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## Beyond Nostalgia

### *“Extrospective Introspections” of the Post-Yugoslav Memory of Socialism*

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### Abstract

This article addresses the issue of socialist nostalgia. Specifically, it deals with the inadequacy of treating the post-socialist “return of socialism” as different incarnations of socialist nostalgia. The author contends that this kind of treatment suffers from “nostalgia reductionism” and “socialism essentialism,” and leads to the very problematic conceptual and analytical shortcoming of pre-determining the nature of what needs to be understood and explained. Correspondingly, the author argues that a meaningful consideration of the post-socialist return of socialism has to free itself from the “nostalgia presumption” and embrace a non-essentialist analytical viewpoint whereby socialist nostalgia is recast as a plurality of heterogeneous and context-dependent post-socialist socialist discourses. To this end, the author analyzes two post-Yugoslav documentary films, *Sretno dijete* and *Orkestar*, to substantiate the claim that socialist nostalgia is too narrow of a framework to encapsulate adequately the span of an entire range of post-socialist socialist discourses and the ways they operate in specific sociocultural contexts and communicate to and with particular audience(s). In advancing this argument, the author does not propose that “the nostalgic” has no place in the analysis of the post-socialist memory of socialism but, rather, that the degree and nature of its presence has to be established through an interpretive reading of particular post-socialist socialist texts, rather than presumed *a priori*.

### Keywords

socialist nostalgia – post-socialism – nostalgia reductionism – socialism essentialism – extrospective introspection – Yugoslavia – post-Yugoslav documentaries – *Sretno dijete* – *Orkestar* – Igor Mirković – Pjer Žalica – Saša Lošić – *Plavi orkestar*

## Introduction

There is a scene in Radivoje Andrić's film *Munje!* (*Thunderbirds!*)<sup>1</sup> that frames perfectly what I wish to explore in this paper. Borrowing Jim Jarmusch's "night on Earth" concept,<sup>2</sup> the film follows the dusk-till-dawn adventures of two twenty-somethings, Pop and Mare, in turn-of-the-twenty-first-century Belgrade. On their way to meet an old-time school friend Gojko, Pop and Mare first bump into Gojko's girlfriend Kata, and then stumble upon a small-time thief, Deda Mraz, who ends up taking them to a house party where he is to deliver "tranquilizers" to his associates. Once at the party, Pop, Mare and Kata are taken aback and amused by what they see: the "lost world" of the thirty-somethings. Jokingly, Kata asks one of the party-goers, "Is this your twentieth graduation anniversary?" to which Mare briefly replies, "Package deal!" (*Paket aranžman*)<sup>3</sup>. Mare's comment provides an immediate point of reference for Kata: "Ah, so that's what this is, brotherhood and unity of the 1980s." Kata's sarcastic remark is met with an equally sarcastic, and immediate, response: "No, we're 'turbo diesel folk!'" Looking clearly amused, Mare replies caustically: "I thought you guys were extinct."

After the initial back-and-forth sarcasm, the conversation between Mare and a group of partiers settles down, and Mare starts complaining about the unsolvable problem of being 25 and still living with his mother. His complaint is met with an unsympathetic response: "You don't say! Look – all these people that you see here – we all live with our parents. That is not a problem. Just locate your place in the coordinate system of confusion. Get it?" Clearly annoyed, Mare replies, "Perhaps one of you could fix my coordinate thing!", and then abandons the conversation. After he leaves, and after some seconds of silence, the person who last replied reflects on Mare's stormy reaction: "I fully understand them; the whole war thing, the news, the whole situation."

With the above scene as a jumping-off point, my aim in this article is to analyze the resurrection of socialist narrative in the post-Yugoslav sociocultural space since the turn of the twenty-first century. More specifically, I wish to explore this in the context of documentary films that deal with the ques-

1 *Munje!*, directed by Radivoje Andrić (2001; Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: Pro Vision).

2 *Night on Earth*, directed by Jim Jarmusch (1991; USA: Fine Line Features).

3 *Paket aranžman* (Zagreb: Jugoton, 1981) is one of the crucial records of the 1980s Yugoslav *New Wave* music movement. Released in 1981, the record compiles early works of the three most important Belgrade *New Wave* bands: *Šarlo akrobata*, *Električni orgazam* and *Idoli*. On Yugoslav *New Wave*, see chapter 4 in Dalibor Mišina, *Shake, Rattle and Roll: Yugoslav Rock Music and the Poetics of Social Critique, Ashgate Popular and Folk Music* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013).

tions of popular culture – and rock music in particular – of the 1980s socialist Yugoslavia. The two documentaries I will focus on, Igor Mirković's *Sretno dijete* (*A Happy Kid*)<sup>4</sup> and Pjer Žalica's *Orkestar* (*The Orchestra*),<sup>5</sup> are both explorations of identity pursued through the mining the Yugoslav socialist past in an attempt to illuminate one's personal (in the case of *Sretno dijete*) or one's generational (in the case of *Orkestar*) sense of the self. The argument that I will pursue is that the socialist narrative in these documentaries cannot be taken as expressions of socialist nostalgia but ought to be understood as identity quests whose task, ultimately, is to come to terms with unsettled lives of the "last Yugoslav generation" (i.e., the thirty-somethings from the scene depicted above).<sup>6</sup> More to the point, my argument is that the socialist narrative of *Sretno dijete* and *Orkestar* operates as a multi-layered and multi-textured "general(ized/izable) mnemonic referent" that provides "parameters of possibilities" for making sense of both past and present-day sociocultural realities as the "coordinate systems of confusion" within which the self – individual and/or collective – has to locate itself and its own self-understanding.

In pursuing my argument, I will examine the socialist nostalgia hypothesis and its inadequacy to provide an (entirely satisfactory) explanatory mechanism for the nature of socialist narratives in *Sretno dijete* and *Orkestar*. In this context, I will discuss the problems of (over)generalization regarding the character of post-socialist societies (what I call "socialism generalism"), and of using "nostalgia" as a general signifier for their present-day sociocultural expressions of the "return of socialism" (what I call "nostalgia reductionism"). In dealing with these problems, my aim is not to dispute the utility of the concept of socialist nostalgia for understanding *certain kinds* of post-socialist sociocultural landscape(s), but to demonstrate that the re-emergence of socialist narrative cannot always and necessarily be reduced to socialist nostalgia alone. In other words, I wish to show that, despite "nostalgic traces," the socialist narratives in *Sretno dijete* and *Orkestar* are *not* about socialist nostalgia but about something entirely different and, in a way, more complex. I call this "extrospective introspections" – i.e., the last Yugoslav generation's outside-in (self-)reflexivity aimed at locating a sense of the self within the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav "coordinate systems of confusion."

