

# Contemporary Art in the Post-Yugoslav Space

Case Studies in Hauntology

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## 1 Introduction

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# 1 Introduction

## Yugoslav Hauntologies

*Jonathan Blackwood and Jasmina Tumbas*

From the vantage point of 2006, three years after the name “Yugoslavia” had disappeared from world maps and fifteen years after the complex processes of dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia formally began, the sociologist and philosopher Ozren Pupovac, writing in the Belgrade journal *PRELOM*, analyzed this ideological process in nascently hauntological terms:

Does not our immediate present, the present of the post-Yugoslav space, already proscribe the very formulation of the question of Yugoslavia? Is it not that the essential ideological consensus upon which this space is constituted, permeated as it is with anti-communist discourses and with an entire bestiary of political anachronisms – from the reactionary nationalist folklore to the political and economic dogmas of liberal capitalism rules out by its very definition and reference, if only in thought, to Yugoslavia and to the politics that this project embodied?<sup>1</sup>

Driven by what Pupovac described almost two decades ago as “an entire bestiary of political anachronisms,” we began to discuss the possibility of this anthology in the summer of 2021. Initially, the topic of our proposal was focused on the structural position of contemporary art in the post-Yugoslav space, deriving from the lack of political agency and the subcultural status of much of contemporary art production, felt particularly intensely in the five republics that are not part of the European Union. Gradually, our discussion became rooted in those most global of problems within contemporary art: a universal exhaustion through overwork (on the part of the artist/art worker) and overstimulation (potential audiences for art); the structural weakness of contemporary art as a set of institutional activities; and the instrumentalization of art, expanding to fill spaces in social work, community activities, childcare, and healthcare. The immiseration and exile of much of the late Yugoslav audience for art, and the persistence of the *forms* of the Yugoslav art world (artist societies and exhibiting spaces) without any of the financial *means* to sustain them, mark the burdens of being a cultural worker in the post-socialist Yugoslav space.

While the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 has been framed in Western discourses as the “end” of an oppressive era in “the East,” this book thinks through socialist Yugoslavia’s prevailing cultural legacies of nonalignment, antifascism, queer and feminist movements, and socially engaged art, whose presence haunts neoliberalism’s rapidly fracturing hegemony today. Marginalized within the European Union’s hierarchical spheres of culture, the post-Yugoslav region has had to contend with national, economic, social,

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## 2 *Contemporary Art in the Post-Yugoslav Space*

and political fragmentations since the early 1990s, grappling with nonexistent and often underfunded local art contexts, while simultaneously creating some of the most transgressive interventions in global debates around politics and art. The lack of political agency and the subterranean nature of contemporary art production beyond international art fairs or (some) national institutions are hardly confined to the space under consideration here; worsening labor conditions and a suffocating precarity are defining features of cultural workers' lives globally.

While the state of research on post-Yugoslav contemporary art remains peripheral in contemporary art discourses, the voices we highlight in this book—from a diverse and locally specific set of spaces in the post-Yugoslav region and its diasporas—both enrich and complicate histories of, and current practices in, art. This is particularly topical if we take into consideration the wars that followed after Yugoslav disintegration, most recently in Ukraine and Gaza, political conflicts that have resounded traumatic memories for—and calls for solidarity from—those who survived genocidal and nationalist violence in the 1990s. The antifascist foundation of Yugoslav socialism, and its relationship to the anticolonial nonalignment movement—a deeply “emancipatory project”<sup>2</sup>—has shaped generations of artists, theorists, and curators during and after the era of socialism; yet their voices have largely remained marginalized in discourses about anticapitalism and Western dominion over contemporary art.

This is in part due to the fact that more often than not, the state of post-Yugoslav art reflects the fragmented and shattered reality that shaped it: exhibitions focused on well-known and canonized artists, or on what many might perceive as a single niche part of post-Yugoslav experience; a small number of authors, curators, and cultural workers from the regional context would become “experts” tasked with the burden, and privilege, of shaping the narratives and discourses for local and international audiences; and what would end up being exhibited has often been limited by the scheduling of an exhibition, accompanied by small print production runs, which would make it nearly impossible for international researchers and anyone interested to find publications outside of the country in which it was produced. Most importantly, much of the art that would reach wider audiences was legible as avant-garde in the “Western” canon, valuing the emancipatory politics of abstraction, and conceptual, video, and performance art over other forms of art. Although the English-language literature dealing with art made during, and after, Yugoslavia has increased exponentially in the last twenty years, texts dedicated to examining the artistic and cultural legacies of the socialist project remain in the minority, in favor of studies attempting to reestablish national narratives locally—that is, Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian, Macedonian (etc.) art—or giving depth to practices already known internationally through monographic exhibitions. Exceptions include, among others, Miško Šuvaković and Dubravka Djurić; IRWIN; Mitja Velikonja; Bojana Pejčić; Dijana Jelača, Maša Kolanović, and Danijela Lugarić; Vladimir Kulić and Martino Stierli; Bojana Videkanić; Jasmina Tumbas; and Sanja Horvatinčić and Beti Žerovc,<sup>3</sup> as well as the majority of the authors in this volume.

