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Article

The pleasure of continuity: Re-reading post-socialist nostalgia

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Abstract

This article explores uses and modalities of the concept of post-socialist nostalgia in the still emerging field of cultural studies focused on the region of Central and Eastern Europe. It encapsulates both the cultural and socio-political forms of post-socialist nostalgia, defined as tinkering with the remnants of the socialist popular culture, television, fashion or design and reminiscing about social welfare under Communist Party rule. The main aim of this theoretical article is to demonstrate the anti-hegemonic dimension of post-socialist nostalgia, which disturbed the official memory politics that promoted discontinuity with the socialist past in the early post-transformation period of the 1990s. The dynamics in Czechoslovakia/Czech Republic in this period are presented to illuminate how discontinuity in memory politics was embedded in retroactive justice, legislation, the economy, etc. In contrast to these elitist discourses reducing the memory of socialism to its crimes, the pop-cultural post-socialist nostalgia (the lowbrow discourse less strictly policed for discontinuity) served as the venue through which continuity with socialism was redeemed. Reunion with one's own past and reclaiming the right to remember the past fully is presented as a source of cultural pleasure, the backbone of both types of post-socialist nostalgia.

Keywords

continuity, culture, memory, nostalgia, ostalgie, popular culture, post-socialism

When back-street dealers started to sell Red Army military hats on Prague's Charles Bridge back in 1990–91, nobody could foresee the rich future life of the material and cultural artefacts of socialism in post-socialist societies. Military headwear in the heart of

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Prague was seen as the last hiccup of the former occupying troops obliged to leave Czechoslovakia by June 1991.[1] The first objectified reference to the socialist past through the indexes of Soviet empire (such as military equipment and wooden dolls 'Matryoshka') – as playful and ironic as it was – embedded some practices of war tourism (Butler and Suntikul, 2013). In this context, possession of an object that once belonged to the defeated party in the style of a souvenir (e.g. purchase of a Red Army furry cap) acquires the meaning of a trophy and symbolically reinforces the defeat and humiliation of the loser. This practice thus epitomizes repudiation and dismissal of the socialist past, rather than being a mnemonic performance aiming to establish continuity. Nonetheless, less than ten years after 1990, cultural indexes of the socialist period flooded Central and Eastern Europe again, latterly in the form of material and immaterial reminiscences of socialist everyday living. Socialist domestic equipment, fashion, design, comebacks of socialist pop music stars, and reruns and new editions of socialist television programmes – were all soon identified and theorized as 'post-socialist nostalgia' (Berdhal, 1999; Boyer, 2006; Ekman and Linde, 2005; Kalinina, 2014; Nadkarni and Shevchenko, 2004; Pehe, 2014; Reifová, 2009; Roberts, 2003; Velikonja, 2009). In this case, the relationship to the socialist period was very different than in the case of early post-Cold War emergence of military souvenirs. This new concern for the socialist past replaced the morally grounded and normative rejection of socialism (which seemed to be self-evident in the first years after the social and political changeover) with the 'will to memory' (Eyal, 2003) while promoting a novel mode of lenient memory of the socialist past. Academic reflection on 'post-socialist nostalgia', in a rather blanket manner, explained the new structure of feeling as a detrimental, corrupted and media-driven form of collective memory which hinders post-socialist cultures from gaining access to the authentic substance of the socialist past (Czepczyński, 2008; Poblocki, 2008; Velikonja, 2009).[2] In media and vernacular discourses, it was not unusual to interpret post-socialist nostalgia as a simple desire to reinstate state socialism with all its attributes, including the undemocratic political system.

This article opens with an assumption that post-socialist nostalgia must not be assessed as an isolated cultural process but should be interpreted against the background of the dismissive approach to the socialist past in the early 1990s. The prevailing disidentification with socialism at this time must be our starting point when looking for the meaning of post-socialist nostalgia. The article seeks to map some classifications onto the existing concepts of post-socialist nostalgia and re-read it from the perspective of memory functions and continuity building. It does so by providing a detailed description of the early 1990s discourse of symbolic nullification and annihilation of socialism in Czechoslovakia and Czech Republic, and it shows how a lenient and permissive approach to the socialist past (i.e. post-socialist nostalgia) emerged as a backlash to this practice of discontinuity.