4 *Sretno dijete*, directed by Igor Mirković (2003; Croatia: Gerila DV film).

5 *Orkestar*, directed by Pjer Žalica (2011; Bosnia and Herzegovina: Refresh Production).

6 For a detailed profile of the last Yugoslav generation, see Zala Volcic, "Scenes from the Last Yugoslav Generation: The Long March from Yugo-Utopia to Nationalism," *Cultural Dynamics* 19, no. 1 (2007): 67–89.

### Socialist Nostalgia: A Memory Recall of the Past Perfect

Scholarly interest in socialist nostalgia goes back to the late 1990s and the curious reappearance of “memory of socialism” in formerly socialist/communist societies. From the outset, the general analytical trajectory that informed the study of socialist nostalgia was a line of reasoning that after the fall of socialism, all post-socialist societies went through a period of “Western fascination” (i.e., enthusiastic and all-out embrace of the capitalist “mode of existence”) and “Eastern amnesia,” and that after some time the “memory of socialism” begun creeping back in and re-infiltrating not only discursive but also living realities of post-socialist societies. This return of socialism was, in turn, taken as an indication of nostalgia – or nostalgic memory – for the “good old days” of pre-transition in the face of “not so good new days” of post-transition. Thus the general analytical assumption was that all post-socialist societies experienced – and are still experiencing – a certain kind and certain degree of socialist nostalgia, and that this post-transition phenomenon can be taken as almost a new collective reality of the formerly “socialist universe.” In dealing with the specifics of the “what to make of socialist nostalgia?” question, a not insignificant portion of academic research focused on the phenomenon of German *Ostalgie* (i.e., *Eastalgia*, or nostalgia for the East) and, in the process of deciphering it, took it as a general signifier of an entire range of socialist nostalgia.<sup>7</sup> Thus, one particular instance of the phenomenon under investigation became a common analytical and explanatory mechanism for, and the “face” of, the phenomenon as such.<sup>8</sup>

Making sense of *Ostalgie* and other related forms of post-communist nostalgic memory was by and large grounded in Svetlana Boym’s reference work *The Future of Nostalgia*, and her distinction between “restorative” and “reflective” nostalgia. In Boym’s view, restorative nostalgia is often “revivalist” in nature and aims to reconstruct the lost home(land), often through various types of religious and nationalist movements. It thus “ends up reconstructing emblems and

7 On *Ostalgie* and its relation to socialist nostalgia, see Timothy Barney, “When We Was Red: Good Bye Lenin! And Nostalgia for the ‘Everyday GDR,’” *Communication and Critical Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2 (2009): 132–151; and Daphne Berdahl, “‘(N)Ostalgie’ for the Present: Memory, Longing, and East German Things,” *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 64, no. 2 (1999): 192–211.

8 See, for example, Nikolayenko Olena, “Contextual Effects on Historical Memory: Soviet Nostalgia Among Post-Soviet Adolescents,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 41, no. 2 (2008): 243–259; Serguei Oushakine, “‘We’re nostalgic but we’re not crazy’: Retrofitting the Past in Russia,” *Russian Review* 66, no. 3 (2007): 451–482.

rituals of home and homeland in an attempt to conquer and spatialize time.”<sup>9</sup> Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, refers to a “historical emotion” and a “yearning for a different time.” Its aim is not to reconstruct the lost home(land) and reinstate the lost emblems and rituals, but to recall, and reflect on, the memory of the times gone by. As Boym puts it:

Restorative nostalgia evokes national past and future; reflective nostalgia is more about individual and cultural memory. The two might overlap in their frames of reference, but they do not coincide in their narratives and plots of identity. In other words, they can use the same triggers of memory and symbols, the same Proustian madelaine pastry, but tell different stories about it.<sup>10</sup>

Thus whereas restorative nostalgia translates into attempts to bring back to life the place that has been lost, reflective nostalgia is a matter of a “nostalgic rendezvous with oneself” by way of “affective memories” about an irretrievable time. In this sense, the former is a longing for the homecoming of a sort; the latter, by contrast, is a longing without the yearning for a homecoming of a(ny) sort.

Most of the studies of socialist nostalgia cast the phenomenon as a case of reflective nostalgia, focusing on “the reflective” and trying to decipher its causes, course, and consequences.<sup>11</sup> In the case of *Ostalgie*, the principal argument put forth amounts to a proposition that the re-emergence of the socialist memory is a matter of “identity recovery” triggered by the East Germans’ sense of identity loss after the unification with their Western compatriots, and the feeling that the new “Germanness” is not so much a *mélange* of the Western and Eastern “ways of being” as it is a push to let go of the inferior East German identity and embrace its superior, West German, incarnation.<sup>12</sup> The German *Ostalgie* is thus a matter of responding to, and fending against, the collective experience of being “lost in unification and transition,” and mobilizing mnemonic and symbolic resources for not only reaffirming the specificities of one’s individual and collective being but also for “meaningfully linking the inex-

9 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 49.

10 Ibid.

11 See, for example, Brenda Luthar and Maruša Pušnik, eds., *Remembering Utopia: The Culture of Everyday Life in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2010).

12 See Berdahl, “‘(N)Ostalgie’ for the Present: Memory, Longing, and East German Things,” pp. 192–211.

orably receding past and accelerated present."<sup>13</sup> As Maria Todorova explains, making a larger point about post-communist nostalgia:

It is not only the longing for security, stability, and prosperity. There is also the feeling of loss for a very specific form of sociability, and of vulgarization of the cultural life. Above all, there is a desire among those who have lived through communism, even when they have opposed it or were indifferent to its ideology, to invest their lives with meaning and dignity, not to be thought of, or remembered, or bemoaned as losers or "slaves."<sup>14</sup>

*Ostalgie*, in this sense, is a form of cultural interventionism *via* nostalgic memory, aiming to both counter the vanishing of a particular form of identity and reaffirm the validity of the latter's vanishing sociocultural foundations. By extension, the argument goes, so are the other forms of socialist nostalgia.