Resisting the notion of a cohesive socialist Yugoslav heritage, we seek to offer polyphonic perspectives on how and why the disintegration of the formerly united, multiethnic federation of republics under the political project of antifascist socialism haunts our contemporary moment. Hauntology, a neologism merging “haunting” and “ontology,” first appeared as a concept in Jacques Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx* in 1993.<sup>4</sup> This was further developed and responded to in terms of *spectrality*, as outlined by Giorgio Agamben.<sup>5</sup> Its main usage has been through writings focused on popular culture and popular modernism

from the last forty years of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first, by Mark Fisher, Simon Reynolds, Merlin Coverley, and others.<sup>6</sup> Hauntology—despite the ever-expanding literature—is still a concept in formation and one that evades simple definition.

It is perhaps easier to start with what it is *not*: nostalgia for the past, with which it is often confused. The terms “Yugonostalgia,” “Yugostalgia,” and “Ostalgia” (German: *Ostalgie*) in contemporary post-socialist societies are often used as an insult. While easily leveled at the plethora of social media accounts that reproduce the signs, symbols, and rituals of the Yugoslav past, or political idealists who supposedly would like to return to an imagined version of the Yugoslav system without much by way of a practical plan for how to reverse thirty-five years of post-socialist transformation, “positive aspects of socialism are [also] *derogatively* marked as post-socialist nostalgia” in the case of struggling industrial workers demanding better conditions today.<sup>7</sup> But it is clear today—especially to the most disenfranchised—that the systemic factors that sustained Yugoslavia from without as much as they were taken advantage of within the system have disappeared and will not be recreated.

Drawing on Mitja Velikonja’s theorization of *Titostalgia*, Nataša Kovačević argues that “nostalgia” might be “redeemable” if

remembering Yugoslavia is not only about reinterpreting or reinventing the past, but also creating new meanings and contexts, available to the young generations who were born after Yugoslavia but share a vision of a more equitable world with the older generations.<sup>8</sup>

Dubravka Ugrešić too considered the emancipatory power of Yugonostalgia and named it her “own personal resistance movement,” which was treated as a threat and “political sabotage of the new Croatian state” in the 1990s.<sup>9</sup> Years later Ugrešić would reflect on this emancipatory power of Yugonostalgia, arguing that it had “lost its subversive quality, no longer a personal resistance movement but a consumer good,” adding that “in the intervening time, Yugonostalgia has become a mental supermarket, a list of dead symbols, a crude memento mori stripped of emotional imagination.”<sup>10</sup> Critical of the 2013 popular exhibition *Long Live Life—International Exhibition of Good Life from the 1950s till 90s in Yugoslavia*,<sup>11</sup> which featured “objects, sounds and aromas that comprised the life of an average Yugoslavian,”<sup>12</sup> Kovačević similarly argued that “Yugoslavia not only becomes graspable through such objects—it becomes the ‘object’ of history itself, watered down into a politically correct concept.”<sup>13</sup> Such an exhibition might serve to “exploit[] the contemporary climate of economic uncertainty and disenfranchisement so as to proffer a safe, unblemished image of the past, where communist ideology is merely an appendage (or even a marketing strategy) to everyday objects.”<sup>14</sup> This type of “depoliticization” is why Nikola Dedić and others have deduced that “Yugonostalgia still perfectly fits into today’s dominant, capitalist model of cultural industries.”<sup>15</sup> However, instead of falling into such ideological traps of venerating the past, Kovačević suggests that we might approach Yugoslavia as “a dynamic, transgressive force that can disturb the present.”<sup>16</sup>

The literature on—and mostly *against*—nostalgia abounds and almost every author in this book grapples with its draw in their quest to understand Yugoslavia through the hauntological, explicitly or implicitly. This is not surprising, as nostalgia is inseparable from the longings that continue to summon it. As Aleksandar Bošković argued already more than a decade ago, finding a conduit for what was destroyed during the “rupture of their previous life” inspired many “stateless” Yugoslavs to participate in

#### 4 Contemporary Art in the Post-Yugoslav Space

the ongoing online project (and book) *Lexicon of Yu Mythology*,<sup>17</sup> which “collected, exposed, and exhibited” what he called “ghostly memories” on behalf of all who were *exiled* from their “multinational togetherness.”<sup>18</sup> Instead of maligning such a nostalgic pull for people from Yugoslavia who were left with “a life’s worth of illegitimate pasts,”<sup>19</sup> Bošković understood the transgressive use of irony and humor in the collective endeavor for the *Lexicon* as its own form of “yearning for an alternative society where rectitude, equality, and solidarity are endlessly anticipated.”<sup>20</sup> Martin Pogačar has noted that such “digital ghosts of Yugoslav socialism ... turn into the specters of the past that haunt the present,” asking us to consider: “What are the contours of Yugoslav digital *afterlife*?”<sup>21</sup> Yugonostalgia is thus always the realm of an *afterlife*, ghosts of which are lingering in the present and future, while also standing in for what Ivana Bago has described—in the context of the pervasive fascination with the “surviving Yugoslav monuments”—as “a kind of Pompeii of the twentieth century.”<sup>22</sup> Looked upon favorably by the United States,<sup>23</sup> Yugoslavia’s *relics* of antifascist and open-border socialism continue to *haunt* the present,<sup>24</sup> manifested in what Gal Kirn has termed a “nostalgic yearning for a paradise lost” in the post-Yugoslav space and its diasporas.<sup>25</sup>

