation, inflection, inspiration, aspiration, assimilation, globalization; all these terms are used by Marc arguing that the idea of the "great Anglo-American model" in the realm of popular music must be challenged and replaced by that of a rhizomatic, ever-evolving logic of transfers.<sup>98</sup> Why should it work differently when considering dialogue between East and West? Only because of the different political contexts? Maybe the emphasis on the ideological perspective (even in the sense of ideological conflict) has always diverted the gaze, because it has seemed the simplest explanation. The fact that the East-West dialog in particular would prove to be a fertile ground for emulation processes has generally been ignored by researchers. Western hypotexts formed a basis, or at least part of a basis, for Eastern hypertexts that were in turn emulated at various levels. Similarly, in the case of disco music, intertextuality is something omnipresent, not only affecting "musicking" processes in former socialist countries. In a recently published anthology dedicated to worldwide disco cultures in the 1970s and 1980s, the authors

shed light on disco's global journey between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, investigating the whys and hows of its evolution across ideological, social, political, economical and linguistic contexts other to the one in which it originated [..., exploring] how disco acquired different forms, meanings and functions as it was adopted and re-imagined outside of its Anglophone manifestations<sup>99</sup>.

In describing these mutations, the authors use terms like "translations, adaptations, importations, fakes, reformulations, absorptions, imitations, inflections, inspirations, aspirations, assimilations, globalisations"<sup>100</sup> – all concepts which can be subsumed in the theoretical and methodological frames of "Intertextuality and Hypertextuality" and "Travelling Songs" we have adopted and developed as tools for analysing processes of transfer in the presented case studies.

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98 Marc: "Travelling Songs", p. 13.

99 Pitrolo and Zubak: "Introduction", p. 1.

100 Ibidem, p. 9.

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# “DISCO LADIES” – PRODUCTION OF SEXY FEMININITIES WITHIN THE YU-DISCO CULTURE: THE EXAMPLE OF LOKICE

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**Abstract:** *This paper deals with the popular Yugoslav dance and singing group Lokice, which was active towards the end of seventies – right at the time when the local music business was adopting elements of disco. My goal is to understand how the kindred tropes of sexiness, sexuality and eroticism were employed in the production of femininities, and what these processes can tell us about the music industry in Yugoslavia, as well as its relationships with the female body. I thus wish to shed light on a specific case in which female sexuality was produced and offered for consumption, bearing in mind the specificities of Yugoslav market socialism. As a dance group, Lokice were, from the very beginning of their activities, associated with corporeality and sexiness, and their popularity grew in parallel with the expanding sexualization of Yugoslav culture. Therefore, I argue that, along with the adaptation of a commodified version of the American disco, Yugoslav popular culture also adopted the commodification of a specific form of styling and representation of female sexuality. The article offers an analysis of various television appearances, a few of the available interviews and newspaper articles, as well as songs from their album Ja sam dinamit (‘I am dynamite’).*

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My goal in this paper will be to understand how femininities were produced within the Yugoslav disco culture and the music market, mainly through the styling of women's bodies in accordance with ideas of sexiness or eroticism. I want to show how those ideas are tightly bound to the inner workings of the music market, and the profit-making possibilities. I will focus my attention on the popular dance group

Lokice (named after their founder, Leposava Lokica Stefanović<sup>1</sup>), active in Yugoslavia from 1977 up to the early eighties, a group that, as one contemporary internet portal has noted, “had Yugoslavia at their feet”<sup>2</sup>. In my analysis, a few converging ideas will be of importance: Disco was imported into Yugoslavia through the media and entertainment industry, that is, as a commercial product largely void of its original subversive aspects,<sup>3</sup> disco’s flamboyant, colourful visual features were readily adopted by the Yugoslav music and show business (known as estrada), and especially by the so called šou program (‘show programs’) aired on television; with that in mind, I will examine many aspects of Lokice’s (sexy) femininities taking into account that they were offered for consumption via the market and the entertainment industry; the emphasis on the visual within the disco culture converged with the same kind of emphasis that shapes the production of femininities within the media spaces; in such a context, representation and production of female sexuality flourished, contributing to the ever-increasing sexualization of (Yugoslav) culture. I thus argue that understanding how sexy femininities were produced in the case of Lokice – through their various public appearances as well as songs – can contribute to shedding light upon the local disco culture and the complexities and contradictions of the late socialist Yugoslav society, as well as help map one step in the history of representations and branding of femininities within the musical market and the entertainment industry.

As Marko Zubak noted, “Yugoslav disco can be seen as a reflection of major late socialist transformations: a ‘musical box’ of sorts, which conveyed the era’s aspirations and neuroses, decadence and contradictions”<sup>4</sup>, and to this I would add that it can tell us much about femininities and sexualities, as represented and ultimately lived in Yugoslavia. I will analyse selected appearances of Lokice in TV shows, as well as with Zdravko Čolić, a few available newspaper articles and album reviews, together with some songs and lyrics from their 1980 album titled *Ja sam dinamit* (‘I am dynamite’) (PGP RTB – 2320061).<sup>5</sup> Before doing so, however, it would be constructive to outline my position, as well as my relationship towards the writings

1 See also the interview with her in this volume.

2 Jelena Manojlović: “Igrale su sa Čolom, Tito ih je obožavao, a Jugoslaviju su bacile pod noge: Čuvene Lokice život je ipak kaznio”, <https://nova.rs/zabava/showbiz/igradle-su-sa-colom-tito-ih-je-obožavao-a-jugoslaviju-su-bacile-pod-noge-cuvene-lokice-zivot-je-ipak-kaznio/> (accessed on February 12, 2024). Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the author of the article.

3 Marko Zubak: “‘Absolutely Yours’: Yugoslav Disco Under Late Socialism”, in: *Made in Yugoslavia. Studies in Popular Music*, ed. Danijela Š. Beard and Ljerka V. Rasmussen. New York and London: Routledge, 2020, pp. 89–98, here p. 90.

4 Marko Zubak: “Yugoslav Disco: The Forgotten Sound of Late Socialism”, in: *Global Dance Cultures in the 1970s and 1980s: Disco Heterotopias*, ed. Flora Pitrolo and Marko Zubak. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, pp. 195–221, here p. 197.

5 <https://www.discogs.com/master/1274132-Lokica-Lokice-Ja-Sam-Dinamit> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

that typically deal with issues of female gender and sexuality within popular music and ultimately, their relationship with feminism.

Namely, my thinking on the topic at hand is clearly and deeply shaped by the writings about, broadly speaking, gender and popular music that originate from the Anglo-American context. Not wishing to enter the debate regarding its hegemonic status within the academia in general, I do feel it's important to express my awareness of the fact that I am using concepts and ideas closely related to liberal capitalist contexts in order to understand phenomena and artefacts from a socialist country. In other words, my theoretical position is largely influenced by my wish to be mindful of the very complex and multi-layered relationship between the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav space and the so-called West, considering the undeniable influences and permeations, without oversimplifying my analysis and focusing 'simply' on transpositions of tokens of Western cultures into the local one. Although I will have to make comparisons between popular music and certain ideologies in the United States and Yugoslavia – given disco's rather straightforward introduction into the country's culture – I nonetheless wish to avoid seeing the first as a kind of 'original' and the latter as a 'copy'.<sup>6</sup> My research is also driven by the fact that the Yugoslav music industry is an especially provocative field for understanding the place capitalist and consumerist logic had within the very specific context of Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia,<sup>7</sup> as well as by the belief that understanding how various concepts present in the music business of the US or the UK were renegotiated into a different cultural and political context can reveal some of their otherwise potentially hidden aspects. Investigating how Lokice's sexy femininities were produced and offered for consumption to the audiences in former Yugoslavia can tell us a lot about the fact that the apparently liberated expressions of female sexuality within the music industry of the time in fact serve to commodify a *certain* type of that sexuality, and that they are mainly used as tools for turning a profit within the music business.

In that sense, this article will lean on writings about female sexuality and disco, as well as popular music and gender, that, in a way, take for granted their close relationship to the second-wave feminist movement in the US. However, it will deal with a group of women who were active in a context that envisioned the fight for women's rights quite differently than in the United States,<sup>8</sup> through a proclaimed gender equality, official state policies targeted towards women and

6 See also Magdalena Fürnkranz' and Juri Giannini's article in this volume.

7 This topic is addressed in greater detail in: Dijana Jelača, Maša Kolanović, and Danijela Lugarić (eds.): *The Cultural Life of Capitalism in Yugoslavia: (Post)Socialism and Its Other*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

8 See Adriana Zaharijević: "The Strange Case of Yugoslav Feminism: Feminism and Socialism in 'the East'", in: *The Cultural Life of Capitalism in Yugoslavia. (Post)Socialism and its Others*, ed. Dijana Jelača, Maša Kolanović, and Danijela Lugarić. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 263–286.

so on. I will thus avoid labelling my case studies as feminist (or non-feminist), or judging whether their activities were meant to be tokens of liberation of women's sexuality or not. What I would like to focus my attention on is how productions of female sexualities that have undoubtedly been influenced by those of their US disco counterparts were produced within the Yugoslav music market, and were to a large extent void of potential activist connotations. I thus want to offer some concrete examples of how femininities are produced as almost always sexualized (in different ways) within the music market, and offered for consumption to the audiences. Yu-disco has proven to be an excellent case study for this.

### (FEMALE) SEXUALITY, FEMININITIES AND (YUGOSLAV) DISCO

Since its beginnings, disco culture had a “sexy reputation”<sup>9</sup>, being associated with various expressions of sexuality and, in no small part because of its tight bond with the dancing culture, with corporeality. In that sense, it was part of and contributed to the increasing sexualization of cultures that followed the development of the entertainment industry, and furthermore it contributed to the commodification of certain styles of expressing one's sexuality. As I already mentioned, Yugoslav popular culture adopted the commercial, mainstream attributes of disco, which is why I would argue that the analysis of the ways in which female sexuality was produced and represented within it must take into account the forces that shaped the music business of the time. In that sense, for the topic I'm covering in this article, writings that deal with the production of femininities within neoliberalism prove to be of importance, even though they are focusing on different socio-political and cultural contexts. For my thinking on the subject of how femininities are produced within various musical cultures (in this case, disco), their zooming in on the relationship between capitalism (or more precisely, the market) and the ways in which femininities are produced, styled, branded and ultimately offered for consumption, is of great importance. I'm referring here to writings that belong to the field of media and/or popular culture studies that employ the concepts of “postfeminism” or “postfeminist sensibility”<sup>10</sup> as critical tools to understand how tokens of femininities, as well as second-wave feminism, have been utilised by the various industries (advertising, entertainment, music, film, TV...), and how they have been caught in the complex web of meanings and ideas produced and used by the capitalist market to, ultimately,

9 Diana L. Mankowski: *Gendering the Disco Inferno: Sexual Revolution, Liberation, and Popular Culture in 1970s America*. PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2010, p. 294, [https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/77806/dlmankow\\_1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/77806/dlmankow_1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) (accessed on February 12, 2024).

10 Rosalind Gill: “Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility”, in: *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10/2 (2007), pp. 147–166.

boost consumption of various products. Not wishing to make a comparison between ‘then and now’, I do want to point out that sexualization of femininities has played an important role within the capitalist markets – and although a socialist country, the Yugoslav entertainment and music industry were mainly organized around the demands of the market –, and that the market has, for decades, been shaping the favoured and acceptable ways in which female sexuality has been styled and branded. Much of that sexuality has been styled according to the norms of what Amy Shields Dobson has labelled as “heterosexiness”<sup>11</sup>, referring to the fact that it is, to a certain extent, liberated within the media cultures – in the sense that it is being shown openly –, yet that it nevertheless caters to the so-called male gaze.

Writing about female sexuality and sexual liberation within the disco culture of the US, Diana L. Mankowski noted that “disco allowed women to be sexual subjects even if they also remained sexual objects in the eyes of men”<sup>12</sup>, “allowing different women to interpret individually the role of sexual liberation in their lives by being a genre open to a wide variety of sexual expression”<sup>13</sup>. US disco mediated various social changes that were brought about by the so-called sexual revolution and second-wave feminism that came before it, offering women the possibility to express their physicality, simultaneously inserting it into the processes of production and consumption that shaped the music industry of the time. As Zubak has already noted, the commercial version of disco was readily adopted by the Yugoslav entertainment and music industry that was “heavily influenced by market forces and pro-Western tastes”<sup>14</sup>. In that sense, the local culture adopted its sexy reputation as well, and its “transparent sexualization”, offering the consumers a “proposition of uninhibited sex”<sup>15</sup>. Within such a framework, women’s sexuality and sexiness were, foreseeably, caught in the “empowered or objectified dilemma”<sup>16</sup>. This proposed duality is, I would argue, a well-established strategy through which women’s bodies are operationalized by the market. That is not to say that the showing and styling of female sexuality in popular culture can’t be liberating in cases where it’s originally considered ‘immoral’ – on the contrary. What I argue is that the music industry is counting on women’s sexuality and corporeality, and that these dichotomies are in fact part of the processes through which they are being produced within those contexts.

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11 Amy Shields Dobson: “Hetero-sexy Representation by Young Women on MySpace: The Politics of Performing an ‘Objectified’ Self”, in: *Outskirts* 25 (2011), <https://www.outskirts.arts.uwa.edu.au/volumes/volume-25/amy-shields-dobson> (accessed on October 15, 2024).

12 Mankowski: *Gendering the Disco Inferno*, p. 351.

13 *Ibidem*, p. 350.

14 Zubak: “Yugoslav Disco”, p. 199.

15 Zubak: “‘Absolutely Yours’”, p. 94.

16 Kai Arne Hansen: “Empowered or Objectified? Personal Narrative and Audiovisual Aesthetics in Beyoncé’s *Partition*”, in: *Popular Music and Society* 40/2 (2015), pp. 1–17.

With this in mind, the case of Lokice can be illuminating because it reveals how the above-mentioned processes functioned within Yugoslav market socialism, to which they were quite successfully adapted. Additionally, I would argue that the reverse is true as well: the way female sexuality within disco cultures was produced and renegotiated into the Yugoslav context can reveal a lot about the relationship between female sexuality and the market, precisely because of the fact that its expression in Yu-disco was, in a way, stripped of the relationships with second-wave feminism and women's liberation movements that were nurtured in the US.

### LOKICE AND DISCO IN YUGOSLAVIA

Lokice were founded on 24 January 1977<sup>17</sup> by the Belgrade dancer and architect Leposava Stefanović, better known as Lokica, who was the leader of the dance troupe and its most prominent member. Before Lokice, she had led a modern/jazz ballet group called Džez-bal ('Jazz ball'). According to her, film directors Dragoslav Lazić and Maksut Maksa Čatović (who both also produced different magazine shows for television) asked her on a few different occasions to create choreographies and dance acts for their shows, which is why she eventually formed Lokice in 1977. Although active until the mid-eighties, Lokice were at the height of their popularity at the very turn of the decade, roughly around the time when the disco culture in Yugoslavia was at its peak. They were famous for their collaboration with the singer Zdravko Čolić that began during the *Zagreb 77* festival of *zabavna*<sup>18</sup> music and culminated on his national tour *Putujući zemljotres* ('Traveling earthquake') in 1978. Lokice also danced frequently in different TV shows envisioned to be 'light' and 'entertaining', such as *Sedam plus Sedam* ('Seven plus Seven'), hosted by the comedy/singing group *Sedmorica mladih* ('Seven young men'). In 1980, they released an album, preceded by a few singles.<sup>19</sup> Owing much of their popularity to appearances on TV, Lokice

17 RTS Tako stoje stvari – Zvanični kanal: "Tako stoje stvari - Intervju - Lokica Stefanović - 07.02.2017", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Agt7HY-taxc> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

18 The term is used for a specific kind of "light" or "entertainment" music produced in Yugoslavia that "emerged in 1950s [...] designating a homegrown form of Western-style popular music". It was stylistically very diverse and influenced by "genres derived from German, Italian, French, Russian, and American models included šlager (Schlager), kancona (canzone), šansona (chanson), romansa (romance), and evergrin (evergreen)". See Jelena Arnautović: "Networking *Zabavna Muzika*: Singers, Festivals, and *Estrada*", in: *Made in Yugoslavia. Studies in Popular Music*, ed. Danijela Š. Beard and Ljerka V. Rasmussen. New York and London: Routledge, 2020, pp. 15–24, here p. 15.