Another important aspect of deciphering *Ostalgie* and socialist nostalgia is a proposition about its forward-oriented nature – namely, that nostalgic memory is not so much about the past as it is about the present and/or the future. This proposition places socialist nostalgia within the framework of post-socialist society as a society in still-ongoing transition, arguing that the nostalgic memory of socialism is a sociocultural response to the destabilizing and disorienting effect of the post-socialist transition and the resultant sense of an "unsettling present" and "uncertain future." In this context, "post-socialism" is cast as a transitional *and* transformative moment with a teleological endpoint – democratic society. As Gwendolyn Sasse puts it:

Ultimately ... the question 'when is transition over?' is a question about the stability of the new democracy and its potential for backsliding. ... [D]emocracy is successfully consolidated when there is no significant domain of power or actors challenging the state from outside the democratic structures, and when a strong majority accepts the legitimacy of the new democracy. When there is little or no potential for reversion to authoritarianism, then, we should say the transition to democracy is over.<sup>15</sup>

13 Dominik Bartmanski, "Successful Icons of Failed Time: Rethinking Post-communist Nostalgia," *Acta sociologica* 54, no. 3 (2011): 225.

14 Maria Todorova, "Introduction: From Utopia to Propaganda and Back," in Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille, eds., *Post-Communist Nostalgia* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), p. 7.

15 Larry Ray, "At the End of the Post-Communist Transformation?: Normalization or Imagining Utopia," *European Journal of Social Theory* 12, no. 3 (2009): 327.

The sociocultural implication here is that the full consolidation of democracy – that is to say, the end of transition – will also bring about the disappearance of the realities generative of the nostalgic memory of socialism, and thus of socialist nostalgia itself. The flipside of this implication is a notion that post-socialist transition is “messy” and that its “messiness” generates a longing for not necessarily the world of pre-transition, but for the sociocultural *values* of that world. In this sense, socialist nostalgia operates as a sociocultural (and, to a degree, political and economic) “normative yardstick” for gauging the realities of the world-in-transition against the ideals of the lost world, and thus as “a strategy that enables us to take a closer look at the character of post-socialism as a social formation.”<sup>16</sup> As Jeremy Brooke Staughn sums it up:

While the image of gleeful East Germans atop the crumbling Berlin Wall dispelled any illusion of ideological omnipotence on the part of the communist states, it soon became apparent that their overthrow did not mark the death of “socialism” in all of its forms. Although few in Eastern Europe wished to see the old regimes restored, there were signs that the “body of ideas” they claimed to uphold enjoyed a level of popular appeal rivaling that of free-market principles in much of the region. Although only a minority advocated a return to “socialism” as experienced in their respective countries, “most people ... tended to support important policies and values associated with the state socialist regimes they have left behind,” expressing “widespread egalitarianism, support for a strong role for the government in the economy, and deep skepticism about a distributive system based more on merit than on need.”<sup>17</sup>

In the context of post-socialist transition, therefore, socialist nostalgia is an expression of both individual and collective doubt about the normative potentials of the world-to-come, grounded in the normative shortcomings of present-day experiences: in the face of the “messiness-induced” unsettledness and uncertainty, socialist nostalgia reaches back into the memory of the past in order to ground the present and cast an eye on the future. This, however, makes the nostalgic memory of socialism also an expression of future-oriented desire for the world that is better than the current one. In other words, it makes it

16 Irena Reifová, “Rerunning and ‘Re-watching’ Socialist TV Drama Serials: Post-Socialist Czech Television Audiences between Commodification and Reclaiming the Past,” *Critical Studies in Television* 4, no. 2 (2009): 66.

17 J.B. Staughn, “Culture, Memory, and Structural Change: Explaining Support for ‘Socialism’ in Post-Socialist Society,” *Theory and Society* 38, no. 5 (2009): 486, in-text citations omitted.

what Mitja Velikonja calls “retrospective utopia” – “a wish and a hope for the safe world, fair society, true friendships, mutual solidarity, and well-being in general.”<sup>18</sup>

### Post-Socialist “Nostalgia Reductionism” and “Socialism Generalism”

While the above most certainly provides an useful analytical framework for making sense of the return of socialism in post-socialist societies, there are nevertheless two issues that make these arguments somewhat problematic and “overdeterministic” (to make use of Louis Althusser’s term).<sup>19</sup> I shall refer to them as “nostalgia reductionism” and “socialism generalism.” What I mean by nostalgia reductionism is the problem of reducing *all* forms of the post-socialist socialist narrative to expressions – and manifestations – of nostalgia, and in so doing losing sight of the possibility that *some* may have very little, if anything, to do with the nostalgic yearning of either the restorative or reflective kind. Another way to put this would be to say that the post-socialist socialist narrative is, in all likelihood, more complex than the socialist nostalgia proposition allows for, and that casting all of its incarnations as the different faces of socialist nostalgia creates a conceptual and perceptual barrier that prevents its full understanding and appreciation. The nostalgia reductionism argument is thus both a caution against the claim that “the nostalgic” in the post-socialist socialist narrative is all that there is, and a recognition that (a degree of) nostalgia is perhaps *one* but certainly not the *only one* of its dimensions.

The second issue, socialism generalism, has to do with the problem of over-generalization about the nature of formerly socialist societies and, therefore, of too sweeping an application of socialist nostalgia as a conceptual mechanism that explains their post-socialist cultural and political realities. What I mean by the first aspect of the issue is that (now former) socialist societies were created through different processes (annexation, federation, partitioning), that they had different socialist histories (as the Soviet satellites, socialist democracies, and communist autarchies), and that they were dissolved through different

18 M. Velikonja, “Lost in Transition: Nostalgia for Socialism in Post-Socialist Countries,” *East European Politics Societies* 23, no. 4 (2009): 548. See also Monika Palmberger, “Nostalgia Matters: Nostalgia for Yugoslavia as Potential Vision for a Better Future,” *Sociologija* 50, no. 4 (2008): 355–370.

19 Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London and New York: Verso, 2005).

internal/external dynamics (unification, partition, peaceful transition, violent breakup). Given all these dissimilarities, one should tread very cautiously when making a claim that they can all be lumped together under an umbrella concept of post-socialist society and, somehow, analyzed and understood as a singular “entity” and reality. Even if one admits post-socialism as their (only) common denominator, one should not rush to the conclusion that this, somehow, warrants a generalizing, and generalizable, mode of inquiry and analysis. Each of the (formerly) socialist societies has had its own experience not only of socialism but also of transition to the post-socialist reality, and they all have their own incarnation of post-socialism as a transformative moment in their histories and as a post-transformative sociocultural, political, and economic reality and experience(s). This is to say that these formerly socialist societies are as dissimilar in their similarity as they are similar in their dissimilarity, and that they ought to be approached, analyzed, and understood as such. Painting them all with the same conceptual brush might be a bit of a stretch and, more importantly, analytically problematic.