The Yugoslav relics of a more virtuous past during socialism haunt the prescribed fate for a people charged with being stuck in an eternal return to violence and barbarism. Accordingly, nostalgia is often treated like a pathology; its etymology invites such a designation, made of the Greek terms “nostos” and “algos,” translated to “return home” and “pain” respectively, being in 1688 first classified as a psychiatric disorder—*homesickness*—to describe “various displaced people of the seventeenth century.”<sup>26</sup> Sejla Kamerić’s *HomeSICK* (2001) (Figure 1.1) points to the pain that comes with



Figure 1.1 Šejla Kamerić, *HomeSICK*, 2001–present. Courtesy of the artist.

displacement: no matter where the work is displayed, the arrow always points in the direction of Sarajevo, the artist's home in the Balkans. But within the misaligned ideological unity of post-1989 Europe, relief from this homesickness for post-Yugoslavs has been reduced to one option: "final break with the reactionary past" and its illusory, sickening pull (nostalgia), in order to pursue the healthy "progress along the road to Europe."<sup>27</sup> Resisting such an ableist logic behind the "civilizing" mission of Western Europe, our book turns to Yugoslav hauntology as "post-nostalgic," always tied to nostalgia while knowing that it "describe[s] a world which can no longer be experienced as anything other than a sum of its pasts."<sup>28</sup>

This is a pithy reminder that in the post-Yugoslav space the past is always with us, be it through seemingly trivial yet impactful things, such as the shadow of an old socialist-era street sign (Leninova, now Aminta III, in Skopje), to the emptiness of largely abandoned socialist-era ritual spaces such as Trg Republike in Ljubljana, or the ghostly Federal Executive Council building in New Belgrade, a huge and important structure from a federal past standing empty in the shrunken present. A yearning for a future that can account for an emancipatory narrative of this socialist past, however fraught and complicated, has inspired much of the scholarship and curatorial work of the last two decades discussed in this book. While Breda Luthar and Maruša Pušnik gave an early warning against such "growing nostalgic yearning" in their 2010 book *Remembering Utopia: The Culture of Everyday Life in Socialist Yugoslavia*,<sup>29</sup> it is clear that some fifteen years later, the post-socialist Yugoslav space still is facing what Svetlana Boym termed, in another context, "the ghost of gigantic ambitions [that] continue[s] to haunt the [space]."<sup>30</sup>

Crucial developments for contemporary art mark the urgency of contending with the "gigantic ambitions" of antifascist socialism haunting the post-Yugoslav space, especially in the diaspora. The 2011 exhibition *Spaceship Yugoslavia. The Suspension of Time* (nGbK, Berlin)<sup>31</sup> was a precursor to today's increased interest in Yugofuturism, in itself arguably a hauntological concept, if we are to follow Bošković's claim that relics of Yugoslavia can function as "sites for the archeology of the future."<sup>32</sup> Curatorial commitments to exploring the varied late modernist memorializations of antifascist struggle and nonalignment have included the distinguished 2018 *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980* exhibition at MoMA, New York, along with other more modest endeavors, such as Zdenka Badovinac's 2021 *Bigger than Myself. Heroic Voices from Ex-Yugoslavia* exhibition at MAXXI, or the 2022 exhibition *Nothing's Guaranteed: Exhibition of Bosno-futurism*, curated by Jon Blackwood at Summerhall in Edinburgh. Wary of the return of "ghosts" haunting our moment, Badovinac nevertheless argues: "what is necessary today more than ever is to redefine the hero within us all, to reactivate the *long-dead* desire to live a life worth more than our individual life."<sup>33</sup>

Writing from the context of resistance movements in the post-Yugoslav space, Ana Vujanović and Bojana Cvejić developed the idea of the "transindividual self," a possible antidote for the prevailing "horizon of reigning individualisms."<sup>34</sup> For them, the "crisis of the social"<sup>35</sup> is the most urgent problem we face today, where crisis (from *krisis*) is understood as "a phase of passage between *life* and *death*."<sup>36</sup> Pupovac characterizes the liminal space of post-socialism as a "temporal caricature," which is trapped in the condition of being "not anymore, not yet," or, as he puts it, it is "stranded between negation and anticipation, between the past and the future."<sup>37</sup> A hauntological perspective on the post-Yugoslav art world might account for this ever elusive present, trapped in *transition*, or "a state marked by a stark ignorance of its own present."<sup>38</sup> In that regard, Piro

## 6 Contemporary Art in the Post-Yugoslav Space

Rexhepi has argued that “the secular submissive servitude” and “postsocialist nostalgia appropriating postcolonial approaches” not only “anesthetize” but “directly disavow the socialist-era structural racism,”<sup>39</sup> for another dimension haunts the history of, and contemporary research on, Yugoslav socialism: “the ghost of Islam.”<sup>40</sup>

Accounting for “the racialization of Bosnian women”<sup>41</sup> in their art, Sejla Kamerić and Selma Selman appear in Rexhepi’s analysis as moments of closeness with writer and activist Melika Salihbegović, who was arrested by the Yugoslav authorities in 1983, as she recalled, because they “were afraid of intellectual women returning to Islam.”<sup>42</sup> Salihbegović shared her treasured copy of Kamerić’s *Bosnian Girl* with Rexhepi toward the end of her life,<sup>43</sup> and she deeply connected to Selman’s “strength and sovereignty,”<sup>44</sup> whose doubly racialized position as a Bosnian woman of Romani descent has broken through the long-silenced voices of dissent against secular and religious violence in art.<sup>45</sup> The post-Yugoslav art space thus remains haunted by undead emancipatory legacies of socialist Yugoslavia, such as feminism, antifascism, nonalignment, and a striving toward freedom of religious belief. These colliding forces are summoned by contemporary artists who confront what Zhiyka Valiavicharska describes as a “restless history,” which, “in all its tensions, contradictions and complexity,” can serve “as a depository of historical experience to inspire, caution, and to draw lessons from.”<sup>46</sup> She adds: “In its unsettling multiplicity, it [twentieth-century socialist history] appears as an unfinished and a *ghostly* history—a history that will never rest.”<sup>47</sup>