19 See discography under: <https://www.discogs.com/artist/894766-Lokice> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

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“became a recognizable TV face of the Yugoslav dance craze”<sup>20</sup>, influencing the growing trend of including flamboyant and extravagant dance acts in live TV show programming, festival performances and so on. As one inspired fan commented on a YouTube video of their performance titled “Baletski čas” (‘Ballet lesson’): “These beautiful ladies, especially the legendary Lokica, made our childhood prettier, as well as our socializing in front of the TV, simultaneously bringing the spirit of the wide world and the elegance into that beautiful land of workers and peasants in the hilly Balkans”<sup>21</sup>. Lokica Stefanović also worked as a choreographer, notably creating the choreography for the closing ceremony of the Winter Olympic Games held in Sarajevo in 1984. After Lokice disbanded, Lokica Stefanović gave dance as well as fitness lessons, joining the trend of making fitness tapes with different workouts people could do at home. As she likes to point out, she did it even before Jane Fonda released her famous exercise tapes.<sup>22</sup> Jelena Tinska, another member of Lokice, pursued the similar career path, designing her own dance and fitness protocols.<sup>23</sup>



Example 1: Lokice, promotional picture<sup>24</sup>



Example 2: Lokice, promotional picture<sup>25</sup>

20 Marko Zubak: “Socialist Night Fever: Yugoslav Disco on Film and Television”, in: *Popular Music and the Moving Image in Eastern Europe*, ed. Ewa Mazierska and Zsolt Györi. New York: Bloomsbury, 2019, pp. 139–154, here p. 148.

21 Lokice: “Baletski čas”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zGYvrQSyPM> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

22 The statement was given by Lokica Stefanović in the already-quoted interview from 2017 (RTS: “Tako stoje stvari”). Two videos from her series *Lepo telo za 30 dana* (‘Beautiful body in 30 days’) are available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWx1vwBIAE0>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QuXI0tHl-F8> (both accessed on February 12, 2024).

23 <https://tinska.com/vezbe/> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

24 Source: <https://tinska.com/lokice/> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

25 Source: <https://tinska.com/lokice/> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

## LOKICE AND SEXUALITY/CORPOREALITY

As a dance group, Lokice's role was, of course, to enhance the visual aspects of various televised or live events and musical performances. Especially during the beginning of their career, they were confronted with the judgement that they were nothing more than "moving décor" – which is a label that, according to Lokica Stefanović,<sup>26</sup> mostly came from professional dancers, music experts or (wannabe) intellectuals. In an interview for the magazine *Nada* from 1981, she explained that, at the beginning of their career, Lokice were "indeed 'moving décor.' Today, however, [... they] have solo numbers during concerts. [... They] also recorded an LP because, why should 'Lokice' only scuttle behind a singer, when they can sing well themselves."<sup>27</sup> Further commenting on malicious remarks regarding the perceived simplicity of their choreographies, Lokica Stefanović explained: "I do this for the audience, and, as it was proved many times before, the audience loves it."<sup>28</sup> What seemed to attract the viewers to Lokice's performances was not necessarily the complexity of their choreographies, but their visual presentation, reliant on a kind of elegant eroticism that, from contemporary points of view, seems rather lowkey and discrete.

The signature distinction of the group was uniformity in the way they looked. In fact, Lokica Stefanović explained that she had very strict rules when it came to her dancers. They had to move as one, and follow her choreography to the letter. In addition, no member of the dance group was allowed to be photographed on her own, with the exception of Lokica Stefanović, who was, in her own words, "a 'constant measure' in the group, while the rest of the girls come and go"<sup>29</sup>. All dancers had short hair (most of them blonde), they wore the same outfits during performances, and mostly danced in colourful leotards, hot pants and high heels (often boots), showing off their long and slender legs. In fact, I would argue that the legs were the most prominent body part flaunted by the group – for example, most photographs are taken from a slightly lower angle, elongating their lower extremities, and no matter how complex or simple the upper part of their costumes were, their legs were always showing. This, of course, isn't unusual for women whose movements shouldn't be inhibited by long skirts while dancing, yet the way Lokice

26 RTS: "Tako stoje stvari".

27 Ljiljana Matejić: "Lokica Stefanović '81: Da li je Boba Zović izbačena iz Lokica zbog toga što se slikala za Plejboj?", in: *Nada* (August 1981), <http://www.yugopapir.com/2015/01/lokica-stefanovic-otvara-svoj-baletski.html> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

28 Ibidem.

29 Ibidem.

## “DISCO LADIES”

were visually represented was often reminiscent of cabaret or can-can dancers and so on. However, despite the fact that their dancing revealed their bodies to a great extent, Lokica Stefanović carefully nurtured an image of elegance and sophistication that is associated with classical and even modern ballet. In that sense, the title of their song “Disco Lady” which I will come back to below, describes the public image Lokica Stefanović was constructing in a quite precise way – they were sexy, often flamboyant, yet always remained ladies.

For example, such a strategy is visible in the performance of their song “Duga luda noć” (‘A long crazy night’), whose brief lyrics connect dancing and, I would assume, love making: “Prepusti se sad ti/Ovom ritmu ljubavi. Nek zvuk nosi nas/Sve zaboravi” (‘Allow yourself to give into/This rhythm of love/Let the sound carry us/Forget everything.’) The choreography that was performed with the song in a holiday edition of the *Sedem plus Sedem*<sup>30</sup> show is, I would argue, meant to express a similar sentiment. Lokice begin the song dressed in fur coats that they theatrically remove during the song to reveal glittery red, high-slit dresses that show off the dancers’ legs, especially in situations when the choreography calls for them to lift or spread them. Their movements are carefully planned and timed, giving off a feeling of grace and elegance, as would be expected from ballerinas who were trained in classical or modern/jazz ballet. In that sense, their bodies were styled according to norms of heterosexiness and offered to the audiences who, up until that time, weren’t particularly used to seeing female bodies exposed in such a way on primetime TV. In an interview from 2017 (that marked forty years since the founding of Lokice), Lokica Stefanović remembered an appearance with Čolić on his disco song “I’m Not a Robot Man”<sup>31</sup>, intended for the foreign market. In the video, everyone was dressed in silver costumes, with Lokice wearing short silver shorts and high heeled boots. According to Lokica Stefanović, this appearance was “shocking for that time”<sup>32</sup>, because of how short the pants were, and because such attire was paired with boots.

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30 Lokice: “Duga luda noc”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-ayZS8Iorw> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

31 Zdravko Čolić: “I’m Not a Robot Man”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSptgzZzGhc> (accessed on February 14, 2024).

32 RTS: “Tako stoje stvari”.



Example 3: Film Still: Zdravko Čolić: “I’m Not a Robot Man”<sup>33</sup>



Example 4: Zdravko Čolić and Lokice<sup>34</sup>

33 Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSptgzZzGhc&t=82s> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

34 Source: <https://www.vesti.rs/Zdravko-%C4%8Coli%C4%87/Jugoslovenke-su-fantazirale-o-Coli-a-ove-poznate-dame-uspele-su-da-mu-osvoje-srce.html> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

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Example 5: Film Still: Members of Sedmorica mladih as Lokice in the *Sedem plus Sedem* show<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, the silver boots and leotards/short pants became something they were recognised for, so much so that one satire appearance by Sedmorica mladih in their show *Sedem plus Sedem* featured the men dressed as Lokice, in pink leotards and silver high-heeled boots, dancing with Čolić to his hit song “Glavo luda” (a literal translation to English would be ‘You, crazy head’). Remembering the performance in the interview from 2017, Lokica Stefanović said that it was an excellent example of the discipline she expected from her dancers, which earned her the nickname “Hitler”.<sup>36</sup> She explained that it took her weeks to get the men in line, teach them the choreography and have them do it flawlessly for the performance, and that they whined the entire time, but still did it incredibly well. As a side note, although this

35 Source: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xakvde> (accessed on July 7, 2024).

36 RTS: “Tako stoje stvari”. This is also an information that appears in various online articles on entertainment portals. For example: Jelena Manojlović: “Igrale su sa Čolom: Tito ih je obožavao, a Jugoslaviju su bacile pod noge: Čuvene Lokice život je ipak kaznio”, <https://nova.rs/zabava/showbiz/igrale-su-sa-colom-tito-ih-je-obo-zavao-a-jugoslaviju-su-bacile-pod-noge-cuvene-lokice-zivot-je-ipak-kaznio/> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

act was perhaps meant to be funny – men in drag were quite popular in Yugoslav popular culture at the time, frequenting various comedy films, TV programs and so on –, it also goes to show that disco opened the door to various sexual transgressions. Although I wouldn't go as far as to say this particular performance was subversive, it can be understood as part of a wider cultural climate that was marked by sexual liberation, although that liberation was, as most things are, constrained by various social and gender norms.<sup>37</sup>

### SEXY FEMININITIES AND “MORALS”

Despite the fact that Lokica Stefanović insisted on professionalism and primarily showcasing the dancing capabilities of the group, the public often associated them with erotic imagery, sexuality and so on – which is something that some members of the group welcomed. The article from the aforementioned magazine *Nada* begins with a question for Lokica Stefanović regarding Boba Zović, a (former) member of the group who posed in the nude for *Playboy* and whose pictures were later published in *Start*, apparently without her permission. The leader of the group explained that they had a deal and that Zović would leave the group after the photographs were published in order to pursue a career as a dancer in the US. After the breakup of Lokice, other members of the group also took the opportunity to pose for photographs that would be considered ‘provocative’ or ‘sexy’, for example Jelena Tinska, who was often on covers of magazines during the eighties.

In an already mentioned interview, Lokica Stefanović also revealed that she herself would never expose herself to “millions of strange men” in the nude, and that she simply isn't interested in such things, even though she did get some offers.<sup>38</sup> “Furthermore”, she said,

our mentality still isn't on a level where people could understand that this is part of someone's job, that someone likes to do it. I'm also in charge of the reputation of the entire group, because now that I want to form my own private ballet studio, I can't allow myself to be in a situation where mothers of the girls who would dance with me say ‘Absolutely not, am I to send my child to the woman who takes naked pictures for the newspaper?’<sup>39</sup>

37 One example of such, more serious transgressions is Oliver Mandić's television broadcast *Beograd noću* ('Belgrade at night') from 1981. See Zubak: “‘Absolutely Yours’”, p. 94; Zubak: “Socialist Night Fever”, p. 194.

38 Matejić: “Lokica Stefanović '81”.

39 Ibidem.

## “DISCO LADIES”



Example 6: Jelena Tinska on the covers of various magazines<sup>40</sup>

In other words, the activities of Lokice – as a group, but also as individual dancers – were perpetually balanced between the various social norms related to feminine bodily displays that were inevitably related to sexuality and sex, and a wish to prove that such expressions were something of an industry standard (at least in “the world”, as they liked to say, referring mainly to the countries of North America and Western Europe), and therefore didn’t speak to their individual morals. The fact that they had to tread this very fine line is also visible in a statement Lokica Stefanović gave decades later, in regards to a performance they gave for Tito on New Year’s Eve 1979.<sup>41</sup> As she explained, they danced in longer dresses and to old pop hits (like “Jambolaya”, “Istanbul”, or “16 Tons”) because they needed to be “decent” for the President.<sup>42</sup>

At the height of their career, Lokice released their only LP, containing eight tracks, most of which could be classified as pop music, but with a substantial influence of disco, especially in some numbers, like the already-mentioned “Disco Lady”. Music was composed and produced by Aleksandar Sanja Ilić (Lokica’s personal friend), Đorđe Novković (for “Ja sam dinamit” and “Šta Sam Mogla Drugo” [‘What else could I have done’]), and Dejan Petković (“Zvoni jednom” [‘Ring the doorbell once’] and “Očigledno Nije Mi Svejedno” [‘Obviously, it’s not all the same to me’]), while the lyrics were written mainly by Marina Tucaković, as well as Željko Pavičić (for “Ja sam dinamit”) and Vojkan Milanović (“Dodirni me” [‘Touch me’]). According to Lokica Stefanović, the album was created and released because

40 Source: <https://tinska.com/novine/> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

41 A photo taken on this occasion is featured on the cover of this Special Issue.

42 RTS: “Tako stoje stvari”.

they realized that there is no need for them to dance exclusively to other people's music – they could perform their own songs and use them as a backdrop for the dance numbers they choreographed.<sup>43</sup>

Much like their dancing, the music on the album also provoked criticism from the often elitist and predominantly male rock critics that dismissed it as a frivolous work undeserving of real attention. Indeed, Petar Luković, a famous propagator of new wave music, published a detailed, sarcastic and at times offensive review of the album in the *Džuboks* magazine in January 1981, in which the critic was introduced as the magazine's "virtuous sex-collaborator"<sup>44</sup>. Using pretentious language to ironically describe the album that was, according to him, as historically significant as *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* by the Beatles, the critic didn't fail to take a stab at the fact that Lokice were exposing their bodies for a living. The long quote from the review below nicely illustrates, for one, the well-known double standards that are frequently invoked by the society whenever female sexuality and the exposing of female bodies is in question, but also speaks to the various ideological strands that marked the Yugoslav popular music at the time. Luković wrote:

Conservative musical-social powers may be bothered by the element of eroticism that is only hinted from the uniforms of the artist who are, we should bear this in mind, dressed just like that at their workplace. But the costume and its hiding or revealing of the body is the strongest weapon in the fight against moralizing and outdated tendencies that are overcome by a progressive social flow. The small surface area of these costumes isn't meant to provoke a vulgar erection, nor is that possible based on these pleasant, colourful, lively, natural photos. The exposing of the body is here a primal protest against the enthroned, backward conventions, an authentic monadism (in Latin: mundus) – of a spiritual world. The decaying remnants of a society can only scream in despair, not understanding the ingenious move of the artists who, by revealing themselves, have revealed the rotting attitudes of the darkest reactive powers.<sup>45</sup>

43 Ibidem.

44 Petar Luković: "Prvi album Lokica: Čovečanstvo će ga večno pamtit", in: *Džuboks* 107 (1981), p. 54. It was not uncommon for articles and reviews in *Džuboks* to be prefaced by a few sentences written by the editorial. Luković was called "virtuous sex-collaborator" in such an introduction to the review that follows.

45 Ibidem. The author uses the phrase "Sepedonični ostaci društva" in the last sentence, which I translated as "decaying remnants of a society." He is most likely referring to a kind of fungal potato blight, *Clavibacter sepedonicus*, to further illustrate his point, and embellish his writing. The author wishes to thank Daniela Codarin for her help in translating this passage. The paragraph in its original language is as follows: "Konzervativnim muzičko-društvenim snagama može da zasmeta element erotike koja se tek naslućuje iz uniformi umetnica koje su, treba imati na umu, na svom radnom mestu baš tako odevene. Ali, kostim i njegovo skrivanje ili otkrivanje tela najjače

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Wishing to give a condescending and brutal review of the album, Luković offered a kind of black box that gives insight into the web of various processes that shaped the production, as well as the perception of femininities within the public sphere and popular culture of Yugoslavia. For one, he is obviously trying to criticize the “exposing” of the bodies of Lokice as an empty gesture that was supposed to provoke the base instincts of (base) men who would be drawn to purchase the LP out of a superficial need to look at partial nudity. Simultaneously, he seems to ridicule the very idea that such exposing of the female body could in any way be progressive or liberating, for the women or the society as a whole. Finally, the quoted paragraph, as well as the review in its entirety, speak volumes about the ideological battles that were fought within the domain of popular music, that were situated on the clearly stated attitude of rock critics whose job, on the one hand, is to judge the value of various products of the established music industry, but that, on the other hand, always assign greater value to those artists that employ the ideas of originality, authenticity, and so on, as part of their strategy for positioning themselves on the music market. In other words, it speaks to the fact that rock critics, who had tremendous influence over how discourses regarding popular music were shaped, glorified rock and punk/new wave, with disco being treated, as Zubak noted, “with disdain and portrayed as an exploitative product with no artistic value”<sup>46</sup>. In such a climate, of course, the production of femininities around notions of eroticism and female sexuality was bound to receive a similar devaluating treatment.