Sedimentation of the collective memory of socialism in the post-socialist Czech Republic

The metamorphosis of relations to the socialist past and the emergence of a more permissive approach to socialist everydayness in Czechoslovakia and Czech Republic are best explained as the sedimentation of collective memory. Halbwachs' (2010) seminal theory

of collective memory removes memory from the individual's head and positions it at the centre of social actors' interactions, shaped by societal forces such as power, ideology and hegemony. From the perspective of cultural studies, the dynamics of this process are twofold: collective memory is fabricated by the structural forces of the official politics of memory and imposed on its users 'from above' and simultaneously it arises 'from below', as a popular memory reflecting the mnemonic performance of ordinary people apart from the elitist discourses of encyclopaedic history and politics (Foucault, 1975). Illuminating the dynamics of collective memory is crucial because the way the Czech society amended its relationship to the socialist past during its post-socialist period will be explained precisely as a slow retreat from institutionally and ideologically prioritized official politics of memory, towards the advancement of popular memory challenging the official emphasis on discontinuity and disidentification with socialism.

Discontinuity in the official mnemopolitics

Shortly after the socio-political changeover at the end of 1989, evaluation of the socialist past became food for the Czechoslovak and Czech mnemopolitics, that is, the official, state-laden politics of memory. The politics of memory, as understood by Kubik and Bernhard (2014), is a set of 'strategies that political actors employ to make others remember in certain, specific ways and the effects of such mnemonic manipulations' (2014: 7). The most salient assumption (as well as an objective) of post-socialist mnemopolitics was rejection and condemnation of the socialist past. This structure of feeling was grounded in the newly emerging public sphere broadly accommodating the views of the former dissidents and critical intellectuals persecuted by the state socialist power structures, and the general national consensus voiced by the first democratic elections in 1990.[3]

By the same token, the official post-socialist mnemopolitics put forward discontinuity with the socialist past as a taken-for-granted normative orientation.[4] Divorce from the former modes of social organization and their substitution with new patterns, norms, laws and discourses permeated the entire society, from justice to travelling, from the economy to television broadcasting. Socialism was suddenly turned into the bygone past – a kind of fusion of tragedy and embarrassment – and there was little or no manifest interest in preserving it as part of national history. Shortly after the changeover, collective memory of the socialist past did not represent a problem to be solved because no one was too keen to remember it. Michael D. Kennedy observed that for the newly constituted 'transition culture' socialism was 'something to be escaped, repressed, and destroyed' (2002: 13).

It was mainly the new political and economic elites who took up and perpetuated the spirit of discontinuity, which was gradually embedded in laws, policy documents and political manifestos. Czechoslovakia saw almost a total replacement of the elites in politics, state administration and the top-level management in other domains of the economy. Reproduction of elites gave way to the circulation of elites to an extent unseen in other post-Soviet countries (Waisová, 2011). People who were catapulted into the new elites after 1989 typically had jobs in lower management before 1989, which they won for their technocratic rather than political qualities (Hanley et al., 1998). A specific sub-group that endorsed discontinuity as the natural course for the society were ex-dissidents – an

important voice in foreign policy, diplomacy, arts, journalism, etc. Another newly formed elite comprised the architects of economic transformation who emerged from the Institute of Economics and the Prognostic Institute (both under the umbrella of the Academy of Sciences), where these experts hibernated during the 1980s. The institutes were covert enclaves of neoliberal economic thought and provided their members with access to up-to-date western scholarship on economics, which was an exceptional condition in Czechoslovakia in the 1980s. The mentioned agents of transformation drew upon the trust of the general public in the rightfulness of economic and political reforms in spite of the hardships intrinsic to them (famously phrased as 'the need to tighten the belts' by the right-wing Minister of Finance and Prime Minister Václav Klaus early in the 1990s). In 1993, more than 65% of respondents expressed trust in the Czech right-wing government headed by Václav Klaus (ČSDA, 2005).

The new leadership of Czechoslovak society, together with most of the population, understood the general reconstruction of the political, economic and social institutions and the re-making of society on the principles of democracy and the market economy in Central and Eastern Europe to be a reinstatement of a lost natural condition. The widespread concept of 'transition', borrowed from 1960s Latin American modernization rhetoric (Buden, 2013: 37), referred to becoming an approximation of the West as quickly and closely as possible. The West was seen as an embodiment of the natural human condition, the paradise lost to which Central and Eastern Europe had to find its way again (Bunce, 1995). The project of transition sought to be the project of reparation of socialist errors. The newly repaired order was then supposed to fill the space vacated after the dismantling of the socialist mentality (Kennedy, 2002: 14).

The backbone of the transition culture was constant: comparative readings of the western model, which attributed differences to Czechoslovakia lagging behind the West and falling behind the order of things we would have lived through, had we not been struck by socialism. However, the reparation-based, dismissive discourse on socialism did not focus solely on institutional and political history. It affected the memory of socialism in its entirety, including personal and everyday memory – it impacted on the vertical 'wedges of memory' cutting across all strata of the past, rather than just suppressing unwanted horizontal layers of memory.