Giorgio Agamben thinks through this restlessness by way of spectrality:

What is a spectre made of? Of signs, or more precisely of signatures, that is to say, those signs, ciphers or monograms that are etched onto things by time. A spectre always carries with it a date wherever it goes; it is, in other words, an intimately historical entity.<sup>48</sup>

This historical character and the limitless potentiality of its interpretation give dynamism to hauntological investigations in the post-Yugoslav context. It is not a unipolar method looking backward; rather, it reacts to the shifting contours of the perpetual present that we all inhabit. As Franco “Bifo” Berardi argued, we have for some time lived in cultural spaces lacking the modernist belief in a better, technologically underpinned future; while the post-digital climate gives us unparalleled access to artifacts and daily narratives from vanished worlds, so too are we numbingly aware of the harm that digital technologies can wreak on individual lives, and on communities, and aware that a future direction of travel seems likely to be much more dystopian than utopian. Berardi states:

In the first part of the [twentieth] century Fascists and Communists and supporters of Democracy held very different ideas ... but all of them shared the belief that the future will be bright, no matter how hard the present. Our post-futurist mood is based on the consciousness that the future is not going to be bright, or at least we doubt that the future means progress.<sup>49</sup>

This loss of a sense of a better future, perhaps felt most keenly in the years following the global coronavirus pandemic, is central to the deracinated awkwardness of our present hauntological moment. In looking back at footage of Yugoslavia from forty or fifty years ago, one may be uncomfortably aware of the different reality beyond the screen, and consumed with questions around “What happened to all these people after the

nineties?” The disintegration of the Yugoslav federation during 1987–1991 and the wars of Yugoslav succession that disfigured the last decade of the twentieth century were perhaps a harbinger of what Mark Fisher has identified as “dyschronia”: the failure of the promises and potentialities of Yugoslav socialism, and the transition period that followed have led to a sense of “time being out of joint.” Building on this notion, Fisher argues:

we can provisionally distinguish two directions in hauntology. The first refers to that which is ... *no longer*, but which *remains* effective as a virtuality (the traumatic “compulsion to repeat”, a fatal pattern). The second sense of hauntology refers to that which (in actuality) has *not yet* happened, but which is *already* effective in the virtual (an attractor, an anticipation shaping current behavior). The “spectre of Communism” that Marx and Engels had warned of in the first lines of the Communist Manifesto was just this kind of ghost; a virtuality whose threatened coming was already playing a part in undermining the present state of things.<sup>50</sup>

Being out of joint is a fundamental condition that came with the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and there is little sense that this rupture has been “reset” in terms of culture, society, and politics since the end of the 1990s. There are those socialized in the Yugoslav system who still imagine alternatives based on past lived experience as compared to those of the present; even in this everyday persistence, the idea of Yugoslavia continues to haunt ever more unsettled notions of the contemporary moment. The numbers that imagine a better alternative can now be found in precisely the emancipatory practices that this anthology addresses, although it can be argued that this has moved away decisively from a powerful state organized around Titoism and internationalism toward an embattled archipelago of ideas related to environmental activism, issues of gender and sexuality, loss of the commons, and complex and contingent imaginaries regarding the place of the former Yugoslav states vis-à-vis European accession. Of particular further significance are the marked absence and lack of diplomatic capital in debates concerning the systemic polycrisis facing us all at the level of global politics in the twenty-first century: the complex mesh linking conflict, climate emergency, the post-digital, right-wing authoritarianism, and populism. This dyschronia is also underpinned by the persistently uneven and disjointed commitment, or lack thereof, to the “entire” former region and its diverse diasporas by European and American elites.

Marked by the inability to cover “all” territories or issues haunting the post-Yugoslav space, our commitment lies rather within what Sara Ahmed has theorized as “complaint,” framed as a critique of the institutions that shape contemporary life. Ahmed writes:

To be haunted is to be hit by an inheritance. No wonder doors matter so much. Behind closed doors, that is where complaints are often found, so that is where you will find us, too, those of us for whom the house was not built, what we bring with us, who we bring with us, the worlds that would not be here if some of us were not here; the data we hold, our bodies, our memories; the more we have to spill, the tighter the hold. We knock on the door from behind the door, to complain as to knock on the doors of history. To knock on the doors of history is to inhabit the present even more, all the more; to breathe it in. No walls, no doors are solid enough to stop the *ghosts* from entering. The complaints in the graveyard can come back to *haunt* institutions. We can come back to *haunt* institutions. It is a promise.<sup>51</sup>

Our book is filled with such complaints, charged from the graveyard of Yugoslavia—brought on by nationalist divisions and geopolitical inequalities in the post-Yugoslav space—and pushing against the locked doors of Europe’s exclusionary art spaces and discourses. It is our hope that *Contemporary Art in the Post-Yugoslav Space: Case Studies in Hauntology* will offer, at least in part, some disturbance for the present moment by provoking a critical engagement with what Jasmina Cibic broadcast as the “the unfulfilled promises of the past”;<sup>52</sup> by that, we mean both allowing space for a “mourning” and a calling out of the palpable “disappearance” of what Kovačević termed “a cluster of ideological values” in the post-Yugoslav space, including “workers’ rights, solidarity, welfare policies, social egalitarianism, economic security, ‘brotherhood and unity’, anticolonialism and nonalignment in international politics.”<sup>53</sup>

