



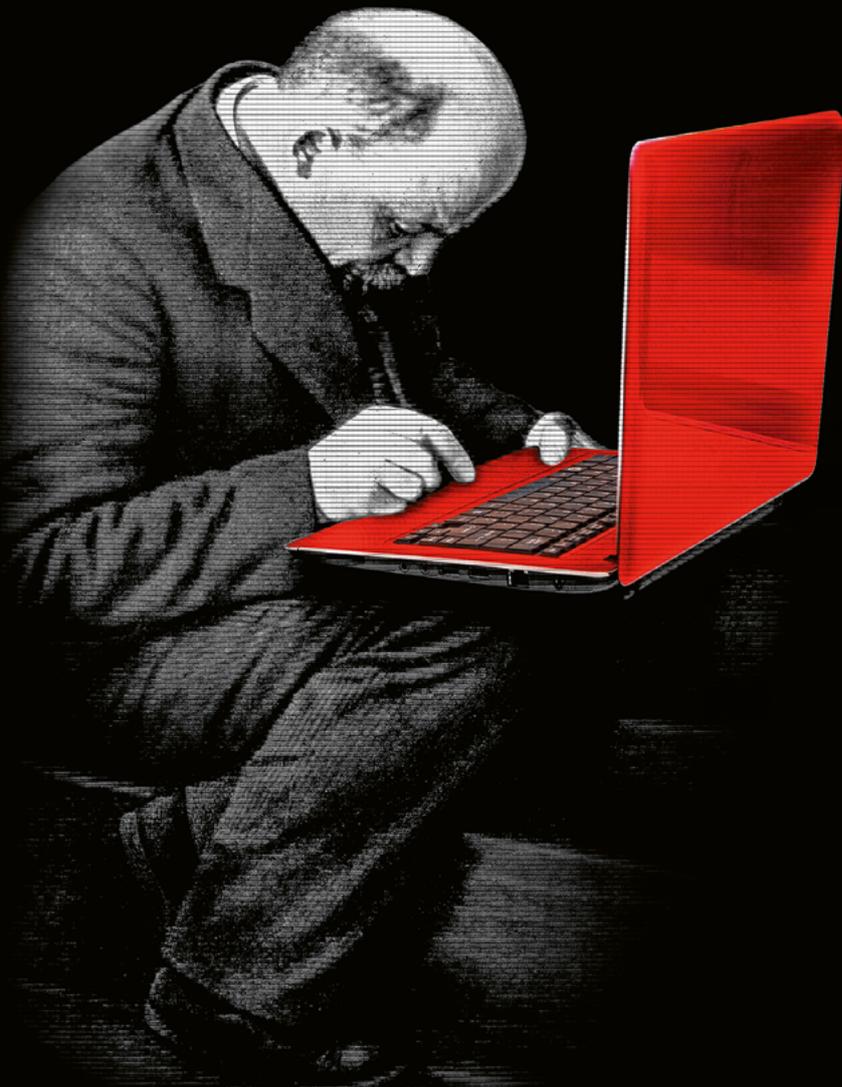
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MARTIN-LUTHER-UNIVERSITÄT
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Sehnsucht nach dem „Kommunismus“? Longing for “Communism”?

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Aula am Campus, Hof 1.11,
Campus der Universität Wien, Spitalgasse 2, 1090 Wien



Picture: Propaganda of the Russian Communist Party
from 2016 designed by Igor Petrygin-Rodionov

Kulturen der Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft bei jungen Menschen in Südost- und Osteuropa und in Ostdeutschland im 21. Jahrhundert

**Internationale und interdisziplinäre Konferenz
an der Universität Wien, Österreich**

21st Century Youth Cultures in Past, Present and Future Eastern Germany, and Southeast and Eastern Europe

**An International and Interdisciplinary Conference
at the University of Vienna, Austria**

Chair of Modern History

at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, Germany

Chair for Transformation Processes in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe

at the University of Vienna, Austria

Franz Vranitzky Chair for European Studies,

Transdisciplinary Chair at the Department of Contemporary History
and the Department of Communication at the University of Vienna, Austria

I. Panel

Phenomenology and Politics of “Yugo- and Tito-Nostalgia”