This articulation of democracy and the market economy was taken to be the natural course of social development in Central and Eastern Europe after 1990, and the only existing path of historical progress from which we had strayed due to a mistake made forty years ago. Roland Barthes (2004) has famously noted that mistaking history for nature is one of the most efficient tools in production of myths. Confusing the social with the natural is a myth-making process which transforms contingency into rigidity. The conventional and the arbitrary (the social) is passed off as necessity (the natural). In this sense, transition culture attempting to nullify the socialist past was anchored in a specific post-socialist mythology of the self-evident, natural correctness of capitalism and the West. The founding fathers of the post-socialist transformation (as described above) and their followers saw the socialist past as a freak of history and a construction manufactured by political engineers, whereas the introduction of capitalism represented the return of a natural condition. The Czech(oslovak) deflection of socialism, backed up by this myth, was quick and smooth. The determination to believe that socialism was just an

ill-conceived detour which could be partly rectified and partly forgotten was intense. Almost as if it had not happened to us…. The blurb to the book by Boris Buden *Konec postkomunismu* (The End of Post-Communism) (2013) makes a similar observation by noting that 'we are now freely allowed to manipulate our communist past, we inspect it from the forensic perspective as a corpse which may be a source of useful indices, we can look at it as at some foreign, distant culture'.

In the early stage of Czech(oslovak) societal transformation in the first half of the 1990s, the principle of commemoration and rectification of injustice was the only mode of memory of the socialist past actively elaborated by the official state mnemopolitics. The preferred memory which was facilitated by the anti-communist (and – as economic transformation proceeded – also neoliberal) dominant narrative was reparation memory. Mnemopolitical texts such as bills, laws, political speeches, media commentaries or interviews unanimously reduced the socialist past to the traumas and harms endured or iniquities committed which must be rectified in the highest measure. The lasting remnant of the relationship to the socialist past was grounded in the idea of the past narrowed down to pathologies and deviances, framing it as a malignant episode whose ramifications we try to mitigate.

According to Françoise Mayer (2009), Czech(oslovak) society introduced the concept of retroactive justice – justice which looked back into the past and addressed crimes and iniquities committed by the communist regime:

> In Central Europe, the Czechs, apart from the Germans, made the biggest progress in putting the reconciliation with the past on legislative ground. The local legislation consists of a large body of laws dealing with rehabilitation of the victims, rectification of moral and material harms, purging the public administration, prosecution, investigation and conviction of the perpetrators of the communist crimes, disclosure of the secret police archives … (2009: 53)

The Czech(oslovak) legislation developed specialized laws which codified rehabilitation of the communist victims, especially political prisoners; property restitution of the assets nationalized after 1948; dismissal of former high communist officials or those who collaborated with the secret police from leading positions in the public sphere; stating the illegal character of the communist regime and the legitimate nature of the anti-communist resistance; and the establishment of the Office for the Documentation and the Investigation of the Crimes of Communism. The ethos of discontinuity – shaking off socialism as a whole way of life and focusing the rest of memory on iniquitous segments of the past – was further advanced by an economic transformation enabling privatization of formerly state property, founding of private businesses and reform of health, education and social welfare systems. Mayer too – as remote from sentimental considerations of socialism as she is – notes that the principle of retroactive justice represented 'the political effort to set the norms of interpretations of the past' (2009: 54). She puts emphasis on the fact that rehabilitation of the victims and the clear out of officials and collaborators were done in a blanket manner. These projects were not designed to bring those individuals to the courts to compensate the victims or punish the perpetrators according to their individual deeds. On the contrary, the legislation concerned strove to be a universal, out-of-court toolkit for navigating society so it could distinguish victims from perpetrators (Mayer,

2009: 66). As such, it put forward the idea of general condemnation of the socialist past (2009: 73). The blanket nature of the reparation legislation – that is, the decision not to treat the acts of victims and perpetrators one by one during individual trials – made it a general moral declaration about the deplorable nature of the socialist past, rather than a hands-on manual for making judgements in particular cases.

The official mnemopolitics reduced the socialist past to communist crimes and this reduction manifested itself in the legislation that targeted society as a whole, explaining to it what are the new preferred values and norms. The values were quite clear and simple: those who kept the past in working order are perpetrators; those who were punished for their efforts to disrupt the past are victims. The monolith of this normative system regulating the moral and legal assessment of socialism was grounded in the painstaking annihilation of the socialist past.

The broad anti-communist consensus together with the specific mnemopolitics at the dawn of post-socialism put the relationship to the socialist past on the grounds of two complementary 'mnemonic regimes' (Kubik and Bernhard, 2014: 14): memory of the destruction and destruction of the memory. Society set out to accomplish a specific memory project: the majority of the past will be forgotten (destruction of the memory) and the extremes which prove impossible to forget will be compensated (memory of the destruction). In this way, society will be reconciled with the past, which will be securely closed off in a settled history. What a surprise when the so-called 'reconciliation with the communist past' turned out to be a Pandora's box rather than a tightly locked closet.