It is also in this spirit that we feature Adela Jušić’s 2016 *Here Come the Women* on the cover: this work conjures up the hauntological forces of a Yugoslav socialism that is indebted to the feminist work of women who built that system, and whose descendants protect and champion that legacy in contemporary art today. Dressed in a pioneer uniform, with a red socialist neckerchief, the artist is pictured holding an official volume entitled *Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the National Liberation Struggle*. Jušić’s austere gaze confronts contemporary audiences with the material reality of a past that is not fully comprehensible in the neoliberal present, but whose presence in a parallel historical timeline is still palpable.<sup>54</sup> Focusing on the production, discussion, and consumption of contemporary art, the essays in this volume work through the complex and nuanced shifts in the arts in late socialist Yugoslavia up to the layered and contingent present and are grouped into three sections: “Shards of the Shattered Mirror—Post-War Transitions,” “Cultures of Exhibition and Display,” and “The Loss of Our Commons—Yugoslav Hauntologies.”

Moving beyond established visual historiographies of transition after the wars of Yugoslav succession from 1991 to 2001, the first section of the book, “Shards of the Shattered Mirror—Post-War Transitions,” focuses on the structurally vulnerable position of contemporary art practices in post-Yugoslav societies: chronically underfunded, with pre-war audiences having dropped by 80–90 percent, with little serious writing or discussion in media outlets regarding the production and function of contemporary art in society. The book begins with an essay by Bojana Pejić, who introduces a critique of Yugostalgia by way of the gendered category of a dowry. Positing it as an “inheritance” that includes the “immaterial capital” of “personal memory” of having lived during Yugoslav socialism, Pejić’s essay responds to an exhibition curated by Dunja Blažević at Collegium Artisticum in Sarajevo (organized by the Center for Contemporary Art, Sarajevo, 2012–2013). The exhibition included artists who were “born in and some of them even reached their adulthood in socialist Yugoslavia, where they had enough time to assemble their immaterial dowry.”<sup>55</sup> Pejić argues that “the memories in question should be aligned to that social milieu, which does not exist anymore (precisely since 1991).” She provocatively adds:

Are we now to claim that with the disappearance of the previous “social milieu,” the “group memory” also ceased to exist, would we be wrong? Well, yes and no. For though the social milieu on which the “imagined community” named *Yugoslavia* was based is *dead and gone* with “our” wars (1991–1999), the production of the individual remembrance in art (and life) may still take place. And it does. However, individual memories embedded in this exhibition belong today to other “social

milieus” constituted in the post-Yugoslav countries in which the artists currently live and work. Whether these individual artists’ memories about a lived past are (to become) a part of the new “group memory” in their respective milieus is an open question.<sup>56</sup>

More than a decade later, such a query about the fundamental instability of the memory of socialist Yugoslavia, or national memory in general, is a central leitmotif in this collection, addressed by way of hauntology. With essays by Bojan Ivanov, Jon Blackwood, Slavcho Dimitrov and Biljana Tanurovska-Kjulavkovski, and Jelena Petrović, “Shards of the Shattered Mirror” addresses the persistence of contemporary art practices working through the memory culture of emancipatory socialism within a debilitating reality of global capitalism. Authors think through art’s response to contemporary crises from the last decade, including war-induced resistances and alliances, the battle for LGBTQ+ rights, opposition to radical and populist nationalisms, and the mass migrations caused by climate change and conflict.

Bojan Ivanov, who along with Bojana Pejić had a professional career in socialist Yugoslavia as a historian, critic, curator, and institutional director, worries at the problematics of the Yugoslav space through an analysis of post-Yugoslav intellectual trends as manifested in individual texts. Blackwood’s essay traces a geographical horseshoe around the former Yugoslav republics little written about outside of the region—Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and North Macedonia—reading specific texts in a hauntological fashion. Slavcho Dimitrov and Biljana Tanurovska-Kjulakovski implicitly work through hauntological questions in their response to dance and performance practices in the post-Yugoslav space, writing that has remained largely absent not only from Western scholarship on the body, but also from that on queerness; the dense undergrowth of thinking around the body and queer performativity is haunted by the absence heretofore of such work created after 1991 in Macedonia/North Macedonia. The contribution of Jelena Petrović presents the post-Yugoslav space as permanently contested, focusing on politically engaged art countering or suggesting alternatives to hegemonic attitudes concerning nationalist politics, neoliberal economic orthodoxies, and a newly self-confident and devastatingly assertive patriarchy; using key examples from the last two decades, Petrović foregrounds a defiant cacophony of critical and oppositional responses by cultural workers in the post-Yugoslav space and diaspora.