Luković’s review offers harsh criticism of the music and lyrics of songs published as part of the album, neither of which were composed or written by the women the criticism is directed towards which is a piece of information that should be important to someone who respects authorship so much. He does, however, see them as “feminine”, and therefore less “serious”. His attitude is, as can be expected, rooted in the age-old notion that the act of creation is more important than the act of performing, as well as the well-established idea that popular music songs that are composed to be ‘light’ or ‘entertaining’ cannot possibly have any ‘true’ artistic value (despite the fact that no one ever says they do). Furthermore, the proof he offers for such a determination comes primarily from the visual aspect of the album

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je oružje u borbi protiv moralisanja i zastarelih tendencija koje su prevaziđene progresivnim socijalnim tokovima. Mala kvadratna površina pomenutih kostima ovde nema za cilj da izazove vulgarnu erekciju, niti je to moguće na osnovu ovih prijatnih, koloričnih, životnih, prirodnih fotosa. Otkrivanje tela ovde je iskonski Protest protiv ustoličenih, zaostalih konvencija, autentični mundanizam (latinski: mundus) – duhovog sveta. Sepedonični ostaci društva mogu samo da vrisnu u očaju, ne shvatajući ingeniozni potez umetnica koje su otkrivajući sebe, otkrile i truležne stavove najmračnijih snaga reakcije.”

46 Zubak: “Yugoslav Disco”, p. 202.

and the sexualized corporeal expressions of the women whose photographs appear on the cover – women who are dancers who use their bodies as tools of artistic expressions.

#### OF LOKICE, DYNAMITES, AND THEIR DISCO MUSIC

The album itself is, I would argue, ‘simply’ a product of the music industry meant to be entertaining and, as I mentioned already, to offer Lokice their own songs to which they could dance. It was, to quote Zubak again, a “manifestation of the explosion of market socialism”<sup>47</sup> in Yugoslavia and as such, it offers insights into how various tropes of women’s sexual liberation, produced within US disco, were renegotiated into the late socialist, consumerist society. The lyrics of most of the songs are dedicated to subjects of love, or at least, heterosexual relationships, also touching on themes like partying, hinting at sexual acts and free love. Most numbers are written in the disco, or disco-ish, style, with a more or less lively beat and the unavoidable four-on-the-floor. Exceptions in that sense are “Dodirni me” (‘Touch me’) that leans more towards mainstream pop and the title number “Ja sam dinamit” that recycles well-known, classic R’n’R beats and riffs, but with a ‘disco vibe.’ The LP also contains two slower love ballads: “On i ja” (‘Him and I’) and “Šta sam mogla drugo” (‘What else could I have done’). In other words, it could be said that many of the music industry standards that relate to how music performed by women should be produced, constructed, and represented were employed in the making of *Ja sam dinamit*. The music was composed mainly by Aleksandar Sanja Ilić (1951–2021), an artist and music industry figure who didn’t work in a specific genre, but rather composed and performed songs for/with different artists and occasions.<sup>48</sup> In addition, some songs are signed by Đorđe Novković, a songwriter famous for composing music for stars of pop or zabavna muzika such as Mišo Kovača, Kemal Monteno, Neda Ukraden, Zdravko Čolić, Tereza Kesovija, Gabi Novak, and many others, as well as Dejan Petrović, one of the few disco/funk performers and producers from Yugoslavia. Thus, I wouldn’t claim that Lokice had a unique sound that made them distinguishable within the Yugoslav music industry, but rather that the songs they performed make effective and skilful use of various musical genres and styles, especially disco or rock and roll, all suitable for dancing.

47 Zubak: “‘Absolutely Yours’”, p. 96.

48 He was perhaps best known for his world music project Sanja Ilić i Balkanika (2000–2021) that also represented Serbia at the Eurovision Song Contest in 2018.

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Example 7: Lokice: *Ja sam dinamit* Cover (featuring Lokica Stefanović)<sup>49</sup>



Example 8: Lokice: *Ja sam dinamit* Inside<sup>50</sup>

In the lyrics of most of the songs, the already-mentioned tropes are present as well. First and foremost, Lokice’s femininities are tied to their physicality and sexuality. For example, the lyrics of “Disco Lady”<sup>51</sup>, written by Tucaković – a veritable master when it comes to following global music industry trends and incorporating them into the local culture –, apparently address the relationship between “Disco lady and DJ”, as the refrain states. The song essentially describes the disco lady who likes to dance the night away, and not just because that is fashionable (as the lyrics tell us). The ‘lady’ is mainly produced within the song through an emphasis on the bodily aspect, but also through her physical interaction with the sonic environment – she is a disco lady, after all. A potential translation of the lyrics is: “Such slender legs, breath and a soft body/I’ll lead like I do others./That’s a call from the DJ/In a discotheque/He’s playing new hits./With sound is her love/With song the love calls her/Through sound she also makes love./Sings while she dances/Not just that what she loves/Because all of it is now in fashion.”<sup>52</sup> The lyrics thus establish a

49 Source: <https://www.discogs.com/master/1274132-Lokica-Lokice-Ja-Sam-Dinamit> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

50 Source: <https://www.discogs.com/master/1274132-Lokica-Lokice-Ja-Sam-Dinamit> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

51 Lokice: “Disco Lady”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-ywWdl0JLA> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

52 “Takve vitke noge/dah i meko telo/vodiću k’o ja druge, To me DJ zove/u nekoj diskoteci/hitove pušta nove. Zvukom je ljubav njena/zvukom je ljubav zove/zvukom i ljubav ona vodi. Peva dok igra ona/ne samo to što voli/jer je to sada sve u modi”.

connection between disco, music, dancing, physicality, sex, and eroticism, exemplifying an overall sexualization of the popular culture that was sweeping across Yugoslavia, and showing how female sexuality and physicality were placed within such culture. The song is, as can be expected, an excellent example of disco, as Ilić employed all the crucial signifiers of the genre – four-on-the-floor beats, prominent use of synthesizers, flanger effects and so on.

Interestingly, the lyrics for the song “Očigledno, nije mi svejedno” (‘Obviously, it’s not all the same to me’)<sup>53</sup> are directed precisely towards the potential objectification of Lokice that happens while they are on stage, but with a twist. The song is envisioned as a kind of lament over a man who doesn’t take Lokice seriously, although Petrović’s disco beats and synthesizer effects contribute to the song’s generally light-hearted feel. The lyrics are sung by multiple members of the group (who are not credited separately), but in singular form, that is, they are singing as if they were one woman, which can create a hint of a confusion in my translation that follows: “In me, you see only an image/Rhythm, movement and nothing else./A girl with a lot of adventure/Who is admired and about whom everyone writes”<sup>54</sup>, state the lyrics at the beginning. “Maybe this is why it appears strange to you/When I gently look at you from the stage./Because you are just a regular guy/So why would I be attracted to you”<sup>55</sup>, continue Lokice, displaying their agency as they proclaim their interest in this mysterious, regular guy. In the second verse, the sentiment is clearly expressed, as they sing: “I’m sorry that tonight we’ll go in completely opposite directions”<sup>56</sup>. In the refrain, they conclude: “Obviously, it’s not all the same to me”, listing the reasons: “What you think of me”, “That I don’t have you by my side”, “That for you I’m just a star on the stage” and finally, “That you still think I’m not right for you”<sup>57</sup>. Furthermore, the lyrics reveal that the song’s protagonist just needs someone “normal” with whom they can spend their days in peace. The song, thus, combines various tropes that have become typical for the pop music performed by female artists: a relationship with a man, eroticism, agency, sadness because of the fact that her love isn’t reciprocated. The lyrics also juxtapose the way Lokice are perceived in public, with the particular focus on their bodily displays, and their ‘real’ wishes

53 As a side note, and to avoid confusion, I’d like to mention that Slađana Milošević (1955–2024), another popular rock singer from the era, performed a song of the same name, released in 1979: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uND564U0OQQ> (accessed on February 12, 2024).

54 “U meni vidiš samo sliku/ritam i pokret i ništa više. Devojku s puno avantura/kojoj se dive, o kojoj se piše”.

55 “Možda ti zato izgleda čudno/što te nežno gledam sa scene/jer ti si samo običan mladić/i šta bi tu privuklo mene?”

56 “I žao mi je što ćemo noćas/poći na sasvim suprotne strane”.

57 “Očigledno, nije mi svejedno/šta ti misliš, misliš o meni. [...] Što te nemam, nemam kraj sebe [...] što sam za tebe zvezda na sceni [...] što misliš ipak nisam za tebe”.

## “DISCO LADIES”

that are the same as those of any other person. It could thus be argued that the song touches on what Lokica Stefanović mentioned in her interview for *Nada* – that the Yugoslav people weren’t ready to accept that such displays are part of someone’s job, despite the fact that they seemed to enjoy them very much.

### AGENCY

My final remark regarding how femininities are produced through Lokice’s songs refers to how their agency was deployed. One example of this can be found in the song “Ja sam dinamit” that seems to be a renegotiation of the figure of an empowered woman that was beginning to dominate Western, as well as local, popular music at the time. In this song, the singer is essentially telling the man that she is too strong for him, because she “always loves as if the end of the world is near”. The lyrics describe the woman as fiery, and the man as too romantic for her. “I kiss like fire/I hug like a storm./Because of it,/I’m unattainable for many”, begin the verses that flow directly into the refrain that explains: “I’m a wild flame./I’m dynamite”. On the other hand, the man who, the audience can only assume, is interested in such a woman is “Just a tender guy with a guitar/You are tender for the fire that burns from within me/Forgive me but you’ll never be mine.”<sup>58</sup> Again, the representation of female strength is enveloped with an atmosphere of eroticism, as the character Lokice perform is free to choose her partner. She is sexually liberated because she is empowered, and vice versa. YouTube offers one video<sup>59</sup> in which Lokice are dancing to the song – in rainbow glittery leotards, they perform a rather simple choreography that involves, among other moves, jumping from one leg to the other and often shaking their behinds as if they were dancing the twist, with Lokica Stefanović taking the role of the lead performer.

In most of the other songs from the album, agency seems to be framing the performance of Lokice’s femininities as well, even though this feature may not be as prominent in the number where Lokica proclaims herself to be a stick of dynamite. In that sense, Lokica and Lokice are set as the main ‘deciders’ in the lyrics, the subjects that appear free to express their desires, feelings and dreams, openly explaining their thoughts and emotions to the men to whom they sing. In “Duga luda noć” (‘A long crazy night’), another upbeat disco/funky song, they invite someone to

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58 “Ljubim kao vatra/Grlim k’o oluja./Zato sam za mnoge/Nedostižan mit./Divlja sam vatra./Ja sam dinamit./ Ti samo si nežan lik/Na gitari./Nežan si za požar što iz mene žari/ Oprosti ali nikad nećeš biti moj./Zanesenjak pesme/Stih je život tvoj./Nežan si za požar što iz mene žari/Oprosti ali nikad nećeš biti moj”.

59 Lokice: “Ja sam dinamit”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FI3bbAqzqs> (accessed on February 14, 2024).

let themselves be taken by the “crazy rhythm of love”<sup>60</sup>. In “Očigledno, nije mi svejedno”, which I have already mentioned, they clearly express their desires to be with their fan, as well as their sadness that this can’t happen. The pop ballad “On i ja” sings about the differences between a man and woman – each of them with their own thoughts and beliefs, who are happy together precisely because of those differences. In other words, I would argue that it is the very expansive and flexible notion of agency that delineates the production of Lokice’s (sexy) femininities by always underlining their subjectivities and always positioning them as active agents.

Furthermore, it could be said that it is women’s agency, a trope so important for second-wave feminism, that, through the disco culture, resonated within the late-socialist Yugoslav context. In that sense, what could have been interpreted and labelled as feminist within the disco culture of the United States, was renegotiated into the quite different context in which Lokice worked, through the framework of an independent woman who could freely exercise her choices – a framework that is wide enough to accept different interpretations of both feminism and the socialist context that, to differing extents, encouraged gender equality.

## CONCLUSIONS

“It was unimaginable for someone to appear with naked legs on the scene”<sup>61</sup>; “Lokice: A curse followed the most beautiful Yugoslav women”<sup>62</sup>; “The best-looking dudes were crazy about her”<sup>63</sup>; “The curse of Lokice: they were the hottest chicks in Yuga, but ended up like this”<sup>64</sup>. These are only some of the titles of online articles available today on various internet portals. From them, one thing is clear – Lokice were hot and sexy, and everyone (including them) knew it. That piece of information, coupled with a hint towards their sad life stories, makes for a perfect click bait. In other words, through the workings of history, show business, media, and the entertainment indus-

60 “Preпусти se sad ti/ovom ritmu ljubavi. Nek zvuk nosi nas/sve zaboravi”.

61 Maja Gašić: “Lokica Stefanović i Sanja Ilić o čuvenim ‘Lokicama’: Bilo je nezamislivo da se neko pojavi golih nogu na sceni”, in: *Gloria* (2017), <https://www.gloria.rs/zvezde/price/129401/lokica-stefanovic-i-sanja-ilic-o-cuvenim-lokicama-bilo-je-nezamislivo-da-se-neko-pojavi-golih-nogu-na-sceni> (accessed on February 14, 2024).

62 Buka: “Lokice: Prokletstvo pratilo najljepše Jugoslovenke”, in: *Buka* (2016), <https://6yka.com/kolumne/lokice-prokletstvo-pratilo-najljepse-jugoslovenke> (accessed on February 14, 2024).

63 Glossy: “Najbolji frajeri su LUDELI ZA NJOM, jedna rečenica je okončala prijateljstvo sa Čolom: Životna priča Lokice Stefanović”, in: *Glossy* (2022), <https://glossy.espresso.co.rs/poznati/vesti/204247/leposava-lokica-stefanovic-zivotna-prica> (accessed on February 14, 2024).

64 24 sata: “Prokletstvo Lokica: Bile su najbolje ribe u Jugi, a završile ovako”, in: *Blic* (2016), <https://www.blic.rs/zabava/vesti/prokletstvo-lokica-bile-su-najbolje-ribe-u-jugi-a-završile-ovako/n6f-hsj6> (accessed on February 14, 2024).

try, Lokice have largely been reduced to their sexy look and bodily displays. To be fair, each article credits them for changing the face of Yugoslav television programs with their dance acts, and speaks of Lokica Stefanović as a respectable professional, but nevertheless, if Lokice are to be associated with just one thing, it is almost exclusively their ‘good looks.’ This kind of perception further shows that the dance group didn’t only embody the ‘sexy reputation’ of disco in Yugoslavia and the expressions of female sexuality it promoted, but that such expressions contributed to establishing a norm of what kind of bodies were ‘sexy’ and acceptable for the music market. The bodies of Lokice were tall, slender and fit, and while their bodily displays do testify to the actuality of processes of liberation of representations of female sexuality in public spaces, they also reveal the rapid adaptation of the market to such, potentially subversive, acts. The way Lokice’s bodies were styled for the audiences was primarily influenced by the various commercial products of disco that were adopted by the local estrada, and of course adapted to the local cultural context.

In that sense, a thread that I have purposefully avoided pulling all the way in this text is the potential relationship between displays of female sexuality in Yu-disco, and the local movements that dealt with the so-called women’s issues and feminism. When it comes to the US context, the usual way of perceiving the various productions and stylizations of female sexuality in the popular culture of the time has to do with second-wave feminism and the women’s liberation and civil rights movements, and so on. In fact, Mankowski argues that those movements and popular culture were inseparable, and that there is no feminist movement that existed prior to, or separately from, the various popular culture products that ensure the adoption of feminist ideas into people’s everyday lives.<sup>65</sup>

When it comes to Yu-disco, however, some of these trends were adopted as well, which is especially visible in Lokice’s *Ja sam dinamit* album – the songs’ lyrics speak of casual sexual encounters, they portray empowered women who are free to make their own life choices and so on, centring agency as the primary framework through which their femininities are produced. However, as far as I could tell, these aspects of Lokice’s activities weren’t (necessarily) understood as signs of progress in the domain of ‘women’s issues,’ primarily because of, I would argue, the ‘complex relationship’ socialist Yugoslavia had towards them, which is outside of the scope of this article.<sup>66</sup> In fact, as was visible from Luković’s review of their album, Lokice’s

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65 Mankowski: *Gendering the Disco Inferno*, pp. 6–7.