Continuity of popular memory

In the first half of the 1990s it was difficult to predict that the ramifications of cutting off Czech society from its socialist past would be rather paradoxical – the comeback of socialism-inspired sentiments on the cultural and political stages. Nevertheless, in the beginning of the 2000s the urge to remember socialism sprang up: first through cultural and material artefacts, and later in the political attitudes of some segments of the public. Hunger for resurrection of the socialist past was one of the most salient post-socialist paradoxes, although the wide consensus about the post-socialist discontinuity was clearly asking for this kind of backlash.

The application of retroactive justice by rectification and mitigation of iniquities committed in the past – however proper and legitimate it was – started to be seen as an activity by which selected groups of the communists' victims aspired to generalize their group memory as the collective memory of the whole Czech population. The socialist past, especially the so-called 'normalization' – the period which was experienced as ordinary everyday life by large numbers of rank-and-file citizens[5] – was all of a sudden re-narrated as a struggle between victims and villains. The majority of people, objectively or subjectively, did not (or did not fully) belong to any of it. Many Czechs never met any political prisoners, dissidents, high party officials or communist prison warders during the years of socialism, and yet the official politics of memory in the early 1990s took these 'mnemonic actors' to be the key – not to say the only noteworthy – figures of the past. Considering Kubik and Bernhard's classification of mnemonic actors including warriors, pluralists, abnegators and prospectives (2014: 12–14), the Czech(oslovak) state

mnemopolitics focused almost solely on the warriors. Yet large numbers of Czech citizens who originally lent support to the general consensus on discontinuity in the early 1990s never occupied these radical positions. Consequently, the awareness crystallized that in the newly narrated history of socialism, there is no space for ordinary people who did not fit into the positions of radical mnemonic actors. It was the dramatic actors in the categories of victims and villains who were newly appointed as the agents of history. Mayer (2009: 258) counts communist officials, normalizers, dissidents, political prisoners and collaborators with the secret police, whereas, as she puts it, 'the people without a story' were expelled from the dialectics of contemporary history. It is from this alienating effect of retroactive justice focused exclusively on radical mnemonic actors and the displacing of ordinary people from history, that the roots of later interest in renewing the complex memory of socialism grew.

After the relationship with the socialist past had been narrowed down following the principle of retroactive justice in early 1990s, many people were suddenly deprived of any history at all: 'the old past' as it was lived and experienced before 1989 was 'outdated' and the new interpretation of socialism did not accommodate ordinary people who were outside the victim–villain dichotomy. A major part of Czech society was beyond the reach of the resolving power of the newly narrated socialist past, and at worst they were numbered with the perpetrators. The populations who were dismissed from history by this new 'reallocation' of the past sought renewal of access to the socialist past ignored by the official politics of memory.

Specific popular practices constituting the new, nostalgic relationship to the socialist past in the late 1990s have been given substantial treatment. Authors who write about the topic employ various categories and systems of classification. Maya Nadkarni and Olga Shevchenko situate the birth of post-socialist nostalgia in Central and Eastern Europe at the moment where the sale began of symbols of communist ideology, such as 'bust of Lenin and Soviet medals' (2004: 499), which sprang up shortly after the political changeover in the region. From their perspective, post-socialist nostalgia further refers to the resurrection of remnants of socialist everyday life, especially objects of socialist material culture, retrospective exhibitions and museums, and television documentaries, as well as re-screenings of socialist-era films and television programmes. Romanticization of the socialist habitus is emphasized as another mode of post-socialist nostalgia, including memories (whether genuine or amended by reconstructive memory) of heartfelt and sincere human relationships and more delicious (or even more healthy) food. Yet another set of nostalgic practices is found in the tastes of the young generation, which does not have its own memory of state socialism and still indulges in postmodern mockery of the socialist lifestyle. Mitja Velikonja (2009) follows the principle of formal genres rather than cultural practices, which brings his approach to post-socialist nostalgia close to Pierre Nora's concept of 'lieux de mémoire'. Velikonja finds the nostalgic memory in particular 'places' such as 'public places, consumer goods, graphic design, popular culture, public events, party politics, street culture, art, cyberworld, or public opinion surveys' (Velikonja, 2009: 540).

To conclude, cultural practices representing post-socialist nostalgia started to mushroom outside of elite discourses (such as politics, economics or law) and can be counted among the fragments of lowbrow culture and quotidian socialist aesthetics. As

disillusionment with the outcome of the post-socialist economic reforms (in the context of the vexing global economic situation) grew bigger in the course of the 2000s, the nostalgic throwbacks to the socialist era went beyond the cultural domain and took the form of political opinions of some segments of the public as well.