The functioning of contemporary art as a dynamic space for alternative political imaginaries acts as a bridge between this first section and the second, “Cultures of Exhibition and Display.” This section has at its heart the mutation of institutions; the inertia and lack of mobility of old Yugoslav museums and galleries, kept barely afloat on minimal funding; and the risk taking of new institutions seeking to build audiences in such an unfamiliar and ever-changing present. In this section we learn from those who have spent decades building and maintaining independent cultural institutions after the brief moment of George Soros funding in the 1990s, discussed in Janka Vukmir’s contribution, to those seeking to reanimate old Yugoslav-era institutions in the present and engaging in work with newer forms such as biennials, or in acts of translation, presenting work from the region for the first time to audiences abroad. In her analysis of the curation of the “Yugoslav narrative” in recent X-ennials, Maja Ćirić teases out some of the complex problems surrounding individual interpretations of the Yugoslav past and the difficulty of “flattening” that past in the curatorial urgencies of the present.

Critically, we also present some of the misunderstandings that can occur from these attempted translations beyond the region itself, and how such attempts are perceived locally, by domestic audiences. These are misunderstandings that can fuel an unwelcome exoticization of the work and reveal the power differentials between individual artist-practitioners from the region and their Western equivalents. This is particularly germane in Ivana Vaseva and Bojana Piškur's meticulous essay focused on the non-aligned movement, and Irfan Hošić's insider's perspective on the cultural ecologies of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Built around an analysis of the Museum of African Art established in Belgrade in 1977, Sunnie Rucker-Chang's essay argues that the museum—due to its consistent engagement with “the developing world” under the policy of nonalignment—offered not only a corrective to the normalizing, flattening view of the “Other” in the Western world, but also a unique celebration of Blackness in the late Cold War period. Nela Gligorović focuses on the impact of post-socialist transformation on the discourse of exhibition-making in Montenegro, with particular reference to *The Marginalia of the Common* exhibition.

The final section, “The Loss of Our Commons,” underlines the timeliness of this anthology in the issues that it raises, in focusing on the post-socialist Anthropocene, the loss of the commons, and the nebulous new private ownerships of formerly publicly owned spaces, through to some of the consequences of many of the trends described earlier, and the building of a “Yugoslavia of the Mind” in a diasporic spectrum stretched around the rest of the globe. This section begins with Hana Halilaj's essay about the archives of the National Gallery of Kosovo (NGK), scrutinizing Yugoslav art history for its neglect and exclusion of Kosovo's local art world, made of “the unwanted people in a desired territory,”<sup>57</sup> a fact that haunts the entire region to this day. Bojana Videkanić poses “Yugoslav People's Art” as a corrective to the loss of our commons, summoning the emancipatory spirit behind the “mass and popular artistic and cultural production during socialism” thus far denigrated in art history, but essential for building a “political vanguard” in art today. Hana Ćurak focuses on very recent events, through exhibition and collective political activism, to chart the presence of a nuanced post-Yugoslav diasporic collectivity in shaping cultural production and political debate in the context of present-day Berlin. Ćurak draws explicitly on ideas of larval spectrality and Eva von Redecker's notion of “phantom possession” in charting the lifecycle of two specific bodies of cultural production. Damir Arsenijević, meanwhile, focuses on environmental violence in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina, using the case study of Tuzla as a means of opening queer and communing approaches to these problems, analyzing visual responses that offer critique of the processes of atomization, individualization, and alienation fostered in late neoliberalism. Katja Pražnik offers a detailed overview of working conditions for artists in the post-Yugoslav space, providing compelling evidence for uncomfortable continuities in those conditions between late socialism and the period thereafter, suggesting that the fitful and inconsistent public funding of the arts reveals material conditions haunted by both class struggle and a lack of agency for artists to enact meaningful change to pay and conditions.

Taken together, the essays in the three sections will make the case for the post-Yugoslav space as a location of critical urgencies, curatorial ingenuity, and dynamic resistance and solidarity to the manifold injustices of late capitalism. If, as for Pejić and others, nostalgia could be defined as “memory without pain,” then the hauntological could be distinguished as memory with pain, with the forlorn hope that the pain may dissipate in the future for everyone who feels it. Taken as a whole, we hope that this volume will

provide a focus on, and a range of “complaints” for those intent on acknowledging that haunting pain. These interventions are far from comprehensive and final, and the essays in this volume were written with the expectation of presenting new entry points for discussion and disagreement and diverse pathways for research, summoning—with any luck—other dreaded specters of socialist Yugoslavia.