Given the above, one ought to be very cautious about the over-application of socialist nostalgia as a way of understanding what, in the end, may well be completely disparate expressions of the post-socialist socialist narrative, as well as about *Ostalgie*-centric essentialization of socialist nostalgia itself. While this is not meant to suggest that nothing from the research on *Ostalgie* can be useful for understanding a wider phenomenon of the post-socialist return of socialism, or that nothing from the general socialist nostalgia proposition can be useful for understanding the particular instances of the post-socialist socialist narrative, it is meant to suggest that one ought to tread very lightly in embracing the “universal explanatory powers” of either *Ostalgie*-centric essentialization of socialist nostalgia or socialist nostalgia itself, and in applying them as *a priori* explanatory mechanisms for a wide range of multifaceted phenomena, practices, and experiences taking shape in diverse sociocultural (and political) contexts.

What the issues of nostalgia essentialism and socialism generalism point to, then, is a lacuna in the way the post-socialist return of socialism has so far been framed conceptually and investigated analytically. They also point to a recognition that there ought to be an other – and another – way to cast the phenomenon in question, and to do so in a way that is attentive to its wide-ranging, multifaceted and heterogeneous nature. To be sure, the point here is not to replace one essentializing and overdeterministic framework for another, but to establish a set of conceptual and analytical criteria for examining *particular* sociocultural incarnations of the post-socialist return of socialism in all of their unique specificities. In the process, the objective,

ultimately, is to argue that a fruitful examination of the return of socialism in post-socialist societies has to be cast – and go – beyond nostalgia.

**Beyond Nostalgia: Post-Yugoslav “Extrospective Introspections” of  
*Sretno dijete* and *Orkestar***

How then does one reconstruct what has been constructed as socialist nostalgia, without replacing one essentializing and overdeterministic framework with another? Or, to reframe the question, how does one go beyond nostalgia in analyzing the post-socialist return of socialism? The answer, I argue, lies in the following “conceptual moves”: recasting “nostalgia” as “discourse”; recognizing inherent heterogeneity of the post-socialist socialist discourse in terms of its use and sociocultural (and political) manifestation(s); and admitting its intrinsic communicative variance in relation to authors and audience(s). What I mean by the first proposition, essentially, is moving away from a pre-determined understanding of what the post-socialist return of socialism is *supposed* to be about, or – to put it differently – not having an *a priori* explanatory mechanism for what, decidedly, is in need of explanatory understanding. One of the problems of framing the post-socialist return of socialism as nostalgia is that it narrows the conceptual and analytical field to only one of the possibly many dimensions of the phenomenon, and thus creates investigative blinders that prevent its full understanding and appreciation. In other words, if the starting point for the inquiry is an already established criterion, what is being investigated will, in all likelihood, end up being explained as (some version) of what has been pre-established. And that, in turn, will be all that is “seen.”

Recasting socialist nostalgia as post-socialist socialist discourse minimizes the above problem by broadening the conceptual and analytical field, and creating what is essentially an open-ended – that is to say, non-*a priori* – investigative point of departure. What do I mean by this? In the way I am using it here, the notion of post-socialist socialist discourse is meant to indicate that what we are looking at and analyzing is a particular kind “sociocultural text” (in the Cultural Studies sense). As a text, this discourse operates by way of establishing its particular “grammar” and narrative structure, which determine the specifics of its inherently multifaceted, heterogeneous and polysemic nature. Our task then becomes to understand interpretatively the grammar and narrative structure of the text and, in so doing, establish its discursive nature. Thus, by casting the post-socialist return of socialism as a discourse, we are not determining *a priori* its essence but, effectively, establishing that its essence needs to be “recovered” through the analysis. Another way to put this would be to say

that the notion of the post-socialist socialist discourse determines the *form* of what is to be understood, but not its *kind*. By contrast, the framework of socialist nostalgia (pre)determines both.

This, of course, is not meant to suggest that the post-socialist socialist discourse is devoid of “the nostalgic,” or that it should *a priori* be considered as such. Quite the contrary. But it does suggest that “the nostalgic” needs to be de-prioritized in our interpretative understanding of the discourse, and our investigation devoid of the assumption that “the nostalgic” is a dominant – or the only – aspect of the post-socialist socialist discourse. In other words, the degree and the kind of presence of “the nostalgic” in the post-socialist socialist discourse is something that is established through an analysis of the discourse itself, rather than something that is assumed or determined prior to it. In this sense, it is perfectly conceivable that “the nostalgic” is found to be either a (relatively) minor or (relatively) dominant aspect of the post-socialist socialist discourse, or no aspect at all.

In the same way that the question of “the nostalgic” within the post-socialist socialist discourse is an open-ended one, so is the question of the discourse’s overall character. In other words, what the notion of the post-socialist socialist discourse permits is the possibility that different types of discourse might be partially or completely different from one another – i.e., that they might have different “properties” and thus, partially or completely, be of dissimilar kinds. Thus, the notion of discourse enables one to think about the post-socialist return of socialism in terms of (potentially) diverse sociocultural texts, each with its own specificities and degrees of particularity. In this context, the question about the nature of the post-socialist socialist discourse is, ultimately, a matter of a “quest” to discern its particular physiognomy in terms of the constitutive aspects, and to explain how these, in turn, inform what the text is fundamentally about – i.e., what and how it communicates.

The second proposition – recognizing inherent heterogeneity of the post-socialist socialist discourse in terms of its use and sociocultural (and political) manifestation(s) – builds on the last point, made above. Its central assumption is thinking about the post-socialist socialist discourse in terms of different kinds of sociocultural texts, and keeping in mind that they operate in diverse sociocultural contexts and, more often than not, communicate dissimilarly. The focus, in this context, is on understanding the ways in which the text and its context inform one another, and the ways in which the interaction between the two informs not only the use(s) but also “communicative possibilities” of the text. What this enables, in turn, is to identify different “genres” of the text and discern the conditions of possibilities and limitations that the genre creates in terms of how the text operates in a particular context, and how that context

is generative of the text's particular "face" (i.e., the ways text establishes itself as visible and viable "communicative outlet").