Cultural and Media Memory

Yugoslavia as the Image of Yugoslavia among the Young Generation

Nataša Simeunović Bajić

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The great transitions from one state and social order to another always produce discursive meanings which need to be slowly and meticulously unraveled. The appearance of Yugo-nostalgia after the dissolution of Yugoslavia introduces arbitrariness and relativity into the following notions: Yugoslav, pre-socialist, non-Yugoslav, socialist, cultural heritage, post-socialist. Since the phenomenon of Yugo-nostalgia stems not from the domain of state order or the official policy of post-Yugoslav states, but from the cultural memory of the people who lived in Yugoslavia, it is especially interesting to consider how the young generation, born after its dissolution, perceives the image of the former country. What is the role of the media in creating this image? Does the image fade with each new generation, or is it enhanced in certain aspects? How far does cultural memory go? What are the aspirations of the young generation towards the present they live in and towards the future they are preparing for? I will try to answer these questions not only from a theoretical, but also from an empirical standpoint.

Yugo-Nostalgia

Pride and Prejudice

Irena Ristić

Resource Centre for Research Support,
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The positivist need to rationalize and normativize ideas, and to conceptualize ideal systems, be it only by declaring the liberal democracy as the least worst system, cannot but lead to the conclusion that longing for communism is a backward attitude. However, as empirical studies consistently show, a significant number of the citizens of former Yugoslavia tend to associate progress—both personal and political—with the previous system rather than the current one, despite the established mainstream theory that communism is outdated. Observed through the lens of phenomenology it cannot be ignored that communism still has support, and does not appear to many people as wrong and backward, even if “objectively”—through the lens of liberal democratic ideology—their belief does not seem correct. The aim of this presentation is to go beyond Yugonostalgia as the main explanation for this phenomenon, and to show that the longing for communism in the countries of former Yugoslavia is only secondarily related to what is perceived as the good side of communism. Primarily, the longing is related to the adverse aspects of the system that followed on the one hand, and to the way that communism and Yugoslavia are depicted by the new ruling elites and the (global) memorialization of communism on the other hand.

Yugoslavia after Yugoslavia

Graffiti about Yugoslavia in Post-Yugoslav Urbanscape

Mitja Velikonja

Center for Cultural and Religious Studies,
University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Twenty-five years after the bloody collapse of socialist Yugoslavia, urban walls in its successor states are still full of pro- and anti-Yugoslav graffiti and street art. Main questions of the presentation, based on my longitudinal research and on semiological (quantitative and qualitative) methodological approaches, are how, where and why Yugoslavia – its socialism, its anti-fascist roots and its leaders – are (de)constructed, praised and condemned in this specific urban subculture. On the level of denotation, graffiti and street art can be divided into different pro-Yugoslav and anti-Yugoslav types, often directly confronted in graffiti battles. On the level of connotation, three major ideological antagonisms appear: socialist federalism versus nationalism, Tito versus his opponents, and antifascism versus fascism. Before presenting the research findings, expressive strategies of such urban production are analyzed, including provocation and criticism, affirmation and continuity, territory marking, constant antagonization, and semiotic guerrilla.

Living and Rocking in the Best of All Worlds

Longing for Communist Yugoslavia

Zlatko Jovanovic

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At the center of this paper is the mythology of Yugoslav New Wave. According to it, Yugoslav New Wave was one of the world’s best rock scenes of its time. Woven into this image is the implication that Yugoslavs were in fact living in the best of all worlds. Already during the late 1970s when Yugoslav New Wave was on the rise, an idea emerged in the New Wave scene that the Yugoslav kind of socialism meant that the Yugoslav youth enjoyed a life with more freedom than their peers in the Eastern Bloc countries, and simultaneously, they were living in a system that was more socially just than the capitalist system of the West. This idea is one of the central pillars of the phenomenon of Yugo-nostalgia. Accordingly, “longing for communism” in the post-Yugoslav states is longing for this special kind of Yugoslav Communism, which is perceived as more free than the state socialism of Eastern Europe and as more socially just than the capitalist system of the West and of the countries in which they live in today that were inherited by people of the former Yugoslav republics.

Against this background, the paper will address the close relationship between the mythology of Yugoslav New Wave and the rise of the phenomenon of Yugo-nostalgia.

II. Panel

European and Generational Comparative Perspectives

East Germany as an Exceptional Case in the Historical View of the Era of State Socialism

The GDR in the Public Light and in the Memory and Appropriation of Today's Eastern German Generations

Thomas Ahbe

Social Scientist and Publicist, Germany

The conflicts that occurred in the transition from a single-party dictatorship and planned economy to democracy and capitalism had to be resolved internally throughout the societies of the Eastern Bloc. However, in East Germany, superimposed over these problems was the conflict with actors from another society, that of the Federal Republic of Germany, whose institutional and administrative systems moved in to East Germany.