In this study, nostalgic practices are understood to be reclaiming the memory of socialism and extricating the relationship to the socialist past from the hegemonic discontinuity introduced and taken for granted in the early 1990s. While the post-socialist mnemopolitics strove to implement discontinuity as the dominant mode of collective memory 'from above', that is, by legislative, political and economic structures, resistance against hegemonic discontinuity rose up 'from below', from the level of the popular memory of socialism. Unlike the discontinuity, which was endorsed by and perpetuated in the serious, highbrow domains of politics, economy and the law, the emotions representing the need for continuity started to condense from the bottom up on the platform of popular memories of socialist mass culture, such as revivals of the old discotheque-like popular music or reruns of television programmes emblematic of socialist television. The emergence of the popular memory of socialism articulates the urge to regain a sense of continuous, uninterrupted temporality and to mitigate the official mnemopolitics of discontinuity. The demand for continuity embedded in the newly formed, lenient memory of socialism was a form of resistance towards the state-driven, dominant mnemopolitics of the post-totalitarian regime, manifesting the urge to restore connections to the socialist past. Treatises on the role of popular culture in the constitution of a lenient memory of socialism ought not to overlook a specific group of films about socialism, the so-called 'bitter-sweet comedies', shot in the early 1990s (Dominková, 2008; Hladík: 2010).[6] These films provided the first post-1989 visualizations of socialist everyday life, while the narratives nonetheless focused on the malignant backbone of the socialist past. As such, these films were cultural renditions of reparatory, discontinuous memory repudiating the socialist past rather than predecessors of the audiovisual nostalgia which came later, the flagship of which became five seasons of the TV drama series *Vyprávěj* (Tell Me How It Was, 2009–13). [7]

This study argues that restoration of continuity with the socialist past brought about by the post-socialist nostalgic popular culture was experienced as mass and massive pleasure. Cultural studies are inspired by Roland Barthes' (1975) twofold notion of pleasure which distinguishes between *plaisir* and *jouissance. Plaisir* is a sort of cultural satisfaction which occurs when one's identity is confirmed, while *jouissance* targets deep-seated desires connected to body and nature rather than culture (Fiske, 1987: 227). The resurrected will to remember socialism bears traces of both types of Barthesian pleasure. Throwbacks to the socialist era are delivered mostly through cultural signification practices and respond to the tensions in cultural identity. Personal as well as cultural identity is closely intertwined with our past – the past is a part, starting point and fabric of our identity. Nussbaum makes the point maintaining that, 'Really successful dissociation of the self from memory would be a total loss of the self – and thus all of the activities to which sense of one's identity is important' (2001: 177). On the other hand, any nostalgia is in near proximity to longing, desire and bodily experienced frustration. Restoration of the links to the (temporarily barricaded) past then incites both cultural as well as natural pleasure.

Post-socialist nostalgia as a demand for continuity

Grouping new lenient memories of socialism under the label of 'nostalgia', 'post-socialist nostalgia' or 'ostalgie' (Boyer, 2006; Enns, 2007) is not unjustified. It partly mimics the vocabulary of the debate over western nostalgia in the film industry, especially US films that revive the style and feeling of the 1950s – a debate which was played out as (an analysis of) postmodern hindsight substituting a modernist perspective on temporality, and a preoccupation with originality and novelty (Jameson, 1984).[8] But more generally, nostalgia is understood as a potential consequence of a momentous change since the outset of the concept's use.

'Nostalgia' is a portmanteau of the Greek word *nosots* (home) and *algia* (pain, suffering) (Davis, 1979: 1). In its original use, it referred to the psychiatric condition diagnosed by the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in the 17th century. There is a distinct peculiarity associated with desire and sorrow embedded in nostalgia, as they are nostalgic only as far as they remain unfulfilled. Nostalgic desire yearns for a return to the idealized situation only if the return is steadfastly unattainable in reality. It is much more likely that nostalgia entails flirting and fiddling about with the idea of time travel rather than any serious political planning of regressive social change.

The advent of post-socialist nostalgia was not unpredictable as it was a ramification of the principal change which divided the temporality of Central and Eastern Europe into 'before' and 'after' and created a severe dislocation into the region's history. Nevertheless, post-socialist nostalgia is specific as it addresses a sharply disjunctive 'before' and 'after' – the socialist 'before' was condemned in a blanket way as soon as the neo-capitalist 'after' became established. Irreconcilability of the past with the dominant line of the present and repudiation of the past can also be interpreted as factors supporting the desire for the past. Pickering and Keightley, too, claim that 'the more the past appears discarded, the more is its significance elevated in personal life and public culture' (2006: 925).