66 By ‘complex relationship’ I mean the fact that, for one, the equality of women was tightly woven into the revolutionary roots upon which Yugoslavia was built, which made the fight for the improvement of women’s lives that would be separate from a class struggle, a slippery slope. In addition, during the early seventies, ideas of Western feminism were becoming more prominent, with more and more women becoming interested in incorporating such ideas into the existing socialist discourses.

activities were often perceived as empty gestures and cheap tricks meant to boost sales of products that didn't have any 'real' value (they did boost Lokice's popularity, though). What I would like to emphasize, however, is that the way these ideas were adopted into the Yugoslav market reveals the fact that issues like women's sexual liberation, empowerment, and emancipation in a broader sense were from very early on encapsulated into music industry products that could, but needn't be interpreted as feminist. In fact, Lokice's activities show the multiple layers of meaning that envelop the production of femininities within the music market of the period, showing that displays of sexuality are always caught in the jaws of the market, and simultaneously 'packaged' in ways that would suit different strategies, audience preferences and so on. In Lokice's case, it is clear that their femininities were produced in accordance with different norms of heterosexiness that require, among other things, the disciplining of women's bodies, as well as with the demands of a still-traditional, patriarchal society, that, as Lokica Stefanović stated, wasn't yet ready to accept that dancing – in the disco or elsewhere –, and everything that goes with it, is part of someone's profession.

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In 1978, a landmark conference *Drug-ca žena. Žensko pitanje: novi pristup?* ('Comrade woman. The Women's Question: A New Approach?') was held in Belgrade, which marked what would later be described as the beginning of "Yugoslav feminism" (see Zaharijević: "The Strange Case of Yugoslav Feminism"). Given that, in my opinion, the discussion of the topic would also entail raising some 'big questions' related to the nature of feminism, its relationship with liberal capitalism and Western ideologies and so on, I decided not to engage with it on this occasion.

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# A PROBLEM WITH YUGONOSTALGIA: YUGOSLAV SOCIALIST EXPERIENCE AND POST-YUGOSLAV LEFT

TANJA PETROVIĆ (LJUBLJANA)

**Abstract:** *This article deals with debates on Yugonostalgia among leftist scholars and activists in the post-Yugoslav societies and their diasporas. The majority of them insist on the political and intellectual futility and theoretical incapacity of Yugonostalgia. Taking the persistent capacity of Yugonostalgia to generate social, political and intellectual debates as a symptom of our own political present, I argue for the epistemological relevance of discourses on Yugonostalgia for (self-)reflection in the production of intellectual knowledge in a post-socialist society. Two related issues emerge from these debates as central to the post-Yugoslav left's "problem with Yugonostalgia" – the first is the epistemic status of the experience of (state) socialism, and the second is the political potentiality of emotions in the specific post-socialist context. These questions are not only crucial for our understanding of Yugoslav socialism as a political project and the lived experience of 'really existing socialism' as inseparable from that project, but also for the ways in which the social theories that shaped that project live their post-socialist (after)lives.*

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Relatively soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the political projects of state socialism in Eastern and Southeastern European societies, the term 'nostalgia' emerged in the everyday, journalistic and academic discourses.<sup>1</sup> Not sensitive to the diversity of actors, historical legacies and experiences of state socialism, this term has come to designate an array of very diverse emotional engagements with the socialist past, encompassing products of popular culture (music, films), everyday objects, food, drinks, visual symbols, recognisable figures, but also personal memories and references to social and political aspects of life "lost in transition"<sup>2</sup>, and political claims based on the past experiences. During the last three post-socialist decades, nostalgia for socialism, labelled Yugonostalgia in post-Yugoslav societies and its diasporas, has not lost much of its currency. Although outside observers still

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2 Kristen Ghodsee: *Lost in Transition: Ethnographies of Everyday Life after Communism*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011.

connect it to the well-known liberal tropes of cherishing dictatorship and recognise it in kitschy paraphernalia,<sup>3</sup> regional public, activist and scholarly debates are, rather, concerned with its political meanings and its conceptual and political potential. Popular culture and particularly music have attracted significant attention within these debates due to their affect-generating capacity. Numerous media articles and scholarly works point to music's capacity to affectively unite audiences across national borders and to the fact that "the Yugoslav popular music outlived the country in which it emerged"<sup>4</sup>, and often ask about any political implications of the persistent musical unity of former Yugoslavs,<sup>5</sup> while others concern themselves with the ways Yugoslav popular music has been pointing to a utopia – and heterotopias – of Yugoslav socialism.<sup>6</sup>

Soon after the demise of state socialism in Europe, the understanding of nostalgia for socialism exceeded sociocultural meanings: it was recognised as a political problem, and such perception persists to these days. In earlier decades of post-socialism, Eastern Europe, preoccupied with "the European future" and neoliberal

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- 3 In one of recent takes on Yugostalgia, Jessica Bateman writes: "Many of the visitors had grown up under the old system and had come to mark the dictator's birthday, which was a major public holiday before Yugoslavia's disintegration. Some belonged to far-left political parties, and sported kitsch-looking T-shirts and banners" (Jessica Bateman: "Everyone Loved Each Other": The Rise of Yugonostalgia", in: *The Guardian*, 23 August 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/25/everyone-loved-each-other-rise-yugonostalgia-tito> [accessed on August 1, 2024]).
  - 4 Ana Petrov: "I posle Jugoslavije – jugo-muzika", in: *Politika*, 30 December 2016, <https://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/371131/I-posle-Jugoslavije-jugo-muzika> (accessed on August 1, 2024). Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the author of the article.
  - 5 See for example Nemanja Marinović: "Za ona dobra i stara vremena: Fenomen jugonostalgije u pop-kulturi", in: *Centar za marginu*, 18 September 2020, <https://czm.org.rs/za-ona-dobra-i-stara-vremena-fenomen-jugonostalgije-u-pop-kulturi/>; Ilija Đurović: "Fantom Jugonostalgije", in: *Normalizuj*, 8 February 2024, <https://normalizuj.me/kultivator/fantom-jugonostalgije/>; I. D.: "Aleksandra Denda: U Njujorku vlada Jugonostalgija", in: *Direktno*, 26 January 2021, [https://direktno.rs/magazin/zabava/muzika/330092/aleksandra-denda-gremi-njujork-jugonostalgija.html#google\\_vignette](https://direktno.rs/magazin/zabava/muzika/330092/aleksandra-denda-gremi-njujork-jugonostalgija.html#google_vignette); Milica Trklja: "Jugonostalgija ili 'neka tajna veza': Propali pokušaji da se muzika deli na 'našu' i 'njihovu'", in: *Sputnik*, 13 January 2014, <https://lat.sputnikportal.rs/20240113/jugonostalgija-ili-neka-tajna-veza-propali-pokusaji-da-se-muzika-deli-na-nasu-i-njihovu-1166328422.html> (all accessed on August 1, 2024). Several academic monographs have been dedicated to these capacities of popular music, among others Ana Petrov: *Jugoslovenska muzika bez Jugoslavije: Koncerti kao mesto sećanja*. Belgrade: Delfi, 2016; Danijela Š. Beard and Ljerka V. Rasmussen (eds.): *Made in Yugoslavia: Studies in Popular Music*. New York: Routledge, 2020; Anita Buhin: *Yugoslav Socialism: Flavoured with Sea, Flavoured with Salt*. Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2022.
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modernity,<sup>7</sup> became intolerant of any kind of nostalgia, and particularly of nostalgia for socialism. In triumphalist discourses of Europeanness, nostalgia was seen as a sign of moral weakness, irrationality and inability to find one's way around in the ongoing social and economic transformations. It was regarded as a "result of a feeling of having lost out in the transition from communism to democracy", a threat to "still fragile democracies" and a symptom of "an emergent retrospective positive evaluation of the old regime among the citizens in Central and Eastern Europe", where "growing numbers of respondents feel that 'a return to communist rule' would in fact be a desirable option"<sup>8</sup>.

More than three decades since the demise of the socialist projects in Europe, no one fears anymore a possibility of reinstating socialism and returning to 'communist rule'. In the lands that used to comprise Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), the space which concerns me in this article, this fear haunts no one, too, and Yugonostalgia seems to be of no concern or interest for the ruling political elites. There seems to be, on the other hand, a growing concern with Yugonostalgia among the post-Yugoslav left: from young activists to established leftist intellectuals and scholars, many recognise Yugonostalgia as a problem, point to its political futility, and describe it as trivial, superficial, non-reflexive and damaging for political action. Yugonostalgia is seen not only politically, but also epistemologically unproductive: according to Maja Breznik and Rastko Močnik, the heterogeneity of phenomena subsumed under the label of nostalgia "makes it impossible to fix nostalgia as a scientific concept"<sup>9</sup>. Reana Senjković is critical of labelling memories of life and work in socialism as nostalgic for quite a different reason: because it diminishes the legitimacy of these memories.<sup>10</sup> Senjković's argument points not only to the widespread negative societal but also to scholarly assessments of nostalgia as an unproductive, passive, and paralyzing feeling, a "pining for social safety that never really existed"<sup>11</sup>, as the banal commodification of socialist

7 Gediminas Lankauskas: "Missing Socialism Again? The Malaise of Nostalgia in Post-Soviet Lithuania", in: *Anthropology and Nostalgia*, ed. Olivia Ang and David Berliner. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014, pp. 35–60, here p. 54.

8 Joakim Ekman and Jonas Linde: "Communist Nostalgia and the Consolidation of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe", in: *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 21/3 (2005), pp. 354–374, here p. 357.

9 Maja Breznik and Rastko Močnik: "Organized Memory and Popular Remembering: The Encounter of Yugonostalgia Theories with Socialism", in: *Memory Studies* 15/5 (2022), pp. 1055–1069, here p. 1061.

10 Reana Senjković: "Konfiscirana sjećanja (na rad i zaposlenost)", in: *Transformacija rada: narativi, prakse, režimi*, ed. Ozren Biti and Reana Senjković. Zagreb: Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, 2021, pp. 111–138.

11 Charity Scribner: *Requiem for Communism*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003, p. 11.

objects and symbols (and, as Maya Nadkarny and Olga Shevchenko lucidly note, as the triumph of capitalism),<sup>12</sup> or proof of dangerous, atavistic cultural attachments, false consciousness,<sup>13</sup> and malady.<sup>14</sup> Studying recollections of socialism, Andrew Gilbert points to the disproportionate focus on nostalgia and argues for “a need to go beyond nostalgia in order to identify and analyse a broader range of meaning and action in the creation and deployment of representations of the past”<sup>15</sup>.

In this article, I look closely at the discourses on political and intellectual futility and theoretical incapacity of Yugonostalgia articulated by leftist scholars and activists in the post-Yugoslav space. Taking the persistent capacity of Yugonostalgia to generate social, political and intellectual debates as a symptom of our own political present,<sup>16</sup> this article argues for the epistemological relevance of discourses on Yugonostalgia for (self-)reflection in the production of intellectual knowledge in post-socialism. It aims to show that two related issues, emerging from these debates as central in the post-Yugoslav left’s “problem with Yugonostalgia” – the first being the epistemic status of experience of (state) socialism, and the second the political potentiality of emotions in the specific post-socialist context –, are critical not only for understanding Yugoslav socialism as a political project and lived experience of “really existing socialism”, but also for understanding “the everyday (after)life of our social theories”<sup>17</sup>.

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12 Maya Nadkarny and Olga Shevchenko: “The Politics of Nostalgia in the Aftermath of Socialism’s Collapse: A Case of Comparative Analysis”, in: *Anthropology and Nostalgia*, ed. Olivia Ang. and David Berliner. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014, pp. 61–95, here p. 63.

13 Zsuzsa Gille: “Postscript”, in *Post-Communist Nostalgia*, ed. Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille. New York: Berghahn Books 2010, pp. 278–289, here p. 283.

14 Maria Todorova: “Introduction: From Utopia to Propaganda and Back”, in: *Post-Communist Nostalgia*, ed. Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille. New York: Berghahn Books 2010, pp. 1–13, here p. 2; for an overview, see also Ana Hofman and Tanja Petrović: “Introduction”, in: *Affect’s Social Lives: Post-Yugoslav Reflections*, ed. Ana Hofman and Tanja Petrović. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2023, pp. 7–42.

15 Andrew Gilbert: “Beyond Nostalgia: Other Historical Emotions”, in: *History and Anthropology* 30/3 (2019), pp. 293–312, here p. 295.

16 Although Yugonostalgia may be compared to collective feelings towards imperial and supranational legacies such as Habsburg/Austro-Hungarian or Ottoman in different parts of Yugoslavia, it is this capacity to generate public and intellectual debates, as well as its particular relation to the lived experience discussed later in this article, that legitimizes treating it as a phenomenon of its own right. For imperial nostalgias in the post-Yugoslav space, see Bojan Baskar: “Austronostalgia, Yugonostalgia and Memories of Empires”, in: *Balkanis* 5/12–16 (2004), pp. 48–52, as well as the ERC project REVENANT – Revivals of Empire: Nostalgia, Amnesia, Tribulation, <https://reventant.uniri.hr> (accessed on July 31, 2024).

17 Anna Kruglova: “Social Theory and Everyday Marxists: Russian Perspectives on Epistemology and Ethics”, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 59/4 (2017), pp. 759–785, here p. 760.

AMBIGUITY OF EXPERIENCE  
AND (IN)EFFICIENCY OF POLITICAL ACTION

The issues of collective mobilization, organization, and political change have become central leftist concerns of our political time, which is characterized by neo-liberal exhaustion and fragmentation, as well as by “diminution in the production of new utopias”<sup>18</sup>. As a consequence, the past increasingly becomes both a place where the imaginations of the future are sought and “a densely animated object of enchantment”<sup>19</sup>. While this is also true for the post-Yugoslav socio-political space,<sup>20</sup> there are also noticeable efforts by those who turn to Yugoslavia for inspiration for the politics of resistance to detach the Yugoslav past from the inevitably messy and contested experience 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.<sup>21</sup> For example, 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.<sup>22</sup> Many leftist activists similarly see Yugoslav socialist experience as useless and unproductive for today’s struggles and resistance.

Another way to detach socialism from the experience of former citizens of socialist Yugoslavia is to question the very socialist nature of that experience: scholars point to the early onsets of the capitalist aspects of Yugoslav socialism, locate the early processes of post-socialist transition in the early 1950s or early 1960s,<sup>23</sup> and

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18 Frederic Jameson: “An American Utopia”, in: *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army*, ed. Slavoj Žižek. London: Verso, 2016, pp. 1–96, here p. 1.

19 David Scott: *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014, p. 13.

20 See Larisa Kurtović: “An Archive to Build a Future: The Recovery and Rediscovery of the History of Socialist Associations in Contemporary Bosnia-Herzegovina”, in: *History and Anthropology* 30/1 (2019), pp. 20–46.

21 See Tanja Petrović: “Towards an Affective History of Yugoslavia”, in: *Filozofija i društvo* 27/3 (2016), pp. 504–520.

22 Ana Hofman: *Glasba, politika, afekt: Novo življenje partizanskih pesmi*. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2015.

23 Branislav Dimitrijević: “In-Between Utopia and Nostalgia, or How the Worker Became Invisible on the Path from Shock-Worker to Consumer”, in: *Nostalgia on the Move*, ed. Mirjana Slavković and Marija Đorgović. Belgrade: The Museum of Yugoslavia, 2017, pp. 30–41.

observe Yugoslav society as post-capitalist rather than socialist.<sup>24</sup> Many of them recognise the ‘really socialist’, emancipatory and Yugofuturistic nature of Yugoslav socialism only in its earliest phase: for Asja Bakić, “Yugofuturism is a concrete moment in the past (for some it is the period before 1962, and in my view it is the period before 1953), when the future seemed much different from the one we live today”<sup>25</sup>. As a consequence, Bakić writes, “what we consider the dissolution of Yugoslavia is a period of time that actually lasts for more than two decades (part of the 1960s, whole 1970s and the 1980s)” during which “Yugoslavia became a bureaucratic nightmare”<sup>26</sup>.