The key aspect of the second suggestion, then, is sensitivity towards the fact that different kinds – or genres – of sociocultural text communicate differently and are therefore employed to different ends and for different strategic purposes. Further, it is also about recognizing that the same cultural text operates differently in different sociocultural contexts and, although it may be communicating the same thing, engenders different meaning(s) and therefore "speaks" differently. And finally, it is also about being mindful of the fact that contexts matter and that the specifics of a context have as much of an impact on the particularities of the text as the specifics of the text have an impact on the (perceived and, also, real) particularities of the context. Taken together, these amount to an incredulity towards a (pro)position that the post-socialist socialist discourse can be cast in one light only, and that this casting can fully and meaningfully speak to its nature, or elucidate its "essential properties." More to the point, they amount to a realization that the post-socialist socialist discourse is, in the end, a series of discourses, each with its own specificities and with its own ways of inhabiting/being inhabited by – and therefore communicating within – larger sociocultural and political framework(s).

The third proposition about intrinsic communicative variance of the discourse in relation to authors and audience(s) is about recognizing that the discursive nature of the post-socialist return of socialism is inseparable from the questions of text production and reception. Its essence has to do with thinking about not only author's intents but also – and perhaps more importantly – about author's subjectivity and how it shapes and impacts (the nature of) the text. Additionally, it also has to do with considering the specificities of an audience the text is communicating to/with, and being mindful of the fact that what and how the text communicates is, in the end, a matter of the nature of audience's engagement with the text itself. To put it differently, a text is always "written" by someone and for someone, and the character of these two "someones" and their relationships to the text ultimately bears upon the "communicative potential, range, and reach" of that text.

In light of the above, the key insight of the third proposition is that interpretive understanding of the post-socialist socialist discourse cannot be divorced from the questions of "for whom/to whom the text speaks" and "who is/are the one(s) from whom/to whom the text speaks." In this sense, the proposition, in the end, speaks to the fact that coming to terms with the post-socialist return of socialism is inseparable from the issues of subjectivity and subject-positions with regards to discourse production, reception and use. Another way to put this would be to say that attempting to understand the post-

socialist socialist discourse outside, and separately from, the above questions would be to misapprehend one of its most defining qualities – i.e. its “inter-subjectiveness.” Simply put, in and of itself the post-socialist socialist discourse “means” and “communicates” nothing. It only does so in and through “inter-encounters” with the subject(ivity)s that render it “meaningful” and “communicative.”

So how does one go beyond nostalgia in analyzing the post-socialist return of socialism? By freeing the latter from “the nostalgic” as an *a priori* essential(izing) assumption regarding its character, and respecifying socialist nostalgia as the post-socialist socialist discourse; by pluralizing and contextualizing the post-socialist socialist discourse, keeping in mind its inherent inter(con)textuality; and by particularizing the discourse’s “communicability” in terms of the specificities of the subject-positions involved in its “life” as a sociocultural text. Taken together, these provide a non-*a priori* conceptual and analytical jumping-off points for investigating the post-socialist return of socialism in all of its inherent multivariateness. In so doing, they offer a possibility for grasping the phenomena in question, and elements thereof, for what – and as – they really are.

### **Sretno dijete: *An Identity Quest of Igor Mirković***

Released in 2003, *Sretno dijete* by Zagreb-based director Igor Mirković is one of the first popular-cultural expressions of the post-socialist return to socialism within the post-Yugoslav sociocultural space. Mirković’s basic intent in the film is to explore the formative impact – and continuing resonance – of rock music of the early 1980s on his individual and, by extension, his generation’s collective identity. Hence the question that drives his explorations in *Sretno dijete*: “What was it that shaped me into a person I became?” Mirković’s strategy of choice in dealing with this question is to attempt to reconstruct the time of his formative years and, in so doing, attempt to come to terms with himself and, by extension, people like him. Thus the “archeology” of *Sretno dijete* is built around, and centered on, an identity quest – one’s own and generational.

Mining the period of 1977–1982, Mirković relies on several distinct exploratory strategies: the constant interweaving of the Yugoslav socialist past and the post-Yugoslav post-socialist present; the positioning of himself as an outsider who is reaching to the insiders of the period in order to attempt to understand the past and himself within that past; and the reconstruction of the past in terms of – or, better yet, in light of – what is personally meaningful and taken as significant with regards to individual, and collective (that is, generational), self-making. Regarding the first strategy, Mirković’s approach is based in the

notion that “the external” and “the internal” are inseparable from one another and that the only way to understand the internal is to locate and interpret it within the framework of the external – effectively, to engage in a “permanent outside-in reflexivity.” Thus, every personal episode from Mirković’s formative years is grounded in a narrative about the key political and/or sociocultural events of the time, which are taken as pivotal for the shaping of his own “private universe” and his individual self-making. The film’s opening scene, for example, is archival footage of President Tito’s 1977 visit to Zagreb, where he is greeted by the cheerful masses as he drives through the city’s downtown. In a somewhat curious moment of self-reflection, Mirković declares that, although he was not actually in the crowd that day, “this is practically the only event I remember from that year, when I turned twelve.”<sup>20</sup> This interplay between the importance of the key episodes from the national past and the shaping of personal memory and experiences is followed through throughout the film.

Mirković’s second strategy – mining the past from the position of an outsider who is reaching to the insiders as the real protagonists of the times gone by – is grounded in his desire to authenticate himself by authenticating what no longer is through the memories of the “makers of history.” Throughout the film, he is forthright with his admissions that he was observing the world of his formative years from a distance and participating from the sidelines rather than being actively immersed in it. For this reason, Mirković’s quest for the “real insiders” and their recollections of the past is employed as not only a method for rendering meaningful “the external” within which “the internal” inevitably has to situate itself, but also as a strategy for making sure that his personal memories of the past check out, as it were, against the ones of those who remember it all because they had made it all. The more and deeper Mirković mines, however, the more it comes to light that the recollections of the “memory makers/memory holders” are murky, conflated and illusive, and that, ultimately, his real self-authentication has to be grounded in the actually existing and verifiable historical memento. He traces one of these in the form of a photograph published in the Spring of 1981, in a weekly paper called *Studentski list* (*The Student Paper*). The photograph is a shot of an audience witnessing the public performance of a conceptual artist Tom Gotovac, with Mirković’s head sticking out from the crowd. In a moment of self-authentication, face to face with the picture, Mirković captions the experience with: “This is the only proof that I’m not lying. I really saw it all. I was there, and I experienced it all.”<sup>21</sup>

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20 Mirković, *Sretno dijete*.