Inquiry into the roots and meanings of post-socialist nostalgia generally results in two different kinds of nostalgia, with scant attempts to look at the dichotomy dialectically. Post-socialist nostalgia is defined either as an affirmative outlook on social security under socialism (socio-political nostalgia) or as a comeback of the iconicity of socialist everyday life mediated by the media and the cultural industry (cultural nostalgia). This study argues that socio-political, as well as cultural, nostalgia derive from the superior mnemonic motivation and urge of popular memory to reinstate continuity between the past and the present.

The concept of socio-political nostalgia in Central and Eastern Europe reflects the formation of idealized memories of the economic and social situation under socialism. Public opinion polls recorded this turnaround after 2000 in the assessment of the socialist past when a growing number of people began to claim that life was better in the socialist era than nowadays (Ekman and Linde, 2005; Tileaga, 2012). In their detailed illumination of socio-political nostalgia, Joakim Ekman and Jonas Linde distinguish four different dimensions of the concept which categorize potential reasons for the rise of nostalgic memories of the socialist economy. The political-ideological dimension derives from political socialization in totalitarian conditions – the citizens whose political views were

constituted under socialism did not internalize democratic values and they reject democracy in general. The socio-economic dimension (in its societal scope) is connected to the frustration and disappointment over the economic performance of liberal capitalism – the people holding this view disapprove of the specific model of democracy which, in their eyes, proved ineffective. The socio-economic dimension (in its personal rendition) is associated with autobiographical reasons and private maladaptations to the capitalist economic order. And finally, the dimension of personal biography follows from feelings of loss of identity and self-esteem brought about by the political changeover (Ekman and Linde, 2005: 356).

Socio-political nostalgia is capable of provoking fears that those who look back on the socialist welfare system wistfully may instigate reverse political change and reinstate totalitarian socialism (see e.g. the media articles and commentaries by Dražan, 2013; Komárek, 2004; Lauder, 2010). Nevertheless, moral panic over the restoration of communism does not have any reasonable substance and the results of opinion polls should be read judiciously. Respondents claiming that their life was better under socialism do not necessarily represent an active political force willing to restore the past. Nostalgia for the past is boldly predicated upon the certitude that the past is locked in bygone times and will not come back. Furthermore, the willingness to reinstall the former regime by those who mourn for a more secure life under socialism can be disproved by empirical data as well. A public opinion survey carried out by the Czech research institute STEM in 2013 found that 32% of the Czech population evaluates socialism more positively in comparison with the present Czech society, while 46% said life is better nowadays, and 22% said that both regimes are equal. The percentage of respondents evaluating socialism more positively increased by 5% between 2012 and 2013. Nevertheless, another survey showed that 79% of the Czech population does not wish to see communism reinstated and 89% do not think such a scenario is likely (Šubrt and Vinopal et al., 2012: 146). The apparent contradictions between the two surveys shed light on the constitutive nature of nostalgia: nostalgia is not about articulating claims of real political agency; it is much more about playing with fantasies and imaginative time-travel. Post-socialist nostalgia does not voice a wish to bring communism back. The principal pleasure of nostalgia is produced by, and limited to, flirting and fiddling with the idea of turning time backwards, not doing it.

Other readings of post-socialist nostalgia ignore its socio-political dimension and define it as cultural processes in which the past is awakened through iconic and indexical references to the socialist era (Boyer, 2006; Godeano-Kenworthy, 2011; Pehe, 2014; Reifová, 2009). Embedded in the contents and artefacts representing the surfaces of the past, its style and taste – cultural nostalgia for socialism speaks the language of retro-aesthetics. Whereas socio-economic nostalgia is conveyed predominantly by elderly and less educated citizens, the group of recipients of cultural post-socialist nostalgia is more vaguely circumscribed. By looking at the viewership of the TV drama series *Vyprávěj* (rerun in 2017) we can assume that immersion in the socialist everyday aesthetics is attractive for broader circles, including young and well-educated spectators.[9]

In post-socialist cultural nostalgia – just as in any other form of cultural memory – the past is mediated iconically and indexically. The past is represented either by newly manufactured (iconic) images which are supposed to mimic a particular moment in

history or by (indexical) fragments originating in the authentic past, preserved and stretching out to the present. If we take television as a backbone of popular memory (Gray and Bell, 2013), historical dramas on television that reconstruct the past from the perspective of the present could be cited as an example of iconic representations, whereas documentary archival footage originating in the historical moment that is being reconstructed stands for indexical representation. The dichotomy of indexical and iconic references to history was coined by Philip Rosen (2001), who distinguished between 'preservationist' and 'restorationist' approaches in cinema, claiming that preservationism strives to represent the past with the original object while restorationism attempts to 'intensify' it with new images designed with this goal in mind (2001: 52).