As these views suggest, only post-WWII events, organizations and practices, directly stemming from the People Liberation Struggle, such as early period voluntary labour actions or activities of the Antifascist Women’s Front (AFŽ) could be revolutionary and authentic, while labour actions from the later period, or efforts by female political workers who importantly contributed to Yugoslav women emancipation are considered inauthentic, useless, even harmful for the future politics of emancipation.<sup>27</sup> Such views, moreover, marginalize or entirely ignore the impact of the modernizing achievements of the Yugoslav socialist project (reflected in the improvement of living conditions, the increase of literacy rates, accessible employment, education and healthcare, and vertical mobility) on the lives of generations of Yugoslavs.

Apart from being ideologically ‘tainted’ and ambiguously socialist, the experience of life in Yugoslav socialism and its affective recollections usually labelled Yugonostalgia are perceived as superficial, banal, commodified, and thus inefficient and unproductive for any political action, mobilization and change. Svetlana Slapšak, for example, writes that she thinks nostalgia is negative

because it reinvents, from depression and despair and a melancholic philosophical thought, what was most visible, simplest and most kitschy in the then-culture. Restoration of the partisan spirit on the level of admiring comic book heroes or wearing uniforms and singing partisan songs with grandmothers and grandfa-

24 Srećko Pulig: “Rade Pantić: Za socijalističku umetnost treba naporan kolektivni rad” [interview with Rade Pantić], in: *Novosti*, 7 July 2021, <https://www.portalnovosti.com/rade-pantic-za-socijalisticuku-umetnost-treba-naporan-kolektivni-rad> (accessed on August 19, 2024).

25 Asja Bakić: “Jugofuturizam kao zamka”, 6 June 2023, <https://asjaba.com/2023/06/06/jugofuturizam-kao-zamka/> (accessed on August 19, 2024).

26 Ibidem.

27 Lilijana Burcar: *Restavracija kapitalizma: Repatriarhalizacija družb*. Ljubljana: Založba Sophia, 2015; see also Tanja Petrović: “O herojima, od ranog do poznog socijalizma, i dalje: Izgradnja prvog i drugog koloseka pruge Šamac–Sarajevo dobrovoljnim akcijaškim radom”, in: *Duh pruge*, ed. Andrea Matošević and Tanja Petrović. Belgrade: Fabrika knjiga, 2020, pp. 147–165.

thers – all of this is of course emotionally satisfying, but cognitively damaging. I am deeply persuaded that a new conceptualization of Yugoslavia has to reject this. We need to stop longing for the “Buco” cheese and “Gavrilović” pate.<sup>28</sup>

Many other leftist intellectuals and activists similarly point to political inefficiency of everyday, activist and artistic references to socialism. In the view of the art historian Rade Pantić, “it is not enough to paint a mural depicting workers or to establish a choir which will perform songs from the People’s Liberation Struggle and say ‘we are making a socialist art.’” Such an art, he argues, “requires hard collective work in all fields”<sup>29</sup>. Of all fields of cultural production, the popular culture is seen as the most powerful generator of nostalgic and unproductive feelings. As the writer Ilija Đurović wrote for the Montenegrin portal *Normalizuj*:

Around ten years ago I first noticed something which I explained to myself with the notion of “phantom Yugonostalgia.” Listening to music on YouTube, I was led by an algorithm to a seemingly non-subversive channel, labelled “Peđa Radović”, with an avatar of Podgorica’s coat of arms. It did not look promising, but behind the link there was something that will reach all corners of former SFRY, as well as beyond its borders during the next decade [...]. Then unknown Peđa Radović digitalised from LPs and other sound carriers the whole treasure of the Yugoslav music production, dutifully equipped it with names of performers, publishers and other information, in an archivally literate and serious manner. He performed this job so seriously that the YouTube audience imagined him as a dusty old man who lives among piles of vinyl plates [...]. Only later we learned that behind this channel was a man born on the eve of Yugoslavia’s disintegration, with no experience of life in the country whose music he guards from forgetting. The whole music past has emerged, and a specific social group (of young, ‘left’ people born immediately before, during or after the breakup of the country whose music Peđa Radović has offered on YouTube) found a new quality, and even identity, in this sound. It was a sound from the past, telling them “This is how the music of the country where you did not live, but you would want to live, sounds.”<sup>30</sup>

28 Svetlana Slapšak: “Jugonostalgija i smeh”, in: *Peščanik*, 13 December 2008, <http://pescanik.net/jugonostalgija-i-smeh/> (accessed on August 19, 2024).

29 Pulig: “Rade Pantić”. See also Rade Pantić: *Umetnost skozi teorijo: Historičnomaterialistične analize*. Ljubljana: cf\*, 2020.

30 Ilija Đurović: “Revolucija malog Perice na Instagramu”, in: *Normalizuj*, 2 October 2023, <https://normalizuj.me/praxis/revolucija-malog-perice-na-instagramu> (accessed on August 19, 2024). The mentioned YouTube channel is accessible under: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCESY-bEs7998WRpINv192zQ> (accessed on September 2, 2024).

Many leftist scholars and activists seek to expose nostalgia as being the opposite of what it seems to symbolize and recall, claiming its capitalist/consumerist nature, its opportunistic, antisocialist/pro-Western or liberal character, and pointing to its workings towards forgetting, obliteration and revisionism. According to Đurović, “nostalgia is essentially counterrevolutionary, while socialist memorabilia reflect the capitalist logic of the world.”<sup>31</sup> While acknowledging a great diversity of phenomena subsumed under the label of Yugonostalgia (which is for some even a reason to deny its viability as an object of scholarly exploration), many researchers of (post) socialism, intellectuals and activists recognise it primarily in commodified objects, and “as ignited by the market economy, and the productions and demands of the restored capitalism.”<sup>32</sup> Tropes such as the “mythological offer of commodities”<sup>33</sup>, the “emerging commercial culture in the postsocialist era”<sup>34</sup>, the “industry of nostalgia”<sup>35</sup>, the “commodified set of practices”<sup>36</sup> are found in many scholarly assessments of nostalgia for socialism. Commodification of the past, intrinsically connected to the spheres of popular culture and popular memory, is seen as hindering political mobilization, eliminating possibilities for emancipation, subversion and change, and maintaining the status quo: “the past is sold as a consolation for the present, it not only brings profit to those who sell it, but also guarantees that that past will never become a future of those who buy it, because all its potentials will

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31 Đurović: “Revolucija malog Perice na Instagramu”.

32 Ana Hofman: “Jugonostalgie gegen Konfiszierung der Erinnerung”, in: *Volksstimme* 11 (November 2022), pp. 25–27, here p. 26.

33 Dean Duda: “U raljama nostalgije”, in: *Feral Tribune*, 28 September 2004. Duda criticizes for “their entrapment in Yugonostalgia” the authors of *The Lexicon of Yu Mythology (Leksikon YU mitologije)* which was initiated in 1989 by Dubravka Ugrešić as a project dedicated to Yugoslav popular culture and designed to involve a wide number of Yugoslav citizens. But it is its “second life” in the mid 1990s, in the aftermath of Yugoslavia’s breakdown and with its disastrous consequences still ongoing that made this project an embodiment of Yugonostalgia. Then, “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 material from the Web site was selected, edited, and published in 2004 by the publishing houses Rende in Belgrade (Serbia) and Postscriptum in Zagreb (Croatia), as a book entitled *The Lexicon of Yu Mythology*, which has since gone through several editions.” (Aleksandar Bošković: “Yugonostalgia and Yugoslav Cultural Memory: Lexicon of YU Mythology”, in: *Slavic Review* 72/1 [2013], pp. 54–78, here p. 57–58).

34 Zala Volčič: “Yugo-Nostalgia: Cultural Memory and Media in the Former Yugoslavia”, in: *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24/1 (2007), pp. 21–38, here p. 25.

35 Daphne Berdahl: “‘(N)Ostalgie’ for the Present: Memory, Longing, and East German Things”, in: *Ethnos* 64/2 (1999), pp. 192–211, here p. 192.

36 Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley: “The Modalities of Nostalgia”, in: *Current Sociology* 54/6 (2006), pp. 919–941, here p. 932.

be exhausted in the process of demand, selling and use.”<sup>37</sup> What is more, commodified nostalgic recollections of the socialist past are seen as revisionist, distorting the gaze on that past and erasing what is really important to remember and revive: Milorad Gačević sees “the key problem of nostalgic memories of socialist good life and consumerist experiences” in

forgetting the struggle that made possible that good life and consumerism. It did not fall from the sky, but came as a result of decades of struggle for socialism followed by suffering and repression, illegal work, agitation, incessant work on education and emancipation of people, heroic resistance to occupiers during people-liberation struggle, voluntary labour actions organized to construct the country, attempts to build self-management, with all victories, defeats, good and bad sides.<sup>38</sup>

The accusation of forgetting, distorting the past and even revisionism is extended to the works by scholars who analyse manifestations of Yugonostalgia in discrete sociopolitical contexts and everyday practices and memories. Breznik and Močnik label them “nostalgia scholars” and criticize them because, with their focus on experience, they call

for “softer” approaches, for the use of research tools employed by oral history, the history of everyday life, anthropology and cultural studies where the concept of nostalgia was initially formed. [...] For this reason, the study of post-socialist nostalgia appears as an “up-to-date” project. It seems to be catching up with the latest historiographic approaches, which during the socialist era were allegedly suppressed by dominant Marxist understanding of historical processes (in which class struggle is the driving historical force and the material production determines all other relatively autonomous spheres of social life).<sup>39</sup>

Such an assessment comes as a surprise for several reasons: it establishes a temporal scheme in which oral history and the history of everyday life, anthropology and cultural studies are “the latest historiographic approaches”, as if they have entered the Yugoslav intellectual space only after socialism ended. With such an understanding of the novelty of “softer” approaches and an understanding of class struggle as isolated from everyday conditions and independent from cultural practices and representations, Breznik and Močnik not only ignore the decades long genealo-

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37 Đurović: “Revolucija malog Perice na Instagramu”.

38 Milorad Gačević: “Levica i jugonostalgija”, in: *Novi plamen*, 16 January 2019, <https://www.novi-plamen.net/glavna/levica-i-jugonostalgija/> (accessed on August 19, 2024).

39 Breznik and Močnik: “Organized Memory and Popular Remembering”, pp. 1061–1062.

gies of ‘history from below’, the Marxist foundations of the cultural studies, their essential connection with the New Left in Britain, and the importance of their understanding of culture as a battlefield and sight of class struggle,<sup>40</sup> but also overlook and dismiss the resonances works by thinkers such as Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Richard Hoggart, and Edward P. Thompson struck with Yugoslav thinkers. They also dismiss the large body of research in socialist Yugoslavia focused on the everyday, real conditions of life and work for the workers, and on culture understood as a field of the class struggle – which was essential not only theoretically, but also practically, for Yugoslav self-managing cultural politics in which amateurism had a central place.

What is at stake here is not only denying any Marxist character of oral history, the history of everyday life, anthropology and cultural studies. The critical question to be asked here is who ‘owns’ Marxist epistemologies and social theory – both within intellectual community and across social spaces, and by extension, who is ‘allowed’ to speak of socialism and whose voice matters. Anna Kruglova points to the relevance of this question when she argues that “ideas and ideals about what constitutes a just, well working society [...] are not confined, either in practice or concern, to the ivory towers or more elegant classes”<sup>41</sup>. She further argues that Marxism needs to be studied by anthropologists, and we need “to stop looking at Marxism as ‘just’ an ideology or even a philosophy, and rediscover Marxism as it has evolved, and continues to evolve, as a form of Gramscian hegemony.”<sup>42</sup> Such an understanding both opens a place for ‘ordinary’ people as ‘everyday Marxists’, their everyday negotiations, ‘popular’ memories and cultural patterns to be seen, heard, and taken seriously as political actors, and prompts intellectual self-reflection about one’s own, class-defined position from which one makes a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate voices, memories, experiences and feelings.

#### POLITICS OF EMOTIONS AFTER YUGOSLAVIA

While discrete experience of socialism in all its everydayness, messiness and ambiguity is generally seen as an unproductive way to look for the politics for the future by leftist thinkers and activists in the post-Yugoslav space, the inseparability of that experience from emotions and affects (which also leads the way towards the commodification of the Yugoslav past) seems to be an even greater reason for its dismissal. Unlike the right-wing politics, which “continuously capitalizes on the

40 Dean Duda: “Hrvanje s anđelima”, in: *Reč* 66/12 (2002), pp. 79–107, here p. 92–93.

41 Kruglova: “Social Theory and Everyday Marxists”, p. 759.

42 *Ibidem*, p. 760.

feelings of anxiety, uncertainty and exhaustion that dominate the contemporary political arena and uses them to mobilize people for the national(istic) politics of belonging and community building, the left-oriented forces too easily dismiss the emotional investment with the historical project of socialism<sup>43</sup>, although they simultaneously express frustration by the success with which the right mobilizes emotions among the citizens.<sup>44</sup>

An easy rejection of emotions by leftist intellectuals and activists in the post-Yugoslav space, who mostly consider them “entertaining, banal, or quotidian, and, therefore, ‘apolitical’”<sup>45</sup>, comes as a surprise if we have in mind the amount of attention given to the political relevance and potential of emotions in the recent, and not so recent, scholarly debates:<sup>46</sup> the history of thought that recognises the political character of affect is a long lasting one, and the claims that “our ethical and political projects must be formulated and conducted as the terrain of the affects”<sup>47</sup> span the centuries, from Baruch Spinoza to Lauren Berlant. At the heart of these projects, as Michael Hardt argues, is the necessity to understand our power to be affected “not as a weakness, but a strength.”<sup>48</sup>

The leftist rejection of emotions is surprising also because the current political, economic and ideological conjuncture overtly denies the post-socialist subjects the power to be affected and empowered by their own socialist past and its symbols, and more specifically by the most politically relevant aspects of that past, such as modernization, vertical mobility, the available education, healthcare, and social security. The consequence of this denial, as Boris Buden pointed out, is that the “social contradictions of post-communism, such as the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the dismantling of all forms of social solidarity, enormous social injustices and widespread suffering—they all remain affectively unoccupied [...] This social anaesthesia is one of the most salient symptoms of post-communist transformation.”<sup>49</sup>

43 Hofman: “Jugonostalgie gegen Konfiszierung der Erinnerung”, p. 27.

44 See for example Đurović: “Revolucija malog Perice na Instagramu”.

45 Hofman and Petrović: “Introduction”, p. 14.

46 For an overview, see Hofman and Petrović: “Introduction”; see also Tanja Petrović: “Nostalgia for Industrial Labor in Socialist Yugoslavia, or Why Post-Socialist Affect Matters”, in: *Nostalgia on the Move*, ed. Mirjana Slavković and Marija Đorgović. Belgrade: Museum of Yugoslavia, 2017, pp. 14–29.

47 Michael Hardt: “The Power to Be Affected”, in: *Flat Affect, Joyful Politics and Enthralled Attachments: Engaging with the Work of Lauren Berlant* (= International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society 28/3 [2015]), pp. 215–222, here p. 215.

48 Ibidem.

49 Boris Buden: *Zona prelaska: O kraju postkomunizma*. Belgrade: Fabrika knjiga, 2012, p. 78.

Reducing affective engagements with the socialist past to entertainment, banality, commodification, to “a feeling like longing and daydreaming, close to escapism from the present challenges”<sup>50</sup>, and seeing them as a mechanism to avoid the responsibility for disastrous wars in the 1990s, not only denies that the emotional and the affective can be and often are a basis for reflection,<sup>51</sup> but also obscures their clearly political aspects: what is derogatively dismissed as Yugonostalgia is often an expression of resistance to historical revisionism,<sup>52</sup> to confiscation of memory,<sup>53</sup> a response to the ethnicization of cultural landscapes, a “contra-discursive moment” to hegemonic discourses of “nationalistic amnesia”<sup>54</sup> and an effort to re-establish and maintain cooperation across the new political borders of the nation-states,<sup>55</sup> but these aspects remain neglected and overlooked.