21 Ibid.

The third strategy of reconstructing the past in light of what is personally, and generationally, significant is driven by Mirković's desire to reanimate the history – socialist and cultural – as an emotional chronicle rather than a dispassionate chronology of events. Thus, emotional resonance rather than objective historical significance becomes the criterion for determining what from the past is brought back to life, as it were, and elucidated as indispensable for coming to terms with oneself. The endpoint of this approach, which Mirković employs throughout *Sretno dijete*, is the casting of the memory of socialist past as an emotional playground for exploring one's own sense of the self and, ultimately, for coming to terms with who – and what – one became because of that past. The scene in the film that captures this most vividly is the one with Mirković's mother retrieving from storage a stack of elementary-school homework assignments and reading to him the one he wrote as a fourteen-year-old, titled *A Farewell to Comrade Tito*. The piece is Mirković's short reflection on Tito's passing and the experience of seeing the "blue train" (*plavi voz*) stopping over in Zagreb, on its way to bring Tito's body to its final resting place in Belgrade. As he listens to his mother reading his homework, Mirković at first tries to hide the feeling of (almost) embarrassment. Then, quickly, the expression on his face – although with a slight smile of amusement – turns somewhat wistful.

Taken together, these three strategies provide a "methodological foundation" for *Sretno dijete*'s archeology of the Yugoslav past, socialist and cultural. While the film, in its constant mining of the times gone by, clearly grounds Mirković's identity quest within what might be broadly identified as the post-socialist socialist narrative, the discursive orientation of that narrative has very little – if anything – to do with nostalgia of either the restorative or reflective kind. In reanimating the past of his former socialist homeland Mirković does not aim to resuscitate that past, or to reflect on it *via* the stream of affective memories about an irretrievable time, or to explicitly cast it as retrospective utopia. Rather, the post-Yugoslav socialist discourse in *Sretno dijete* has a strategic purpose of grounding Mirković's "extrospective introspections" about himself and, by extension, the people of his generation. To go back to the article's opening paragraphs and the scene from *Munje!*, Mirković's identity quest and a resolve to deal with the question of "what was it that shaped me into a person I became?" is, in the end, his attempt to "locate his place in the coordinate system of confusion" – i.e., to understand himself within the context of a larger social universe "responsible" for molding him into what he came to be. In this context, his extrospective introspections are a means of illuminating what is within oneself by way of elucidating what is outside of it, "out there." The methodology of Mirković's archeology, thus, is based

on a recognition that extrospection (that is, consideration and observation of the things external to oneself) is a precondition for, or a path towards, introspection (that is, consideration and observation of the things internal to oneself), i.e., that the only way into oneself, as it were, is through the outside of oneself. Correspondingly, the memory of socialism in *Sretno dijete* figures as “raw material” for “the extrospective” in Mirković’s extrospective introspections and, as such, as an exterior to an interior of oneself. To employ the metaphor from *Munje!*, *Sretno dijete*’s post-Yugoslav socialist discourse is what deciphers and renders meaningful the coordinate system of confusion within which Mirković aims to locate (the sources of) himself and the people of his generation.

### ***Orkestar: An identity Quest of the Last Yugoslav Generation***

In many respects, the 2011 documentary *Orkestar* by Sarajevo-based director Pjer Žalica continues, extends, and deepens the identity quest of Mirković’s *Sretno dijete*. Both films engage in the mining of the socialist (and) cultural past in order to come to terms with the questions of “why are we the way we are?” and, in the end, “who are we?” However, whereas Mirković’s efforts are focused more on the personal identity quest, Žalica’s intent is to unearth the sources of his generation’s “self.” He does this by teaming up with Saša Lošić – his friend and a leader of one of the most popular 1980s rock bands, *Plavi orkestar*. Together, they journey through the territory of the former Yugoslavia and, through their interviews with friends and colleagues, musicians and artists, and politicians and statesmen from the common socialist past, craft a travelogue about the time of the last Yugoslav generation of 1964. Žalica’s point of entry into the past his documentary aims to recover and elucidate is a story about his friend Saša Lošić and Lošić’s band *Plavi orkestar*.

The intent of Žalica’s *Orkestar* is made explicit by the director’s opening statement at the beginning of the film:

Three years ago, my friend Saša Lošić and I embarked on a journey. We wanted to understand what kinds of traces did the time and place we lived in leave on our generation. Now we know: this is not a story about a bad time, but about good people.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, from the very outset Žalica makes clear that *Orkestar* is not about the past times as such but about a particular generational cohort in the context of

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22 Žalica, *Orkestar*.

those times. The past and exploration thereof, in other words, is not an end in itself but, rather, a means to an end of illuminating, through self-examination, a collective character and spirit of a particular group of people. The approach Žalica employs to accomplish the latter is defined in one of the first scenes of the film where, in talking to Saša Lošić, Rambo Amadeus (a Belgrade-based musician) remarks: “We ourselves need to demystify ourselves, so that others do not demystify us.”<sup>23</sup> In the hands of Žalica (and Lošić), this process of self-demystification translates into multi-layered explorations of the intersections between the personal, the generational, the cultural, the political, and the national in an attempt to lay bare what remains buried, obscured, and in need of deciphering.

Taking the above as a foundation for its archeology of the collective past, Žalica’s *Orkestar* pursues three distinct, but interrelated, demystifications: of Yugoslavia, of *Plavi orkestar* (in the context of Yugoslav (popular) culture), and of “post-Yugoslavism.” The assumption that drives the logic of demystifying all of these is that it ought to be possible to distill their particular essence and establish (a sense of) order within an otherwise “chaotic” (sense of the) past and present. Further, it is the notion that the demystification of each phenomenon being explored could, implicitly or explicitly, be grounded in a principle – or proposition – from which these phenomena are to be illuminated. And finally, it is the expectation (or, perhaps, hope) that, if successful, the demystifications should enable the last Yugoslav generation to articulate its own self-understanding in terms of their relationship to and experience of the Yugoslav socialist past and, equally important, post-Yugoslav post-socialist present. Cumulatively, these three exploratory criteria amount to a (pro)position that *Orkestar* might chart a path towards (the possibility of) locating one’s collective place in the coordinate system of confusion (to reemploy the metaphor from *Munje!*).