Critical analysis usually castigates post-socialist cultural nostalgia as the aesthetically flawed and politically detrimental production of cultural industries in Central and Eastern Europe (see e.g. the review by Fischer, 2015). Nostalgic representations which focus on rehearsing the style, fashion and design of the past are often dismissed as 'socialist kitsch' (Czepczyński, 2008: 136) or the fetishization and reification of history (Poblocki, 2008). Images of the past underlining the positive feelings it gives rise to are accused of purveying a superficial attractiveness and of being apolitical in character, bringing about collective amnesia. Such images are thought to reduce complex historical, political and social processes to catchy spectacularity, appealing to emotions rather than historical consciousness. Just as socio-political nostalgia is blamed for creating the wish to reinstate the bad past, cultural nostalgia is criticized as a lack of will to remember how bad the past was.

This kind of criticism is in/directly inspired by Frederick Jameson's (1984) condemnation of nostalgia in film and his conception of nostalgia as an element of 'cultural logic of late capitalism'. Pickering and Keightley (2006: 923) argue that: 'For Jameson, an active relation to the past has become almost impossible in our contemporary condition, where we have lost a sense of historical location and are locked into an endless succession of depthless presents.' To Jameson, the nostalgic gaze downgrades the past to a mere pool of styles which are superficially cannibalized and abused in the production of pastiche (Jameson, 1984: 65). Nostalgic simulacra referring to the styles, codes and visual languages of the past do not have the capacity to explore the real historical processes in their depth and complexity. The true substance of history remains obscured and falls prey to collective amnesia.

Critical analysis argues that the past caricatured as a succession of decades, generations and its façades hampers comprehension of determining political struggles of the past and blocks out political readings of the past from the perspective of the present. In a culturally nostalgic dictum, the past appears as the days of people in funny trousers, not as a political project driven by specific constellations of power. Similarly, Velikonja defines nostalgia as 'an uncritical glorification of past times, no matter what they were really like' (2009: 537), while ignorance of what the past 'was really like' refers to the political character of state socialism and the apolitical nature of nostalgia. It is thus conceived of as the relationship to the past in which the past is deprived of its political coordinates. Some critical treatises, furthermore, associate the amnesia allegedly produced by cultural nostalgia with the commercial interests of the cultural industry (Poblocki, 2008: 188).

Critical analysis is concerned almost exclusively with the textuality of cultural nostalgia; its exaggerated, kitschy language. Simultaneously it makes bold statements about issues – such as collective amnesia or apolitical alienation from history – which are far beyond what can be read from the structures of nostalgic discourses. The critical approach to cultural nostalgia simply makes a basic methodological error when cultural uses of a particular entity are inferred from the textuality of cultural nostalgia. This line of thought assumes that social appropriation of the nostalgia-mediated past is (or ought to be) equivalent to the conclusions reached by semiotic, textual and structuralist analysis. Sceptical readings of cultural nostalgia limit it to pure textuality, lacking any real referent and autopoietically referring to itself. Cultural nostalgia is thus (on inappropriate methodological grounds) closed down with regard to the uses, meanings and appropriations the audiences produce in their real-life fiddling with nostalgic access to the past. It is crucial to interpret post-socialist cultural nostalgia precisely in the context of popular agency because the resistant and anti-hegemonic character of post-socialist nostalgia is predicated on the contrast between the official mnemopolitics of discontinuity coming 'from above' and the demand for continuity rising 'from below', via the channels of iconic and indexical contents of popular culture.

Cultural nostalgia which plays up outward codes and signifiers of the past meets the definition of 'reflexive nostalgia' as coined by Svetlana Boym (2008). Post-socialist cultural nostalgia tinkering with the imagery of socialist popular television, design, advertising or consumerist aesthetics shows conspicuous marks of reflexive nostalgia: it is ironic, cynical, playful and open to pranks.

Veronika Pehe (2014), inspired by Paul Grainge (2002) and Lynn Spigel (2001), interrogates the concept of the anti-hegemonic character of post-socialist cultural nostalgia. She castigates it as 'retro', arguing that it uses an ironic outlook on socialism as a veil concealing moral superiority over, and disdain for, obsolete socialist times. In this perspective, post-socialist nostalgia even coalesces with neoliberal capitalism, helping it to define socialism as inferior to the developmentally more advanced capitalism. Pehe (2016) claims that there is 'little evidence' for mapping anti-hegemonic tendencies onto the operations of post-socialist nostalgia in society. The principal issue in this dispute is to pinpoint what exactly is meant by post-socialist hegemony. Earlier in this article I tried to demonstrate that it was the specific politics of memory aiming at codification of discontinuity that constituted the core of hegemony in the Czech Republic in early 1990s. Post-socialist hegemony was represented not only by incoming capitalism but also by its culturally specific overdeterminations, especially identification with the mythical West and disidentification with (Czech)oslovak society's own past. In this sense, post-socialist cultural nostalgia can be assigned anti-hegemonic virtues as the first harbinger of more lenient memories of socialism in the context of the dominant spirit of discontinuity.