For the East German minority, which was at most a fifth of the population of united Germany, the new political freedom to share in constitutional democracy and western consumer standards, was tied to enormous biographical breaks. Additionally, East Germans as a constructed and then also self-identified group were confronted with negative stereotyping.

Since this constellation was especially conducive to nostalgia, the education and political education of a unified Germany was actively pursued in order to promote the processing of the historical past. There is a network of German institutions dedicated to processing dictatorship.

What effect does processing the past have? What image of the German Democratic Republic do middle-aged and young East and West Germans have? How do young East Germans interpret the contents of overcoming dictatorship and make it into their history? What role do the familiar narratives play compared with the narratives of (political) education and the media?

Dreams of USSR 2.0

Communist Utopias of Young Members of the Russian Organization “The Essence of Time”

Anke Giesen

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Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg, Germany

In May and June 2017, in large Russian cities, youths and young adults took to the streets to demonstrate against widespread corruption among their countries' politicians. If one has been following the numerous interviews with those affected by such corruption, as reported in newspapers and on television, one cannot escape the impression that at least the young urban generation in Russia wants to live in a “normal” country and that, with their forms of communication in social networks, they do not differ essentially from those of their age group in greater Europe.

Yet the young generation in Russia has shown itself to be just as ambivalent as the Russian population as a whole, which is commonly described as divided into a modern, liberal part and a traditional, Soviet-nostalgic part.

In the lecture presentation, young members of the organization “The Essence of Time” will be introduced and will explain how, in the context of a professional campaign, they effectively advocate for transforming their country into a “Soviet Union 2.0” although they would have known life under socialism only as pre-school children, if that. In this regard, a deeper glance will be cast on the various sources of communist utopias.

Between Longing and Refusal

Memories of Communism in Postcommunist Poland

Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska

Institute of Contemporary Culture,
University of Łódź, Poland

Polish society is divided with regard to communism. In 2016, the government of the “Law and Justice” party introduced, with great public approval, the so-called “Decommunization Law,” which forbids memorializing communism in public spaces. Social-psychological studies on the contrary show that generations which experienced communism as adults (that is, people who were no longer children at the time of transition), remember the 1970s and especially the 1980s in an especially positive light. (Prusik, Lewicka 2016) Recently, communism has also found inroads into popular culture, above all in fashion and design, which take up again Polish designs from the 1950s and 1960s. In major cities, a growing number of restaurants and bars are serving “communist cuisine,” although these dishes are far more readily available now than the supply chains in the People’s Republic of Poland had allowed for. This paper will explore the question of whether and how these varying attitudes are related. Can it be that the rejection of communism in political discourse and its highly positive assessment in everyday culture are two sides of the same coin?

References in the Soviet Past Among Young Adults in Contemporary Russia

Anna Schor-Tschudnowskaja

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Sigmund Freud University, Vienna, Austria

The paper is based on interviews that were recorded from 2013 to 2016 with young adults (ages 18 to 28) in Moscow and St. Petersburg (in the course of a FWF research project). In the quarter century that has gone by since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a whole generation has grown up. According to various studies, this generation is characterized by their historical disinterest and very fragmented knowledge of their country's recent past. My study's goal was to analyze as closely as possible the impressions of the Soviet Union which necessarily occurred beyond the scope of personal experiences among the youngest generation of adults in Russia: How do young people arrange the reference points within their family histories in the Soviet Union and how do they do so in general? What role does the Soviet past play in their lives today and what relevance is attributed to past historical experience? To what extent can one speak of nostalgia in the youth's look back at history? And to what extent have they inherited a society oriented around utopias? Exemplary findings from the interviews will be presented.

Locus of Longing: Tourist Product Communism

Consumers and Guides Giving “Communism Tours” in Slovakia

Sabine Stach

German Historical Institute Warsaw,
Max Weber Foundation, Poland

On offer for the last fifteen years in cities from Berlin to Moscow are the city tours that follow the tracks of communism. Addressed above all to tourists from the American continent and Western Europe, firms offering “communism tours” lead their guests away from the common tourist paths to the “authentic places” which makes the most recent history of the postcommunist countries evident. “Communism” thus becomes the product of a highly commercialized tourism industry. Using the example of the “Bratislava Post-Socialist City Tour,” the presentation opens up the question, to what extent this kind of city tour is motivated by a desire for communism. By focusing on the product—the native youth—on one hand, and on the other, the consumers—tourists between 20 and 70 years old—two theses introduced: (1) the nostalgicizing view of Czechoslovakia is less an expression of desire for the socialist past or concrete social and political aspects of communism; it is much more evidence of longing, not only among tourists, for a simple world which is experienced through the senses, a non-digital world before 1989. (2) On the tour through today’s urban space of Bratislava, the narrative of a dictatorship and deficient economic system in Czechoslovakia is combined with a critique of urban planning policies, investment, and corruption after the transformation. In this light, the Velvet Revolution loses some of its decisively positive valuation. In the subtext, the tour ultimately also implies a vague utopia of a non-capitalist society.