The neglect of emotions and the dismissal of affective engagements with the Yugoslav past are not universal, though: a closer look to the ways in which the post-Yugoslav intellectual and activist left treats this past reveals a class-based affective economy that has to do with the essential question of who can have the “power to be affected” by the Yugoslav past.<sup>56</sup> It shows how Gramscian hegemony governs the field of remembering as much as it governs the field of Marxist theory production. The curators of the Museum of Yugoslavia’s exhibitions seem to be aware of this hegemony and of the fact that dismissal of nostalgia results in exclusion of “ordinary people” and their emotions, visions, desires and voices from narratives of the past and imagination of the future: for a long time, they have been making efforts “to detach from the nostalgic connotation, which, it was believed, conceals objectivity and distances the Museum content from critical thinking, which is an imperative of

50 Sara Sopić and Mirjana Slavković: “Hedgehog’s Home – Inventing a Better World”, in: *Hedgehog’s Home – Inventing a Better World*, ed. Mirjana Slavković and Sara Sopić. Belgrade, Museum of Yugoslavia, 2023, pp. 12–54, here p. 14.

51 Ibidem, p. 12.

52 Maruša Pušnik, Breda Luthar and Dejan Jontes: “Spominski narativi in bitke za opredelitev socializma: Jugoslovska osemdeseta”, in: *Teorija in praksa* 61/2 (2024), pp. 407–427.

53 Dubravka Ugrešić: “The Confiscation of Memory”, in: *New Left Review* 218 (1996), pp. 26–39.

54 Stef Jansen: *Antinacionalizam: Etnografija otpora u Beogradu i Zagrebu*. Belgrade: Biblioteka XX vek, 2005, p. 256.

55 Mitja Velikonja: “The Past with a Future: The Emancipatory Potential of Yugonostalgia”, in: *Transcending Fratricide, Political Mythologies, Reconciliations, and the Uncertain Future in the Former Yugoslavia*, ed. Srđa Pavlović and Marko Živković. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2013, pp. 109–128, here p. 115.

56 Hardt: “The Power to Be Affected”; Petrović: “O herojima, od ranog do poznog socijalizma, i dalje”; Tanja Petrović: “Alternative Cinematic and Literary Histories of Yugoslavia and ‘The Power to Be Affected’”, in: *Affect’s Social Lives: Post-Yugoslav Reflections*, ed. Ana Hofman and Tanja Petrović. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2023, pp. 165–191.

contemporary theory and practice of museology”<sup>57</sup>. However, they have recently embarked in a „series of attempts to tackle these claims and institutional anxiety in a different way”<sup>58</sup> – by curating exhibitions that represent “an important step in institutional history in terms of welcoming *ordinary peoples’ voices*, which were ignored in official histories.”<sup>59</sup>

Dismissing Yugo-nostalgia as a negative phenomenon that revitalizes most accessible, visible, banal, and kitschy aspects of the Yugoslav culture, Slapšak opts for another kind of nostalgia, based above all on “the legitimization of longing for Yugoslavia in intellectual circles.”<sup>60</sup> She thus gives 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.”<sup>61</sup>, while simultaneously rejecting any possibility that other affectively engaged recollections of socialism may also articulate legitimate, reflective, and politically relevant claims.<sup>62</sup> Đurović similarly points to a useful and productive reading of the Yugoslav past:

Such readings luckily exist. ‘Left’ theoreticians, philosophers and artists are ever more numerous in every corner of the former SFRY, there are many wise heads at departments of important western European universities, they are writing books in which they point to sentimentalism and nostalgia as a problem that needs to be eliminated without forgetting all important aspects that can still unite the space that used to share Yugoslav experience. This space can be united not in some new territorial Yugoslavia, but in a new leftist politics, in a Yugofuturism that would expel Yugonostalgia forever.<sup>63</sup>

Gačević makes a similar juxtaposition, contrasting maintaining the memory of “banal, everyday objects bought in the time of socialism, summer holidays on the Adriatic Sea and shopping travels to Trieste” with “the memory of true heroes of socialism.”<sup>64</sup> He praises “all those who work as theoreticians and curators and organize conferences and exhibitions nurturing the memory culture about national

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57 Neda Knežević: “Foreword”, in: *Hedgehog’s Home – Inventing a Better World*, ed. Mirjana Slavković and Sara Sopić. Belgrade, Museum of Yugoslavia, 2023, pp. 6–10, here p. 7.

58 Ibidem.

59 Ibidem. The emphasis is mine.

60 Slapšak: “Jugonostalgija i smeh”.

61 Ibidem.

62 See also Svetlana Slapšak: “Twin Cultures and Rubik’s Cube Politics: The Dynamics of Cultural Production in Pro-YU, Post-YU, and other YU Inventions”, in: *Südosteuropa* 59/3 (2011), pp. 301–314, here p. 312.

63 Đurović: “Revolucija malog Perice na Instagramu”.

64 Gačević: “Levica i jugonostalgija”.

heroes, men and women, who have worked on liberation of the country from the occupiers, on reconstruction of the country, on raising literacy rates and education of the people, on improving position of women, and many other things.”<sup>65</sup>

There is an obvious tension between this call to deal with “real heroes of socialism” and the gaze to which these heroes, together with other former Yugoslav citizens, are subjected when they claim the legitimacy of past socialist experience, the political importance of that socialist heroism, but also when they recall that past experience with emotional engagement – for example on commemorations or protests, when they carry symbols of socialist Yugoslavia. They are seen through the prism of irony and cynicism, while their claims are met with suspicion and a lack of belief in their sincerity. This is particularly true for the “heroes of late socialism” of the 1970s and the 1980s. Despite their sincere investment in the values Gačević lists in the above quote, they are usually seen as ‘nostalgics’, anachronistic, grotesque and stuck in the past.<sup>66</sup>

The fact that a majority of activists and left intellectuals denies Yugonostalgia any political potential does not speak much about the people who emotionally engage with the past, but rather points to a hegemonic gaze which doubts their authenticity and the sincerity of their belief in socialist ideals. This doubt and this disbelief are by no means specific to the post-Yugoslav space: William Mazzarella describes them as “an itch in the liberal imagination”, quoting the example of reactions to North Koreans’ tears for Kim Jong-Il, when Western media kept asking “Do they really mean it?”<sup>67</sup> The answer to this question was always negative – the North Koreans were either pretending because they were forced to express their emotions publicly, or they were being manipulated. While reason and affect are definite elements of sincerity,<sup>68</sup> they are denied to those who emotionally engage with the Yugoslav past and used as tools for delegitimization. A similar, class-based gaze is applied to the popular culture which has long been understood as the most propulsive generator of nostalgic sentiments among former Yugoslavs.<sup>69</sup>

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65 Ibidem.

66 Vesna Adić: “Nevidljivi poklonici: Dan mladosti u Muzeju istorije Jugoslavije”, in *Muzeologija, nova muzeologija, nauka o baštini*. Belgrade – Kruševac: Centar za muzeologiju i heritologiju Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu – Muzej u Kruševcu, 2013, pp. 339–344.

67 William Mazzarella: “Totalitarian Tears: Does the Crowd Really Mean It?”, in: *Cultural Anthropology* 30/1 (2015), pp. 91–112, here p. 92.

68 Ibidem.

69 For a discussion about the potential of music to shed a new light on memory politics and practices in the post-Yugoslav context, see Ana Hofman: “Introduction to the Co-Edited Issue ‘Music, Affect and Memory Politics in the Post-Yugoslav Space’”, in: *Southeastern Europe* 39/2 (2015), pp. 145–164, and the articles in said Special Issue.

## CONCLUSION: REDIRECTING THE GAZE

Firmly associated not only with popular culture and commodified objects such as “fashion, food and other such things”<sup>70</sup>, but also with the notions of the past, remembering, and memory culture, Yugonostalgia as a generalized designation for a wide range of affective engagements with the past socialist experience is seen by the post-Yugoslav left as politically unproductive, anti-revolutionary and damaging for the future-oriented left politics.<sup>71</sup> For Bakić, “Yugonostalgia symbolises generalized, almost apolitical longing for the past and is a petit-bourgeois sentiment”, but she also considers Yugofuturism a trap for the left, because “it does not allow present-day leftists to step into the future with optimism. Obsessive dealing with Yugoslavia, with what it used to be and could be, blocks communist fantasy which (finally!) would not be connected to Yugoslavia.”<sup>72</sup>

There is, in contrast, an increasing number of researchers insisting on the importance of the possibility of imagining a future from the problem-space of Yugoslav socialism and its immediate experience,<sup>73</sup> as well as of those who, while acknowledging the epistemic strength of global and universalizing narratives such as those of post- and decoloniality, insist on “the concrete historical and material contexts in their dynamic and lived manifestations”<sup>74</sup> and on keeping the perspective that is historically specific and informed, that is, “in which time-bound and place-bound specificity counts.”<sup>75</sup> Xine Yao argues that emotional expression is not simply the signifier of a “universal human” but is deeply conditioned by the very operation of “humanity”, as it is itself based on an exclusion of the Other, to whom the very possibility of being included into this category is denied and whose feelings are

70 Primož Krašovec: “(Yugo)nostalgia”, in: *Atlas of Transformation*, 2011, <http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/n/nostalgia/yugonostalgia-primoz-krasovec.html> (accessed on August 19, 2024).

71 See Todor Kuljić: *Manifest sećanja leveice*. Belgrade: Clio, 2021, pp. 153–154.

72 Bakić: “Jugofuturizam kao zamka”.

73 See Tanja Petrović: *Yuropa: Jugoslovensko nasleđe i politike budućnosti u post-jugoslovenskim društvima*. Belgrade: Fabrika knjiga, 2012; Kurtović: “An Archive to Build a Future”; Larisa Kurtović and Azra Hromadžić: “Cannibal States, Empty Bellies: Protest, History and Political Imagination in Post-Dayton Bosnia”, in: *Critique of Anthropology* 37/3 (2017), pp. 262–296; Hofman: *Glasba, politika, afekt*; Nadia El-Shaarawi and Maple Razsa: “Movements Upon Movements: Refugee and Activist Struggles to Open the Balkan Route to Europe”, in: *History and Anthropology* 30/1 (2019), pp. 91–112; for a broader post-socialist context, see: Dace Dzenovska and Nicholas De Genova: “Desire for the Political in the Aftermath of the Cold War”, in: *Focaal: Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 80/1 (2018), pp. 1–15; Scott: *Omens of Adversity*.

74 Hofman and Petrović: “Introduction”.

75 Maria Todorova: “On Public Intellectuals and Their Conceptual Frameworks”, in: *Slavic Review* 74/4 (2015), pp. 708–714, here p. 711.

not recognised as such.<sup>76</sup> In the post-Yugoslav context, debates over Yugonostalgia reveal class-based hierarchies and legitimization struggles, but this class dynamics remains unaddressed, silenced and ignored, even by those leftist intellectuals who insist on a historical materialism that understands class relations and inequalities as crucially defining for social life.

Can we think of an epistemologically and politically productive, but also more just and mutually supportive understanding of the affective engagements with the Yugoslav past, one that does not dismiss the experiences, desires and claims of those who engage, either because that past is part of their own biographical experience, or because they act as its archivists and see it as an inspiration? Can we think productively about the temporality of past–present–future<sup>77</sup> and go beyond the trope of ‘being stuck in the past’ which usually accompanies critical discourses of Yugonostalgia? For this, we first need an approach which does not treat as mutually exclusive epistemic positions an insistence on material production and class relations, and taking seriously into account lived experience in its complexity and ambiguity. That approach should also acknowledge not only the agency of those who emotionally engage with Yugoslav past, but also the capacity of that past to affect, and destabilize the fixed relationship between the temporal frames of past, present and future and teleological ideas of time passing. The recognition of this agency of things, feelings, and ideas from the past and its political potential has a long-lasting genealogy: it is central to Reinhart Koselleck’s concept of ‘futures past’, referring to the “onetime future of past generations or, more pithily, [...] a former future.”<sup>78</sup> Koselleck insists on the connection, as stated by Tribe, “between a chronological past, a lived present that was once an anticipated future, and expectations of the future.”<sup>79</sup> A related concept is ‘afterlife’, which became prevalent with its usage moving “away from longstanding meanings in religious, archaeological, and art studies”<sup>80</sup>, building instead upon Walter Benjamin’s reflection on ‘Nachleben’ connected to the idea that “works, lives, languages, and media possess a historicity that cannot be reduced to the continuum of temporal unfolding preferred by the nineteenth-century German historicism associated with such proper names

76 Xine Yao: *Disaffected: The Cultural Politics of Unfeeling in Nineteenth-Century America*. Durham: Duke University Press 2021, p. 5.

77 Scott: *Omens of Adversity*.

78 Reinhart Koselleck: *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, p. 11.

79 Keith Tribe: “Translator’s Introduction”, in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, by Reinhart Koselleck. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, pp. vii-xx, here p. x.

80 Nancy Rose Hunt: “Afterlives: A Trajectory and the Curatorial Turn”, in: *Allegra Lab*, May 2020, <https://allegralaboratory.net/afterlives-a-trajectory-and-the-curatorial-turn/> (accessed on August 19, 2024).

as Leopold von Ranke.”<sup>81</sup> This renewed academic interest in afterlives remains engaged with the affective and embodied workings of unresolved traces of the past, but has become increasingly linked to political affects. An important body of this research has been dedicated to the afterlives of socialist projects across the globe and the ability of their material, cultural, and political remains to transmit collective affects across time and space.<sup>82</sup> While ruins, residues, remains, relics, or memories occupy an important space in the imagination of socialism from its aftermath, inseparable from the notions of the end and failure, emotions which the socialist past still generates point to the “endings that are not over”<sup>83</sup>, and an agency that unfolds not as being caught or stuck in the past, but as “living on and after that both remains attached to what came before and [...] departs from it in ever-new directions.”<sup>84</sup> It is these future oriented, ever-new directions inseparable from the socialist past that deserve our attention.

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81 Gerhard Richter: *Afterness: Figures of Following in Modern Thought and Aesthetics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, pp. 2–3.

82 Christina Schwenkel: *Building Socialism: The Afterlife of East German Architecture in Urban Vietnam*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020, p. 8.

83 Avery Gordon: *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, p. 139.

84 Richter: *Afterness*, p. 4.

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## “NO ONE EXPERIENCED WHAT I HAD” (INTERVIEW WITH MIRZA ALIJAGIĆ)

MARKO ZUBAK (ZAGREB)

Mirza Alijagić was a lead singer of the Bosnian pop group Mirzino Jato (‘Mirza’s Flock’) formed in the late 1970s, as a local answer to Boney M. Their first single “Apsolutno Tvoj” (‘Absolutely Yours’) became an instant success and has remained the most successful Yugoslav disco hit.<sup>1</sup> The interview was conducted in Belgrade in 2015.

Marko Zubak (MZ): You experienced a meteoritic rise to stardom during the late 1970s. How did your music career begin? Your road to fame was not typical and neither was your background.