Conclusion

This article argues that socio-political and cultural nostalgia for the socialist era are two different manifestations (conveyed by different carrier groups) of the same memory need, the need for continuity. In both cases, the demand for continuity is predicated on the same motivation. The motivation is not the desire to go back to the socialist era but

the urge to attain the right to remember it – to migrate in an unconstrained way back and forth across the terrain of memory.

Socio-political as well as cultural nostalgia are two sides of the same coin: two different ways of establishing continuity which is, as emphasized above, the source of pleasure. In the case of socio-political nostalgia, the pleasure of continuity is experienced as partaking in the 'socialist signified' – carriers of socio-political nostalgia indulge in rehearsing memories of the substance of the socialist order, social security, full employment, the paternalist state, etc. In the case of cultural nostalgia, the pleasure of continuity is managed by the consumption of 'socialist signifiers' – images, surfaces and signs iconically or indexically referring to socialism. Neither of these two 'bridges over the troubled waters' of historical rupture in Central and Eastern Europe is superior to the other and neither of them (if not abused by professional politicians) represents any ambition to revive communism. It would be myopic to assume that post-socialist nostalgias endorse the accumulation of historiographic knowledge, cultivation of historical consciousness or any other highbrow form of memory as envisioned by cultural critics. Nostalgic representations nevertheless democratize the issue of continuity and provide some remedy together with it. They widely disseminate an invitation to negotiate meanings and produce appropriations regarding the dislocation that yawns in the history and the collective memory of post-socialist societies.

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Notes

1. In this article, the country is referred to as Czech Republic and Czechoslovakia, depending on the context. The name 'Czechoslovakia' is used to refer to the period before 1 January 1993, when the federation of Czech and Slovak republics split up. The name 'Czech Republic' is used to refer to the period from 1993 onwards.
2. On the other hand, the alternative view of post-socialist nostalgia, pretty much congenial with my own understanding of the realities referred to by the concept, can be found in the Introduction to the edited book by Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille (2013: 1–13).
3. In the federal parliament elections in Czechoslovakia in 1990, Občanské forum (The Civic Forum, a broad coalition against the rule of the Communist Party) gained 53% of votes, while the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia gained 13% of votes.
4. In legal terms, the Czechoslovak and Czech state after 1989 were based on the principle

of legal continuity with the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. The legal code of socialist Czechoslovakia was mostly continued by the new system, while some laws were dropped or modified by new laws or amendments. It can be argued that the legal continuity facilitated the efforts to cut the society from its socialist era by tools other than the law and thus galvanized discourses of discontinuity in public communication.

5. Almost two decades of Czechoslovak history, starting from the suppression of the liberation movement of the Prague Spring in 1968 up to the political changeover in 1989 is dubbed 'normalization'. The period of normalization was characterized by the consolidation of Communist Party rule and a peculiar unspoken agreement between the Communist Party establishment and the citizens. The party-directed government somewhat raised living standards and the majority of population overtly followed the ideological rituals although authentic fidelity to communist ideals was lost. The silent majority of the Czechoslovak population turned to their private and family life and weekend hideways in their countryside cottages ('*chata*') (Otáhal, 2002).
6. This group of films includes the works such as *Tankový prapor* (Tank Battalion, 1991, dir. Vít Olmer), *Černí baroni* (Black Barons, 1992, dir. Zdeněk Sirový), *Báječná léta pod psa* (Those Wonderful Years that Sucked, 1997, dir. Petr Nikolaev), *Pelíšky* (Cosy Dens, 1999, dir. Jan Hřebejk), *Pupendo* (Pupendo, 2003, dir. Jan Hřebejk).
7. *Vyprávěj* (Tell Me How It Was) appeared on Czech Television, and was directed by Biser Arichtev, Johanna Steiger-Antošová, Martin Dolenský, Bořivoj Hořínek, Rudolf Tesáček.
8. Frederick Jameson (1984: 66) lists the following movies: *Rumble Fish* (1983, dir. Francis Ford Coppola), *American Graffiti* (1973, dir. George Lucas) and *Chinatown* (1974, dir. Roman Polanski).
9. Audience measurement showed that, in the case of the rerun of *Vyprávěj* in 2017, most of the viewers were females aged 30–59. In terms of education, most of the viewers had a university degree (data provided by Czech Television, ATO-Nielsen Admosphere).

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