Panel III

Alternatives to Present-Day Neoliberal Capitalism: Does “Communism” Have a Future?

Soviet Communism has Discredited all Humanist Alternatives

What Might Be Done?

Jörn Schütrumpf

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Bolshevism as a political movement has been dead for twenty-five years, but its crimes live on. All alternatives to the capitalist system are denounced by the seventy years of Bolshevik rule. In the western countries, the Russian revolution of 1917 and especially the Bolshevik takeover awakened hopes for their own revolutions. But in each country the point quickly came when hope turned into denial due to the terror the Bolsheviks used in order to retain power. The Bolsheviks did not initiate free and just, i.e., classless societies, but societies with artificial class structures. They disappeared when domination became dysfunctional and was exhausted. Nothing discredited post-capitalist ideas as much as the Bolshevik rule. Nowadays, each new alternative movement has to develop its aims and methods in ever new confrontations with Bolshevik political practice. This is the only way to prevent Bolsheviks from again gaining power in the future.

The “Woman Question” in Transition

Between Socialist Experience and Future Prospects

Leda Sutlovic

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University of Vienna, Austria

The treatment of the “woman question” in Yugoslavian state socialist women’s organizations can be observed from the two aspects. The first is ideological, explaining how the issue was perceived in theoretical and conceptual terms, and was framed accordingly within the state policies. The second is organizational and shows that by situating women’s rights institutions, from the federal to the local levels, within the socialist self-management system, the efficacy of the institutional agenda is improved. These two aspects are shown by the Croatian case in the 1960s and 1970s. Through the demonstration of specificities of the socialist experience in the field of women’s rights, the aim is to provide an addition, or even an alternative, to the deficits which exist in the system today.

Serbia's Retrogressing Democracy

Ivana Spasić

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In the early 2000s, Serbia seemed to be firmly on the road to democratization. Especially important in that regard, as evidenced by sociological research from that period, was the widespread feeling of political maturation and subjectivation of large swathes of citizenry, which had engaged quite directly, and passionately, in the removal of Slobodan Milošević's authoritarian regime. Some major lessons seemed to have been collectively learned, including: the necessity of constant popular monitoring of political officials; the insistence on the latter's accountability; evading the traps of nationalist mobilization and war-mongering; the importance of building democratic institutions that promote equality, fairness and public dialogue; and respect for the public interest. The prevalent motto seemed to be never again shall we allow anyone to rule like Milošević did. Less than twenty years later, however, these lessons look defunct. Democratic development, which was making slow but apparently irreversible steps forward, is now taking the opposite direction. A poor, dependent, frightened society, caught in the huge clientelist network started by the former governments and greatly upgraded by the current one, is rather passively allowing another authoritarian regime with façade-democratic legitimation to tighten its grip over all social spheres. Censorship of dissenting voices and intimidation of political opponents are back, along with sustained undermining of the existing institutions and the barely established rules of the game. This paper will attempt to map and briefly discuss the manifestations, causes, and implications of this disheartening reversal.

Arguments of Anti-Communism and Anti-Capitalism in Contemporary Romania

Enikő Vincze

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Arguments of anti-communism were and are used for the legitimation of each and every political decision regarding societal change after 1990. In Romania, the idea of communism is strictly associated with Ceauşescu, the authoritarian leader who defined the socialism or state socialism in this country between 1965 and 1989. But anti-communism was not only sustained by the mainstream intellectuals and all of the politicians, regardless of their ideological or party affiliation, while they promised the improvement of people's material living conditions or the assurance of civic and political rights. Much more, anti-communism was used to justify the privatization of public assets, the production of social and economic inequalities, the underdevelopment of Romania compared to other EU member states, and the austerity measures implemented since 2009. Even after almost three decades of capitalism, critics of capitalism, and more so the ideas of equality, distributive justice, or social and economic rights are easily delegitimized by their association with "communism."

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