Mirza Alijagić (MA): I don’t think a single ex-YU pop star experienced what I did. This was truly new for everyone, for music critics, for journalists. Literally everyone was in a complete state of shock. No one knew what to do. First came that first single of ours. You know, I am an opera singer by vocation and for me, this whole thing that we’ve been doing was just fun, fooling around, but in a good, positive way. For that first demo record I even called one of my friends to come and sing for me, so that I could first see what is this all about – because I didn’t have the time. The thing is that I was pretty busy at the Sarajevo opera where I worked and had to prepare for the roles. I also went to the music academy, though unfortunately, I never finished, because show business literally pulled me away. I was in a privileged situation at the academy because my status was different from typical regular students. I don’t think any other student had such an arrangement. I took courses which professors taught me outside of the usual schedule. I studied piano, solfeggio, music theory, singing. And I had all that because I was seen as an extraordinary talent. I soon began to sing at different places. I sang on television, in a choir, in another choir, and also recorded some backing vocals here and there, as well as for the annual Sarajevo pop music festival *Vaš šlager sezone* (‘Your Hit of the Season’). And then major Yugoslav pop star Zdravko Čolić called me to sing backing vocals at his Sarajevo concert. That shook me. I was rather blown away, to be fair. He asked me to join him at the New Year’s Eve Concert at the Skenderija, a major sport hall in Sarajevo. In those years, up to five thousand people would come

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1 See also Magdalena Fürnkranz’ and Juri Giannini’s article in this volume.

to those New Year's concert celebrations and Čolić wanted to have good vocals around him. The wider public still didn't know me, but I was already acknowledged in certain Sarajevo music circles, though nothing special. Anyway, I was delighted to be invited and sang there. Around then was when I decided to start a solo career. I mean why should I sing only for others, right?

MZ: The Track "Absolutely Yours" by Mirzino Jato appeared out of nowhere and instantly became a huge hit. How did that single come about? Who was responsible for the sound? How and why did you jump on the disco bandwagon?

MA: Well, I was thinking about how I could make an impact, do something really big. Boney M. was huge at the time, in Yugoslavia as well. So, when Zele Lipovača, the guitarist and songwriter with the heavy metal-band Divlje Jagode ('Wild Strawberries') received an offer to compose a few songs, it all clicked together. We also needed some intriguing lyrics to match the tune. At the time, the Serbian lyricist Marina Tucaković was just emerging. She was to be acclaimed in the future and ended up having tons of major hits in her resume. I went to see her in Belgrade. When she saw me, she was stunned: "Wow, Mirza you look awesome!" – she gave me that look. I told her: "Marina, I am here for business only. We'll discuss other things some other time, ok?" [Hahaha] "What do you want?" – she asked me. "Well, I need some lyrics!" and then I sang her the tune. And that's how she wrote "Apsolutno tvoj". The success of the song was very much due to her lyrics. But also, with my voice! If some typical pop singer had recorded it, it just wouldn't have been the hit it ended up being. So, it was a joint effort, though it was Zele who always, more or less, behaved as if he'd done everything. I never argued with it: it didn't really matter.

MZ: Where was the greatest Yugoslav hit actually recorded?

MA: Well, we recorded the demo in an improvised music studio in Sarajevo, run by the sound engineer Nikola Borota. I'd just returned from the theatre from some production, and sang the tune in a hurry. We recorded the whole thing in a matter of hours. That's how the first demo was done. Along with me there were Zumreta Miđić – Zuzi Zu – and Jasna Gospić from the Sarajevo pop group Ambadori. She was already well-known but she didn't know me, and you know, I could be quite slick at times, deft at certain things, when I performed somewhere as a singer, you know [...]. First of all, I was pretty tough, both physically and verbally. I could have a sharp tongue occasionally, and from time to time, I would even punch someone if, for example, some musician became obnoxious. So, I entered the studio and said: "Ok we are going to sing it like this" to which Jasna put her hand on both

ears and eyes, in a sense, like: “Really? Are we seriously singing with this guy? He doesn’t have a clue” [Haha].

MZ: There were some problems getting the track released, right?

MA: Once we’d recorded the demo, in some two to three hours tops, Borota mixed it and together we went to the main Sarajevo state record label Diskoton and offered them the track but they declined it. We went with this demo to all of the twelve major Yugoslav record labels and they all rejected it. That speaks for itself, doesn’t it? Were there really, at these places, the right people employed? Those who understood music and had a feeling for something new and fresh? Well, obviously not. Anyway, this came to me as a shock. I was just at the begging of my career, I was just starting, I was in my mid-20s, and I was hit big time. I received this major blow to my face, which went then straight to my brain. But a few believed. After Predrag Peca Popović, at the time among the best Yugoslav rock critics, heard the demo for the first time, he approached me. Normally, he wasn’t one of those who would sweet-talk you just for the sake of it. But he told me: “Well, congratulations, you are a star now”. I knew who he was, but I didn’t know what he was on about, it really wasn’t clear to me. But he backed it up: “This is for sure the biggest Yugoslav hit of all time!” So, we went once more to Belgrade PGP RTB records, as Borota knew some people there. He pleaded them to print the track in whatever small distribution. And they eventually agreed, but said they could print only some 3,000 copies, no more, that’s it.

MZ: Audiences were immediately interested?

MA: When PGP RTB released those 3,000 copies, I told them that I wished to perform the track on TV, on the specialized TV music show called *Pop ekspres*, created by two young guys from Belgrade TV, with whom I soon became friends, Tucko and Bucko [Branimir Dimitrijević and Boris Miljković]. They were really thrilled with me: first, I was a Bosnian; second, I was funny; and third, I could talk. And they shot this video, and as a back story, told reporters to go to the city and ask people if they’d ever heard of Mirzino Jato before. Who? Who are they? Never heard [...]. Well, then, here you are, this is Mirzino Jato. And at the time, *Pop ekspres* was the best and most popular Yugoslav pop music TV show, with the great line-ups, featuring top music stars plus one new, emerging act. And I was that new rising singer. Oh man, what a line-up that was: Bijelo Dugme, Srebrna Krila, Yu Grupa, Generacija 5, I can’t remember all the names. Unbelievable. Zumreta and Jasna didn’t perform with me then. To be honest, very few believed in the song. Even they didn’t believe in it. So, it was Marina [Tucaković] who actually helped

me find some girls to sing with me on the show. The only ones who believed in the track were Nikola [Borota], Marina [Tucaković], [the journalist] Peca Popović and me. Even Zele didn't have faith. But immediately after the show was aired, pure chaos ensued – literally, a madhouse. I left the studio and stopped a taxi as I wished to go back to Marina's place where I was staying overnight. So, I enter the taxi and the driver immediately tells me: "Oh, man, you won't believe what I just saw on TV. Some guy with some deep, deep voice sang this song!" Ok, I literally froze. I told him – that was me! Well, he nearly bumped into a car in front of us. He hit the brakes, and almost screamed: "Really? Come on, sign me an autograph!" Complete shock! I mean, come on, the record was still not out, I was stunned.

MZ: And once out, how did the sales go?

MA: The very next day we went to PGP RTB records, to get the records, but we couldn't get through as a crowd had gathered and was blocking the entrance. What I didn't know was that the label, in the meantime, had announced that the record would be in the stores the next day. To be precise, in that one particular shop in Makedonska street where their biggest store was located. I still didn't know what was going on. I just saw tons of people waiting. Famous Yugoslav schlager singer Dragan Stojnić, who was one of the music editors at the PGP RTB, turned to me and said: "Come here, I want you to see something." And he walked me to the window facing Makedonska street: "Do you know why they came? Because of you!" And all those 3,000 singles were sold on that day, can you imagine? Unbelievable, a true phenomenon! Such a thing just moves you, gives you wings.

Then they printed another 10,000 copies, then another 20,000 and then again, another 30,000. I soon lost count. I was often at PGP RTB records in Belgrade, and would routinely see salesmen asking for 5,000 copies, for 20,000 copies of Mirzino Jato. I think we received the money for some 300,000 copies. But it was rumoured that the single sold in even greater numbers, and that some copies were lost, which could be true – that's how it was done back in the days. Soon, three or four months later the second single came out. Jasna [Gospić] only recorded studio vocals for the first track, she never performed with us. So, then came Gordana Ivandić, sister of the famous Bijelo Dugme drummer Ipe Ivandić. And then Zuzi joined the band. We had some 280 performances that year. Imagine that! Find me anyone in the world who performed 280 times a year. We toured on ship across the Adriatic coast for three months straight, often performing two times a day. I was walked around like a circus bear and didn't have a clue where we were going, nor what we were doing next.

Mića Marković, an incredible jazz musician and a real gentleman of the shady

Yugoslav music business, once talked to me. He was such a nice guy with great manners. He treated me as if I were his senior, even though I was just a kid. I knew who he was, and would freeze out when I would see him, I just loved his jazz jams, I would like to hear him live now. When he heard me singing, he said: “Wow this is unbelievable, we are pushing this.” You can imagine what that meant to me. Though of course there were also those at PGP RTB records who didn’t root for me.

MZ: How was the money?

MA: Once I came to Belgrade to sign a contract at PGB records, they say we’ll pay you a bit. When I returned to Sarajevo, I’d already spent some money. You know, it cost me to travel to Belgrade, stay there for four, five days – it was not a small expense for me. I didn’t earn much back then. So, when I returned to Sarajevo, I went to the bank the next morning. I knew a lady who worked there, she was a fan of ours. I told her: “Please give me some money.” She said: “Ok, there is money on your account, how much do you want?” I didn’t have a clue how much in fact was there, so I just told her to give it all to me. I thought it was going to be a couple of hundred German marks. But then she said she needed to speak with her boss and went to see him. When she came back she told me the director wished to speak with me. I went upstairs and he told me: “Mirza please, don’t take out all the money – I won’t have enough to service the clients.” “What’s he on about?” – I thought. “Well, Mirza, you wish to take 27 thousand marks?” he asked. If I didn’t black out then! – You could buy three VW Golfs for that kind of money. The Golf was a good car back then. I got so much money that first time. Not to mention later.

MZ: You had a striking media appearance, was that strategically planned?

MA: Yes, I don’t think there was a single TV show in Yugoslavia where we didn’t perform. I became the first Yugoslav pop singer to perform live on the main evening TV news. Can you imagine what it meant back then to sing on a national television at the evening news, on that major broadcast of the day? Not on some agricultural show, where singers occasionally made guest appearances. And I sang a complete song, from start to finish. This was my idea, the perfect way to promote us. And I was proven right.

The name of the group was also important. I thought of Mirzino Jato, because of the girls. But it didn’t catch on from the start, and I thought it might be changed at one point. But, you know, let it be more girls, more birds, and this is how it eventually stuck. First it was Mirza and the Flock, but that didn’t sound right, Mirza’s Flock sounded much better. Another thing on which I insisted was fashion. With

my theatre background, I asked for us to have proper clothes. This was quite new on the music scene. We changed our outfits two to three times per show, just for the fans. The girls went to London to buy clothes, or we would go together to Italy and buy some garments there. When I now look at the photographs from 35 years ago, our look is now in, but it wasn't back then. Then it caused a shock, but now it is fashionable and trendy.

MZ: Did Boney M. serve as a model? It seems the track effectively provides local imprint to eurodisco of the 1970s.

MA: That was more or less Zele's idea, he was the one who created the sound. He was in charge of the music. He did research that sound, one must admit this. He was capable of working throughout the night on that perfect sound and he really created it. As far as all that is concerned, he was unparalleled. What's interesting is that for 35 years no one has managed to copy it. We really had our own sound. That combination of soprano, alto and bass just does not exist in the literature of music. It was my idea to have a soprano contrary to such musical heritage, so to form a unique harmony that is hard if not impossible to emulate. I even went crazy a few times. I gave the track to some people who know how to read music, to practice it ahead of one concert and when I came back later, I discovered they still didn't know how to sing it! They said there was no way for them to copy the original. So, what should I have done? Another time we had a big concert in Belgrade at the Pionir Hall [Aleksandar Nikolić Hall] and the show was sold out five days ahead, but our guitarist didn't show up and had to look for a substitute. This renowned Belgrade guitar player, I will not name him, came to rehearse but he couldn't play it. Oh my [...]. I don't play guitar, but I took his guitar and played it for him on a single string and he still couldn't get it.

MZ: How did you juggle your new pop career with your work at the Sarajevo opera house?

MA: Of course, there was some trouble, some jealousy. Along with being a member of an opera choir, immediately, from the very start of my opera career I had solo roles, bigger or smaller. They said I was the best bass ever to come to that theatre. I was Sparafucile in *Rigoletto*, that's the biggest bass role out there. I was Angelotti in *Tosca*, Zuniga in *Carmen*, again a main bass part. I sang in *La Bohème*, and had a minor part in *My Fair Lady*. This was all happening in the same period. But I managed to prepare all these roles. I sang them all very well, but they didn't treat me ok. I can't remember what production it was, but an incredible thing happened once. The whole theatre, the entire crowd stormed onto the stage after my aria and

asked me for an autograph, and the production had to stop. No one expected this. The theatre director told me, “Mirza, please, don’t do this in the future.” Or for instance, I was late for the rehearsal, just five minutes and they began poking at me, messing with me, like: “You can’t do that Mirza.” But, to be honest, I started neglecting the opera then.

MZ: You were the star. Mirzino Jato released another LP in 1983, but then you kind of disappeared, almost as suddenly as you emerged. Why did you stop?

MA: You know that one year was just packed with events. I am telling you, it was pure chaos, the stuff that movies are made of. Someone should really make a film based on these events. For instance, one time I was in Belgrade, I had to perform at the *Nedeljom popodne* (‘Sunday afternoon’) TV show. Shooting was at 10 am, with the broadcast at noon. I told them I needed to fly to Zagreb after and wouldn’t be able to catch the plane, which left at 1pm. And all the PGP RTB production team got up on their feet to keep that plane from taking off. The plane, full of passengers, was waiting for me on the runway for a full twenty minutes. When the car picked me up, we arrived literally in front of the plane, as if I was the president of some country. The crew told the passengers that Mirza will come and they would be a little delayed, but when I entered, they started clapping [...]. Crazy! All that, for more than a year. No one experienced what I lived through. But slowly it became all a bit too much for me, to be honest. I think I’d just had it. I was married, I had a son and when you go on a tour you don’t come home for a month. That was just too much for me.



## “I MANAGED THE FIRST YUGOSLAV PRIVATE BALLET TROUPE” (INTERVIEW WITH LEPOSAVA LOKICA STEFANOVIĆ)

MARKO ZUBAK (ZAGREB)

Leposava Lokica Stefanović is a choreographer and a pioneer of Yugoslav jazz dance. Her troupe Lokice performed with Zdravko Čolić on his 1978 tour ‘Travelling Earthquake’, becoming an instant sensation. Lokica became a recognisable symbol of the genuine dance craze that swept Yugoslavia in the late 1970s.<sup>1</sup> The interview was conducted in Belgrade in 2015.

Marko Zubak (MZ): In the late 1970s you became known across Yugoslavia for leading the all-female dance troupe Lokice. But you were dancing in public a whole decade earlier. How and when did your career take off?

Leposava Lokica Stefanović (LLZ): It started long before disco music. And before the first discotheques emerged in Belgrade in 1968, with the so-called discotheque Kod Laze Šećera (‘By Sugar Laza’), followed by Cepelin (‘Zepellin’) near Tašmajdan, and later Aquarians (‘Aquarians’) at Slavia Square, all the way to smaller clubs which opened at local community centres. My dance career preceded all that. I graduated from the classical ballet school, but never went for a single audition for a classic ballerina. I was not interested in any of that. Already during my basic ballet training, I had begun dancing in mid 1960s at the Boris Radak studio where I learned new different steps. Radak introduced jazz dance to Belgrade. He learned it from Broadway choreographer Ray Harrison who came here in 1960 under the USA Cultural Exchange program and directed musicals throughout Yugoslavia. I also watched choreographer Don Lurio who defined the style of Italian TV variety shows, imagining myself dancing with him.

MZ: This is when you formed your first dance troupe Jazz-Ball?