## Notes

- 1 Ozren Pupovac, “Dialectics of the Revolution,” *PRELOM* 8 (2006): 10.
- 2 Bojana Videkanić, ch. 14, this volume.
- 3 Miško Šuvaković and Dubravka Djurić (2003); IRWIN, *East Art Map* (Afterall Books, 2000); Mitja Velikonja, *Titostalgia: A Study of Nostalgia for Josip Broz*, trans. Olga Vuković (Media Watch, 2008); Bojana Pejić, ed., *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* (Walter König, 2009); Dijana Jelača et al., eds., *The Cultural Life of Capitalism in Yugoslavia: (Post)Socialism and Its Other* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Vladimir Kulić and Martino Stierli, *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980* (Museum of Modern Art, 2018); Bojana Videkanić, *Nonaligned Modernism: Socialist Postcolonial Aesthetics in Yugoslavia, 1945–1985* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2019); Jasmina Tumbas, *I Am Jugoslovenka! Feminist Performance Politics during and after Yugoslav Socialism* (Manchester University Press, 2022); and Sanja Horvatinčić and Beti Žerovc, *Shaping Revolutionary Memory: The Production of Monuments in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Igor Zabel Association for Culture and Theory and Archive Books, 2023).
- 4 Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx, the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Routledge, 1993).
- 5 Giorgio Agamben, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of Living amongst Spectres,” in *Nudities* (Stanford University Press, 1994).
- 6 Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntologies and Lost Futures* (Zero Books, 2013); Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture’s Addiction to Its Own Past* (Faber, 2010); Merlin Coverley, *Hauntology: Ghosts of Futures Past* (Oldcastle Books, 2020).
- 7 Our emphasis. See Tanja Petrović, “Mourning the Lost Modernity: Industrial Labor, Europe, and (Post)Yugoslav Post-socialism,” in *Mirroring Europe: Ideas of Europe and Europeanization in Balkan Societies*, ed. Tanja Petrović (Brill, 2014), 95.
- 8 Nataša Kovačević, *Uncommon Alliances* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 213.
- 9 Dubravka Ugrešić, *Europe in Sepia* (Open Letter Press, 2014), 10–11.
- 10 Dubravka Ugrešić, *Europe in Sepia* (Open Letter Press, 2014), 11.
- 11 The exhibition *Živeo Život – Međunarodna izložba lepog života od ’50 do ’90 godine* was held at Robna Kuca Beograd in Belgrade, Serbia.
- 12 Biljana Purić, “Between (Yugo)Nostalgia and Utopia,” *New Eastern Europe*, July 18, 2013. <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2013/07/18/between-yugo-nostalgia-and-utopia>.
- 13 Nataša Kovačević, *Uncommon Alliances* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 212.
- 14 Nataša Kovačević, *Uncommon Alliances* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 212.
- 15 Nikola Dedić, “Yugoslavia in Post-Yugoslav Artistic Practices: Or, as ... Remembrance,” in *Post-Yugoslav Constellations: Archive, Memory, and Trauma in Contemporary Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian Literature and Culture*, ed. Vlad Beronja and Stijn Vervaet (De Gruyter, 2016), 173. Dedić cites Boris Buden’s 2012 book *Zona prelaska. O kraju postkomunizma* (Fabrika knjiga) and the introduction to Jelena Vesić and Dušan Grlja’s 2009 exhibition, *Political Practices of (Post-)Yugoslav Art: Retrospective 01*.
- 16 Nataša Kovačević, *Uncommon Alliances* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 212.
- 17 See *Leksikon YU Mitologije* (Rende, 2004) and the website [www.leksikon-yu-mitologije.net](http://www.leksikon-yu-mitologije.net).
- 18 Aleksandar Bošković, “Yugonostalgia and Yugoslav Cultural Memory: Lexicon of Yu Mythology,” *Slavic Review* 72, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 57.

## 12 *Contemporary Art in the Post-Yugoslav Space*

- 19 Martin Pogačar, “Digital Afterlife: Ex-Yugoslav Pop Culture Icons and Social Media,” in *Post-Yugoslav Constellations: Archive, Memory, and Trauma in Contemporary Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian Literature and Culture*, ed. Vlad Beronja and Stijn Vervaet (De Gruyter, 2016), 292.
- 20 Aleksandar Bošković, “Yugonostalgia and Yugoslav Cultural Memory: Lexicon of Yu Mythology,” *Slavic Review* 72, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 78.
- 21 Our emphasis. Martin Pogačar, “Digital Afterlife: Ex-Yugoslav Pop Culture Icons and Social Media,” in *Post-Yugoslav Constellations: Archive, Memory, and Trauma in Contemporary Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian Literature and Culture*, ed. Vlad Beronja and Stijn Vervaet (De Gruyter, 2016), 284.
- 22 Ivana Bago, “Inheriting the Yugoslav Century: Art, History, and Generation” (PhD diss., Duke University, 2018), 283. Bago refers here in particular to Christine Blau’s article, “Haunting Relics of a Country That No Longer Exists,” published on August 28, 2017. See [www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/former-yugoslavia-monuments](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/former-yugoslavia-monuments).
- 23 Ivana Bago, “Inheriting the Yugoslav Century: Art, History, and Generation” (PhD diss., Duke University, 2018), 283. Bago refers here in particular to Christine Blau’s article, “Haunting Relics of a Country That No Longer Exists,” published on August 28, 2017. See [www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/former-yugoslavia-monuments](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/former-yugoslavia-monuments).
- 24 Our emphases, pointing to the use of “Haunting” and “Relics” in Blau’s article title, “Haunting Relics of a Country That No Longer Exists,” cited in Bago’s dissertation.
- 25 Gal Kirn, *Partisan Ruptures Self-Management, Market Reform and the Spectre of Socialist Yugoslavia*, trans. Borut Praper (Pluto Press, 2019), 215.
- 26 Sevtlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (Basic Books, 2001), 3. Although the term has, as Boym notes, “two Greek roots,” it has “a pseudoGreek” origin, which she also calls “nostalgically Greek.” The Swiss medical student Johannes Hofer coined the term in his 1688 dissertation.
- 27 Tanja Petrović, “Mourning the Lost Modernity: Industrial Labor, Europe, and (Post)Yugoslav Post-socialism,” in *Mirroring Europe: Ideas of Europe and Europeanization in Balkan Societies*, ed. Tanja Petrović (Brill, 2014), 91.
- 28 Merlin Coverley, *Hauntology: Ghosts of Futures Past* (Oldcastle Books, 2020), 13.
- 29 See Breda Luthar and Maruša Pušnik, “The Lure of Utopia: Socialist Everyday Spaces,” in *Remembering Utopia: The Culture of Everyday Life in Socialist Yugoslavia*, ed. B. Luthar and M. Pušnik (New Academic Publishing, 2010), 17.
- 30 Our emphases. Sevtlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (Basic Books, 2001), 104.
- 31 Anita Šurkić et al., *Spaceship Yugoslavia: The Suspension of Time* (nGbK, 2011).
- 32 Aleksandar Bošković, “Yugonostalgia and Yugoslav Cultural Memory: Lexicon of Yu Mythology,” *Slavic Review* 72, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 55.
- 33 Our emphasis. Zdenka Badovinac, “Art Communities at Risk: On Slovenia,” *October* 178 (Fall 2021): 125.
- 34 Ana Vujanović and Bojana Cvejić, *Toward a Transindividual Self* (Oslo National Academy of the Arts, 2022), 11, 15.
- 35 Ana Vujanović and Bojana Cvejić, *Toward a Transindividual Self* (Oslo National Academy of the Arts, 2022), 9.
- 36 Our emphasis. Ana Vujanović and Bojana Cvejić, *Toward a Transindividual Self* (Oslo National Academy of the Arts, 2022), 15.
- 37 Ozren Pupovac, “Present Perfect, or the Time of Post-Socialism,” in *Art Always Has Its Consequences*, ed. Ivet Ćurlin et al. (What, How & for Whom, 2010), 107–108.
- 38 Ozren Pupovac, “Present Perfect, or the Time of Post-Socialism,” in *Art Always Has Its Consequences*, ed. Ivet Ćurlin et al. (What, How & for Whom, 2010), 108.
- 39 Piro Rexhepi, *White Enclosures: Racial Capitalism and Coloniality along the Balkan Route* (Duke University Press, 2022), 72.