Each of the demystifications attempted in Žalica’s documentary is centered on the explorations of contradictions build into a collective phenomenon under investigation, and grounded in the principle/proposition that distills its respective essence. The film’s opening exploration of Yugoslavia is thus framed by a sentiment that the socialist Yugoslav society was an attempt to merge the best from the Western capitalist and Eastern socialist worlds, on the one hand, and by an acknowledgement of president Tito’s “childish tyranny” (as *Bijelo dugme*’s Goran Bregović puts it), on the other.<sup>24</sup> The principle that grounds

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23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

the exploration of these, and therefore (an attempt at) the demystification of Yugoslavia, is “an enlightening character of Yugoslav socialism.” Further, the demystification of *Plavi orkestar* oscillates between the notions of Saša Lošić’s band being a socialist-realist incarnation of *The Beatles*, and it figuring as a popular-cultural surrogate for one of the foundational principles of Yugoslav socialist community – “brotherhood-and-unity” (*bratstvo-jedinstvo*). Žalica and Lošić mine these by embedding them in a proposition about “the mythological and sloganly character of Yugoslav (popular) culture.” And finally, the probing of post-Yugoslavism operates within the contradictory parameters of a ubiquitous normative vacuity of the post-socialist present, and a stamped-out normative potency of the pre-post-socialist past. An exploration of these, in an attempt to demystify post-Yugoslavism as the current sociocultural trajectory of a “generation of the normals” (as the film dubs the generation of 1964), is couched in the principle of the “present-day absence of a philosophy of life.” In working through all three demystifications, *Orkestar* takes as its exploratory point of departure a remark by one of the interviewees, Bosnian author and poet Abdulah Sidran, that “every negation of found tradition, regardless of the latter’s nature, is barbarism.”<sup>25</sup>

The result of Žalica’s and Lošić’s efforts to demystify their own generation is a travelogue that wades through a memory of the past in order to attempt to get to a coherent sense of the collective self within that past. Despite its intent, however, *Orkestar*’s travelogue is a fragmentary (and therefore difficult to summarize) back-and-forth journey through ideas, reflections, and impressions, as coherent in its incoherence as it is incoherent in its coherence. To put it differently, what Žalica’s documentary reveals is the “messiness” of memory and the intricacy of an undertaking of “sorting out” the past and getting a firm handle on it. One of the primary reasons for this is that the memory *Orkestar* mines is very much alive and far from being the settled “collective memoirs” of the times gone by. In the same manner, so is the past this memory is trying to recall and re-collect. Because of this, the destination of Žalica’s and Lošić’s journey down the memory lane, as it were, is not a “total recall” resulting in an orderly deciphering of the coordinate system of confusion of the Yugoslav socialist past, and in a calibrated generational positioning within that system. Rather, it is a realization that the deciphering undertaken in *Orkestar* may be just as illusive as the past sought to be demystified, and that the truth of, and about, the last Yugoslav generation may, in the end, be resting in the undemystifiability of that past.

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25 Ibid.

Like *Sretno dijete*, *Orkestar* crafts its narrative through a permanent outside-in reflexivity that intertwines and weaves in “the external” and “the internal” in a multifaceted and multilayered fashion. Mirković and Žalica thus both pursue their respective identity quests from the position that the only possibility of deciphering “the internal” is to situate and explicate it within the context – and confines – of “the external.” For both of them, therefore, a consideration of and reflection upon what is outside of oneself is a precondition for, and a path to, deciphering and demystifying what is internal to oneself. To cast it more sociologically, the archeology of *Sretno dijete* and *Orkestar* is grounded in the notion that identity – be it personal or collective – is fundamentally a social construct that can only be made sense of by getting a handle on the social forces implicated in constructing it.

Like Mirković, Žalica also couches his extrospective introspections in the notion of history as an emotional chronicle and the sense of past as an emotional playground for (self-)reflexivity. Thus the demystifications *Orkestar* attempts are driven by an emotional resonance of the particular episodes and idea(l)s from the past, rendered significant by Žalica’s and Lošić’s interviewees, rather than by some objectively established and verifiable “criteria of truth.” In this context, “the past” becomes what resonates personally and generationally and touches emotionally, and what can (potentially) be made sense of and validated on the grounds of having had the real impact on cultivating a particular sense of the self. What is historically real, therefore, is what has left an emotional imprint, and what is thus taken as having a genuine impact on the ability of those who had lived through a particular kind of collective past to render their past experiences meaningful.

Finally, Žalica, like Mirković, seeks to authenticate a sense of history (re)constructed through *Orkestar* by way of tapping into a “memory log” of the actual protagonists of the times he aims to demystify. However, unlike Mirković, who positions himself as an outsider on the sidelines of history, Žalica, through Lošić and *Plavi orkestar*, places his generation at the center his film’s historical narrative, thus eliminating an insider/outsider dichotomy as the basis for deciphering the past. In the context of Žalica’s approach, the “agents of history” *Orkestar* explores are thus both the interpreters of the past and the subjects in need of their own interpretative understanding within the past they are attempting to decipher. They are, in other words, both, and simultaneously, the subjects and objects of their own history, who only have themselves to resort to and reach within in order to try to authenticate the times and memory of their own making. To put it differently, whereas Mirković’s authentication of history and himself within that history rests on him meaningfully embedding himself in the past as a subject-in-the-making, Žalica’s process of

authentication works by way of his generation being embedded in the past as an already-made subject.

### *Sretno dijete* and *Orkestar*: The Post-Yugoslav Return of Socialism

As already noted, *Orkestar* and *Sretno dijete* are both identity quests pursued through the mining of the Yugoslav socialist past in an attempt to come to terms with one's personal (in the case of *Sretno dijete*) or one's generational (in the case of *Orkestar*) sense of the self. As such, they are, to put it colloquially, two sides of the same coin: if Mirković was to extend his *Sretno dijete* and broaden (that is to say, de-individualize) his identity quest, he would end up with a film very much alike *Orkestar*; if, by contrast, Žalica was to extend his *Orkestar* and narrow (that is to say, individualize) his identity quest, he would very much end up with a film like *Sretno dijete*. In a more formal sense, the complementary nature of the films rests in the fact that they are two popular-cultural incarnations of the post-socialist return to socialism, dealing with the same *problematique*, employing very much the same exploratory strategies, and relying on an identical archeology to explore its subject-matter.

As a particular kind of sociocultural text, *Sretno dijete* and *Orkestar* are popular-cultural incarnations of the post-socialist socialist discourse within the post-Yugoslav sociocultural and political space. Central to their narrative structure is an attempt to re-invoke the Yugoslav socialist past as a “general(ized/izable) mnemonic referent” for grounding the sense of individual and/or collective identity within both Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav realities. In both films, this post-socialist return to socialism is crafted through a series of extrospective introspections which, through permanent outside-in reflexivity, weave a multilayered and multifaceted interplay of the personal, the generational, the cultural, the political, and the national in an attempt to decipher the past so as to be able to demystify one's own sources – and sense – of the self. Inscribed within both films' narrative structure, thus, is a quest to recapture “the out there” that no longer exists in order to elucidate “the within” that still does.