LLS: Yes, I saw that many of my friends, fellow graduates from the ballet school, weren’t working – we were an exceptionally large generation, about twenty of us graduated in the same year, in 1967. So, I simply asked a few of them if they wished to dance with me. So, in 1967, I formed a dance troupe called Jazz-Ball with my colleagues. ‘Jazz-Ball’ is a portmanteau of jazz and ballet, even though this is the

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1 See also Adriana Sabo’s article in this volume.

wrong term. That was jazz dance, while ballet is ballet, its form is well known. We practiced in a hall belonging to the amateur folk ensemble, whenever it was available. And we performed in the first great TV music shows, such as *Koncert za ludi mladi svet* ('Concert for Crazy Young People') directed by Jovan Joca Ristić, who was among the first in the world to illustrate songs, turning local pop tracks into music videos, like MTV would do twenty years later. Another Yugoslav TV visionary, Zagreb director Antun Marti invited us to dance in his show for 5 minutes straight, unprecedented at the time, since dance TV acts lasted up to 2,5 minutes tops. With his magic and my choreography, we danced to a medley consisting of three James Bond theme songs, seemingly instantly changing our outfits as the tunes changed. All the other dance troupes that performed on TV were composed of dancers from their respective city theatres. But Jazz-Ball was the first private ballet group in Yugoslavia and I was also its leader and manager. The troupe performed till 1970. Some girls went on to dance in the theatre, and others went elsewhere. And I also had enough. You know, my father was an engineer and since I was the only child, I began studying architecture. It was the closest thing to art. I studied for ten years since during this time I was dancing professionally, so I just wished to finish and get my degree.

MZ: In the latter part of the 1970s you along with your new troupe became the familiar face of many TV music and variety shows. Yet television was not your first choice, right?

LLS: No, that was theatre. Theatre was my greatest passion. There I could feel the audience, which I loved. And I began working in theatre productions primarily as a choreographer not as a dancer. In fact, after graduating from ballet school, even before Jazz-Ball was formed, I initially did some choreographies for the Dadov amateur theatre in Belgrade. I was working on a monodrama where the main actor moved like a fox. After Jazz-Ball dissolved and I finally graduated from the university, I again went back first to theatre productions. For two seasons, from 1975 to 1977, I was a choreographer at the Yugoslav Drama Theatre in Belgrade. I redesigned their top floor into a ballet hall, so that actors could properly train with mirrors, and not just on stage. I also got to work on the canonical Marin Držić's renaissance comedy *Dundo Maroje* where all the roles, both male and female, were played by men. I created such a choreography that each time when the festivities at the square commenced, audiences would clap so intensely that the performance had to be halted, which was inconceivable back then, till the actors bowed, even with requests that the whole scene be repeated.

MZ: However, eventually you went in the other direction, to television, which was also experiencing a boom. The move coincided with the emergence of your second dance troupe, Lokice: how did it come into being?

LLS: I was doing a choreography at the Yugoslav Drama Theatre for some vaudeville, and since I was close to composer Aleksandar Sanja Ilić, who lived just a block away and I considered him kind of like my younger brother, it was natural for me to ask him to compose some music for it. Soon he had a TV show featuring his own tunes, and asked me to make a choreography for a few of his tracks. I warned him that I didn't have a troupe anymore, but he told me not to worry and brought four of his female friends, who he knew from the city. On that show, I was only a choreographer, while the girls danced. But soon, in June 1977, there was another similar show. I can't remember who the director was but he wished to have more dancers in it. So, I called one of my old friends and, after seven years of inactivity, I quickly got back in shape. In just two weeks I lost weight and began dancing again. One of the girls soon left for America, but the six of us continued to work as Lokice. The age gap between me and the youngest dancer was huge, ten years, but people had no idea because we all kind of looked the same.

MZ: You were known for your strict discipline within Lokice.

LLS: I told the girls from the very beginning: I am a difficult person to work with, very demanding, you need to be a bit crazy to do it. But I can promise you that in six months you will have your TV show. They agreed and we started working. I didn't tolerate lateness. If you were late, it was deducted from your fee. For each mistake during the show, it was 10% off. Later, it became even more strict once we began performing solo as a troupe. Iron discipline ruled. While we were on tour, after concerts we would eat and then go to sleep because the next day we had to travel and look good again. We had to wash our hair. It had to be clean for each show, since hair was our trademark. Ever since I'd been a kid, I told others in the playground what to do, was careful that all was well organized and everyone felt ok. A few of my girls studied and I promised their parents that they could dance with us but only if they studied. I knew that from my own experience. My father only let me lead Jazz-Ball troupe if I took exams. The funniest thing was that even when we returned home, the girls would still phone me asking things. I said: "Do you have a mother? Ask her!" They just got used to me taking care of them. They had a full make-up kit, but I had everything else, from antibiotics to bandages, and nylon stockings that tightened twisted ankles but remained invisible. There was no way my dancers would perform without stockings. Legs just looked better with them. We had the precise, special darker shade for the summer, and lighter for the winter since there was no solarium at the time.

MZ: Lokice became known as the attractive dancers that accompanied singer Zdravko Čolić from Sarajevo who, after releasing his 1978 LP *Ako priđeš bliže* ('If You Come Closer'), became the biggest pop star in Yugoslavia, in part due to incorporating dance rhythms into his tunes.

LLS: His manager Maksa Čatović, who worked with Čolić at the time, invited us to join him at the 1977 Zagreb music festival. For a while we were around him, accompanying him at occasions. Each year, the popular TV show *From Head to Toe* would proclaim the personality of the year, and in 1978 it was Čolić. The show was on my birthday on March 31, shot at the Zemun Pinki hall in Belgrade with Raffaella Carrà as a special guest. The following month, in April, we had already joined Čolić on his famous tour *Travelling Earthquake*, which lasted until the end of summer.

MZ: How did the tour look from your perspective?

LLS: Well, it was something different, certainly never seen before in Yugoslavia. There had never been such an all-female dance group, all good-looking at the scene. At the beginning of each concert we were specially introduced, along with other guests. "Good evening friends", the announcer said, and then Čolić would enter and immediately all hell broke loose. We danced together, danced alone, a true spectacle not yet seen before. Sport halls were sold out in April and May while it was still cold, and then during summer major stadiums like Belgrade's Marakana and Sajarevo's Koševo. I picked a few of his tunes which I liked the most like "Glavo luda" ('Crazy Head') and "Pjevam danju pjevam noću" ('I Sing All Day, I Sing All Night') and made a choreography. At first, it was a bit shaky to get everything right, but eventually everything clicked just fine. There is this recording of "Glavo luda" where we dance at Kalemegdan fortress for the Yugoslav-Hungarian TV co-production *Duplex*. It was at the end of the tour, we just came from the sea, all tanned and Čolić was simply great there, his legs moved like a ballet dancer, he looked amazing.

At first, we all got along well, we hung out after concerts. It was a big crew, with musicians and us. Sure, like in any family when you're always together, inevitably some trouble erupts, especially when so many different personalities are in one place. Someone is vain, another likes to tease, others like to quarrel. And manager Džarovski was notorious for his intrigues. Once, after the concert we had to return to Belgrade because two girls had their exams. Džarovski reluctantly agreed and arranged the next day for a car to pick us up and return to the gig in the next town. But exams were moved to the afternoon and we couldn't make it on time but Džaro nevertheless instructed the ticket clerks to tell the fans that Lokice will be there.

Čolić overheard this, and asked him why was he lying. And Džaro uttered then that sentence which buried everything: “Well, they bring you half of the audience!” This was in the middle of the tour, we still had two months left, but at that moment we disappeared. Zdravko also fell in love with my dancer Jasna and grumbled about the strict regime I imposed. He was angry with me and I was always fine with everyone hating me as long as everything was under control, at least while we were under contract. Afterwards they could do whatever they pleased.

MZ: Jovan Ristić shot a documentary about this tour, which captured some of this ambience.

LLS: Again and again, I keep coming back to that movie that was supposed to open in cinemas after all these shows were over and somehow still remain interesting to fans. There is that scene in it with me training, choreographing “Robot Man”, Čolić’s euro-disco track, which targeted the German market. The film crew arrived and Ristić turned to me: “Listen, we were just in Sarajevo, and they all praised him so much, his teacher, his neighbours, pedestrians on the streets, saying how he wonderful he is, good with parents, excellent at school, great at sports. Do me a favour. Everyone sees that he is not a natural dancer, so just say it. That will help the film, at least he will not appear perfect.” I said: “Ok”. It’s not difficult for me to tell the truth, especially if it is for the good cause. And I said those famous words into camera: “Zdravko is not a talented dancer. He is tall, and a little stiff, but he practices, and you can see the results.” And he really danced great at the end. Well, he got mad at me for this. He soon went to serve the army and we never worked with him again. We didn’t see each other for 12 years.

MZ: While he was still in the army you performed together in 1979, at the New Year’s Eve at Tito’s Brijuni Islands residence? A famous photo immortalized the event.<sup>2</sup>

LLS: In fact, I danced three times for Tito. The first time with my Jazz-Ball troupe back in the late 1960s. A newspaper photo showed us dancing in front of Tito and his wife Jovanka in the Belgrade Youth Centre. *Politika*, the biggest Belgrade daily, reported: “Tito especially liked the game between beat and folk music performed by the Jazz-Ball dance troupe.” The second time was that famed performance in Brijuni Islands at the New Year’s Eve of 1979. We arrived there straight from Zagreb where we were shooting the New Year’s TV show. Two Mercedes picked us up and drove as fast as if they were on a modern highway. That evening we danced with Čolić in the hotel. Tito was not feeling well and stayed with us only till 1am.

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2 A photo taken on this occasion is featured on the cover of this issue of *TheMA*.

The photo is actually from the following day, when we were invited to his White Villa residence. It was cold, it even started to snow. We hopped on the bus, all dressed up in costumes from our TV show where we danced to old evergreens, such as “Fever” or “16 Tons”. When our turn came, we went upstairs to the saloon where Tito was sitting with his poodle and entourage beside him. I had a solo, and as I was walking towards him, the poodle began barking at me. Afterwards, as we were sipping our drinks, I asked if we could take a photo with Tito, since he always took so many photos. So, we stopped by his side, and some army major dragged Čolić, wearing his army uniform, into the frame. That’s how that photo was made. We entertained Tito one final time, half a year later, for his birthday. We’d just landed from New York and they picked us up from the runway and drove us to Dobanovci. Actor Ljubivoje Ršumović who led that program, later said that after the end Tito asked for “Loknice” [a pun – the mispronounced name of the troupe now meant hair curls] to go once more, as an encore. If only I’d heard it back then. Well, at least I have something to remember.

MZ: You parted ways with Čolić but this was not the end of Lokice?

LLS: We performed as a troupe for another two years with a few changes. Zdravko’s girlfriend Jasna left the troupe, Boba went to London, and actress Jelena Tiska stepped in for four months. We worked mostly with the comedy music ensemble Sedmorica mladih (‘Seven Youngsters’), regularly appearing in their popular TV show *Sedam plus Sedam*. When they shot the pilot, we were still on tour and they employed some dancers from the theatre with whom they were not satisfied. Consequently, they called me, wishing to recreate something from the movie *Saturday Night Fever*, which was a huge hit, but I had yet to think about it, because we’d been away for so long. So, I showed them the film. And Čolić also had his last performance before the army. Risić asked me to prepare Sedmorica mladih so they could dance to “Glavo Ludo” dressed as us, Lokice. They were amazing, true comedians, coming up with jokes in an instant. Fantastic! We quickly became friends and they asked me to stay as their choreographer for the entire series. We had a sketch or an act in each episode of the show and were later featured in the opening and closing sequences. In fact, that was the first time we danced with partners. One time we arranged another dance medley with various national dances. There were Scottish, Can-Can, Spanish, and then Russian dances which we danced to, as well as “Moskau Moskau”, the euro disco track by Dschinghis Khan. Unfortunately, the segment was never aired since the Soviets had just invaded Afghanistan and it was cut from the show.

MZ: At the peak of your fame, Lokice released two singles and an LP, featuring a few disco songs, most notably “Disco Lady.” How did you end up singing?

LLS: I desperately wished to make a record. I thought it would be good to have some songs ready when Čolić returns from the army. So maybe we could do something new, a musical of a kind with a storyline where we would sing and dance together. I even went to New York and rehearsed there. That was the main idea behind it. Sanja Ilić, Dejan Petković and Đodre Novković composed the tracks and disco was in fashion then. I think it was interesting, people bought it at the time. The LP came naturally after the singles, since we already had four tracks and just needed another four to make it a full LP. It was good music, but difficult to sing. It might have been a bigger hit if someone else had recorded it, because we were primarily visually attractive, so we were best when we both sang and danced. However, that musical never materialized, since Čolić never contacted me. After leaving the army, he made some statements that were not fair to us, like he would never ever have any female dancers around.

MZ: Throughout most of that time you were actually employed and worked as an architect. Couldn't you make a living from dancing alone, from all those TV shows? After all, you were a major star yourself.

LLS: No, not a chance, no way. And appetites changed with time. With Jazz-Ball, we weren't paid much. I was ok with that, I liked dancing and didn't miss anything, especially after we could freely travel from the late 1960s on, when our passports became the most valuable in the world since we could enter some 120 states or so. But television in general later too paid us ridiculously, much less than singers who just opened their mouth. And they would have to return to us nine times for shooting, while singers would yawn and earn more. Secondly, television forced us to sign such unfavourable contracts where they retained all the rights, for all the frequent reruns, while we gave up everything and got the money for the original broadcast alone. Also, choreographers didn't get any royalties. So, it was not possible. The other girls were all freelancers, except me. I worked for five years at the office. I designed an eleven-story building in the centre of Priština. I worked even while I was on tour and used my days off then. Once we had a show in Zaječar, some 250 km away from Belgrade. I worked till 3 pm and then a car picked me up, dropped me at the venue and after the concert drove me back to Belgrade so that I could be at my workplace early the next morning. The following day the same procedure was repeated, only then they had to drive me to Bor, which was just 34 km away from Zaječar, but I had to travel some 1,000 kilometres just for these two concerts. I finally stopped working in 1980, when I passed the state exam and earned the status of an artist.

MZ: After forming the first private dance troupes you opened your own private ballet-recreational studio.

LLS: Yes, it opened in October 1981 in the former clothing store *Prvi Maj* ('First May') which had stood empty for a few years because it was envisaged for demolition. But they let me rent it. With my late husband I totally redesigned this huge, 250 m<sup>2</sup> space. We made one large hall, a smaller one, two dressing rooms, a waiting room for parents, two toilets, one bathroom, and a large office for me with a refrigerator and a bed where I could sleep.

MZ: You introduced also something resembling aerobics there, inspired by your visits to New York. Did you take some courses there? Was Jane Fonda your role model?

LLS: No, because she was still not into aerobics when I was there. I used to go to New York each winter and practice with Alvin Ailey at the American Dance Theatre. After my first visit, I took the whole troupe with me in May 1979, and brought them to Michael Shawn, another choreographer. When we were there, we spent a weekend at one mansion in Connecticut belonging to some scientist from Yugoslavia. It was a huge villa with an indoor pool where we swam before the dinner. There I saw two businessmen doing some exercises, claiming they could get rid of their belly with it in a week. Since everything about the body interested me, I approached them and they showed it to me, I could see that there was something there. Among the various books I brought from New York, there was a tiny booklet by Judi Sheppard Misset called *Jazzercise*, issued in 1976. Inside I saw some women doing some exercises, including jazz square, the step we learned at jazz dance plus some others. I began thinking if I could do something similar. I took one part from jazz dance, something from Judi and added the exercises from those businessmen. And I ordered a rhythm machine from my friend, an air-steward, to bring me from Singapore. Back then, people exercised without any music, they would just do it. I turned it on and tried out all the rhythms, then some music, wrote down everything for myself and called my friends to try something. So, when I opened my studio there were also these proto-aerobics there where these women exercised.

## BIOGRAPHIES

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TheMA is a peer-reviewed open-access research journal dedicated to the history of performing and visual arts. It is published biannually and specializes in the critical and trans-disciplinary historical study of artistic production and reception in various artistic genres including literature, theatre, music, painting, sculpture, and architecture.

This volume explores different aspects of the yet uncanonised disco culture that thrived in Yugoslavia from the late 1970s until the early 1980s. Yugoslav disco culture points to the many issues and dilemmas at the heart of late socialism: With funk pioneers and Estrada emulators, gender transgressors and male chauvinists, affluent clubbers and Roma dancers, mainstream promoters and hostile critics, disco resists the polarizing definitions of conformist or progressive, official or subcultural, repression or dissent. Operating within gray zones, it highlights the inadequacy of the outdated binary matrix typically used for the interpretation of popular culture under socialism.