- 40 Melika Salihbegović's 1983 statement quoted in Piro Rexhepi, *White Enclosures: Racial Capitalism and Coloniality along the Balkan Route* (Duke University Press, 2022), 53. She stated: "The last couple of years in Sarajevo [there was] a widespread craze of fear that 'one ghost is hunting the world, the ghost of Islam.'" For additional analyses of how religion and racialization intersected in the post-Yugoslav space, see Catherine Baker, *Race and the Yugoslav Region: Postsocialist, Post-conflict, Postcolonial?* (Manchester University Press, 2018).
- 41 Piro Rexhepi, *White Enclosures: Racial Capitalism and Coloniality along the Balkan Route* (Duke University Press, 2022), 80.
- 42 Melika Salihbegović quoted in Piro Rexhepi, *White Enclosures: Racial Capitalism and Coloniality along the Balkan Route* (Duke University Press, 2022), 44.
- 43 Melika Salihbegović quoted in Piro Rexhepi, *White Enclosures: Racial Capitalism and Coloniality along the Balkan Route* (Duke University Press, 2022), 79–80.
- 44 Melika Salihbegović quoted in Piro Rexhepi, *White Enclosures: Racial Capitalism and Coloniality along the Balkan Route* (Duke University Press, 2022), 79.
- 45 See also Piro Rexhepi, "Our 'Raceless' Region Revisited," in *Decoloniality in Eastern Europe: A Lexicon of Reorientation*, ed. Ana Valencia (New Media Center Kuda, 2023), 18–25, and Jasmina Tumbas, "The Complicated Position of Ethnic Roma in Art and Culture Today," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 86, no. 1 (2023): 2–14. Selman has also been associated with a new interest in "Roma futurism," see for example Martina Stefanova and Boryana Rossa, eds. *Sofia Queer Forum 2021: Queer Roma: We've Got the Power!* (LevFem, 2022), 89.
- 46 Zhivka Valiavicharska, "Restless History," in *Decoloniality in Eastern Europe: A Lexicon of Reorientation*, ed. Ana Vilenica (New Media Center\_kuda.org, 2023), 56.
- 47 Our emphasis. Zhivka Valiavicharska, "Restless History," in *Decoloniality in Eastern Europe: A Lexicon of Reorientation*, ed. Ana Vilenica (New Media Center\_kuda.org, 2023), 56.
- 48 Giorgio Agamben, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of Living amongst Spectres," in *Nudities* (Stanford University Press, 1994), 38.
- 49 Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *After Future* (AK Press, 2011), 40.
- 50 Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntologies and Lost Futures* (Zero Books, 2013), 18–19.
- 51 Our emphasis. Sara Ahmed, *Complaint!* (Duke University Press, 2021), 308.
- 52 See Jasmina Cibic's film *BEACONS* (2023).
- 53 Nataša Kovačević, *Uncommon Alliances* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 213.
- 54 Jušić collaborated with colleagues from the feminist collective CRVENA in Sarajevo to develop the "Online Archive of Antifascist Struggle of Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia." See Arhiv Antifašističke Borbe Žena Bosne I Hercegovine I Jugoslavije (Archive of Antifascist Struggle of Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia): [www.afzarhiv.org](http://www.afzarhiv.org).
- 55 The exhibition included Alma Suljević, Danica Dakić, Darinka Pop-Mitić, Dejan Habicht, Gordana Anđelić Galić, Kristina Leko, Maja Bajević, Marjetica Potrč, Milica Tomić, Renata Poljak, Sanja Iveković, Šejla Kamerić, group škart, and Tanja Lažetić.
- 56 Our emphasis for "dead and gone." Bojana Pejić, ch. 2, this volume.
- 57 Albert Heta quoted in Hana Halilaj, ch. 13, this volume.

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