The post-socialist socialist discourse of *Sretno dijete* and *Orkestar* is “interested” in that it is created from a particular subject-position and from the viewpoint of specific subject-interests. Its subject-position is that of the last Yugoslav generation—i.e., a generational cohort whose formative period is embedded in the socialist past, and whose lives and ideals were unsettled by the 1991 outbreak of civil violence, the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and post-socialist ethno-nationalist regionalism. Its subject-interests emanate from a need of that gener-

ation to deal with its unsettled lives and the questions of identity and belonging brought forth by that unsettling. More to the point, they reflect the fact that the unsettling happened at the crucial point in the lives of the last Yugoslav generation – i.e., at the moment when its members were too old to both forget their formative socialist years and to fully embrace their new post-socialist realities. This, in turn, led to a generational crisis of a sort, which, in turn, led to the attempts to address the crisis with identity quests aiming to deal with the questions of “why are we the way we are?” and “who are we, in the end?” The archaeology of these quests thus became centered on mining (the memory of) one’s own past in order to (try to) get to the point of being able to locate oneself and one’s place in the socialist and post-socialist coordinate systems of confusion.

Not insignificantly, the authors of *Sretno dijete* and *Orkestar* are themselves the members of the last Yugoslav generation (Igor Mirković was born in 1965; Pjer Žalica in 1964). Thus, the narrative embedded in the post-socialist socialist discourse of their films has a deep personal and immersive genera(tiona)l resonance, being as much of an open internal monologue with oneself as it is a public dialogue with a generational cohort on and off the screen. To put it differently, *Sretno dijete* and *Orkestar* have two types of audience in mind: the authors, and the last Yugoslav generation the authors belong to. Because of this, the approach to constructing the discourse in both films takes the narrative style of a personal(ized/izable) “memory pastiche” and the form of “fictionalized-history documentary.” In the context of the former, a narrative structure of the discourse draws upon emotionally significant “memory recalls” patched together – and not necessarily chronologically – in order to (re)construct one’s “socio-psychological genesis” that is both recognizable in terms of its socio-historical resonance and relatable in terms of its psycho-emotional “correspondability.” The narrative style of memory pastiche thus aims to bring forth and interlock different pieces, or elements, of an emotional memory of one’s own past so as to create a discourse that invites and enables personal and/or generational self-recognition and self-identification. The films’ form of fictionalized-history documentary bends the conventions of documentary-making by dissolving the requirements of “objective and verifiable criteria of truth” as the basis for story-telling into “socio-emotional truth” as the criteria for weaving a narrative and structuring a discourse. Essential to this form is documenting the past by way of its socio-historical resonance to and psycho-emotional correspondability with the subjects of that past, and revealing it as historically appreciable in light of the degrees of emotional significance the subjects attach to specific “past episodes.” In the context of fictionalized-history documentary, therefore, “real” becomes what is emotionally true while “his-

tory” becomes what of the past and/or present social circumstances is relevant to, and corresponds with, that emotional truth.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, because both *Sretno dijete* and *Orkestar* have a particular audience in mind – the last Yugoslav generation to which the directors themselves belong – their discursive structure is calibrated in a way to achieve a direct and very intimate, but non-nostalgic, connection and inter-relationship. Its primary aim is to invite an audience to encounter itself, as it were, through extrospective introspections the films proffer, and to engage in one’s own outside-in reflections regarding the questions the films’ post-socialist socialist discourses explore. The films, in other words, do not aim to elicit audiences’ nostalgic yearnings of either a restorative or reflective kind, or to have audiences recall and recast their socialist past as retrospective utopia of one sort or another. Rather, they seek to establish the socio-historical and psycho-emotional mnemonic referents their audiences can tap into as the starting point for their own journey of self-discovery and the “final frontier” for locating their own place – individual or collective – in the past and present coordinate systems of confusion.

### Conclusion

My aim in this article has been to address the issue of post-socialist socialist nostalgia. More to the point, it has been to deal with the inadequacy of treating different forms of the post-socialist return of socialism as expressions of socialist nostalgia. I have argued that this kind of treatment suffers from the shortcomings of nostalgia reductionism and socialism essentialism, and leads to very problematic conceptual and analytical blinders of pre-determining the nature of what needs to be understood and explained. Correspondingly, I have proposed that a meaningful consideration of the post-socialist return of socialism has to free itself from the “nostalgia presumption” and embrace a non-essentialist analytical viewpoint whereby socialist nostalgia is recast as a plurality of heterogeneous and context-dependent post-socialist socialist discourses. In short, I have argued for a non-*a priori* conceptual and analytical framework that enables a genuine understanding and explanation of the post-socialist return of socialism.

The purpose of the analysis of *Sretno dijete* and *Orkestar* has been to illustrate my argument that not all forms of the post-socialist return of socialism can,

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26 For philosophical underpinnings of emotional truth, see Ronald de Sousa, *Emotional Truth* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011).

or should, be taken as incarnations of socialist nostalgia. To put it differently, it has been to show that socialist nostalgia is too narrow of a framework to encapsulate adequately the span of an entire range of post-socialist socialist discourses and the ways they operate in specific sociocultural contexts and communicate to and with particular audience(s). As I have pointed out, this, however, does not mean that “the nostalgic” has no place in the analysis of the post-socialist return of socialism but, rather, that the degree and nature of its presence has to be established through interpretive “reading” of particular post-socialist socialist texts rather than presumed or established *a priori*. With regards to *Sretno dijete* and *Orkestar*, while neither are devoid of “nostalgic traces,” in neither case can the degree and nature of the latter’s presence be taken as the basis for reading the films as sociocultural expressions of post-Yugoslav socialist nostalgia. In the case of Mirković’s film, the nostalgic traces are present as “intimations of nostalgia” and as no more than a sporadic peripheral subtext that neither determines, or delimits, the film’s narrative style or discursive form. In terms of Žalica’s film, the nostalgic traces figure as one of several types of outside-in reflexivity aimed at demystifying normative vacuity of post-Yugoslavism, and thus as no more than a partial – but non-determining – structuring element of the film’s narrative style or discursive form. All this is to say that “the nostalgic” in either *Sretno dijete* or *Orkestar* does not equal socialist nostalgia.

Ultimately, a larger conceptual point in all of this is a choice between an *a priori* “royal road to science” and a non-*a priori* “fatiguing climb of its steep paths” (to use Marx’s metaphor).<sup>27</sup> The former might be more facile; the latter, in the end, is more illuminating.

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27 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1 (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 104.