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From Tito's *Pionirs* to Punks: Youth Identification in Late 20th-Century Yugoslavia

By

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Abstract

This paper explores the formative experience of young pioneers in Yugoslavia and the ways their participation in state youth organizations provided the context for their transformation into punks in adolescence and beyond. The Union of Pioneers of Yugoslavia was specifically formed by the state to create happy, utopian children with the intention of developing productive socialist adults later in life. Through initiation ceremonies, uniforms, and specifically designed spaces for young pioneers, the state sought to create a collective youth identity among Yugoslav children. Former pioneers rarely recall the socialist ideology taught, instead reminiscing on the joys of their childhood, whether that be the excitement of ceremonies or class fieldtrips. However, these utopian visions of socialism taught to and experienced by children as pioneers would lose their luster as they aged into the socioeconomic realities of the 1980s. It is in this important context that punk came bursting through the concrete, resulting in the creation of new spaces of thought, clothing, music, and artistic and political expression. From their lyrics to fashion to spaces of performance, Yugoslav punk allows for a different view on the seemingly universal youth experience of navigating dreams vocalized but not yet realized.

In Moste High School in Ljubljana hangs a simple plaque, the warped stone stating, “here in this building on the 18th of October 1977 first performed Pankrti.”[1] On October 18th, 1977, Pankrti would perform the first punk performance in Yugoslavia, marking the advent of rapturous sounds and performances reverberating off the brutalist facades. Bursting through the concrete were new sounds of rough basses, the squeak of leather jackets, and the hiss of spray paint. This was the “punk spring.”[2]

As youths were grappling with shifting socioeconomic realities in the 1980s,[3] punk became a space to vent their angst and frustration as they negotiated their belonging within the Yugoslav machine. Not a decade earlier, punk youths were raised in the Yugoslav *pionir* organization, or the *Saves pionira Jugoslavije* (*SPJ*), in which children were handed promises of utopian socialism: a glowing present and a limitless future. The *SPJ* shaped the formative experiences of Yugoslav youths, these idyllic promises laying the groundwork for punk to flourish in Yugoslavia. By viewing punk in this context, one can begin to understand the complex and convoluted ways punk youth expressed their identification and belonging to the punk community and the nation as a whole.

Punk youths in Yugoslavia sought to create alternative lives for themselves, ones that addressed the realities of their experiences living under socialism. Although punks critiqued the state, they mainly sought to hold it accountable for making the ideals they were taught as

[1] Barry Philip, *In Search of Tito’s Punks: On the Road in a Country That No Longer Exists* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023), 75.
[2] Oskar Mulej, “A Place Called Johnny Rotten Square: The Ljubljana Punk Scene and the Subversion of Socialist Yugoslavia,” In *A European Youth Revolt: European Perspectives on Youth Protests and Social Movements in the 1980s,* edited by Knud Andresen and Bart van der Steen, 189-202, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 193.
[3] For additional context on socioeconomic conditions of 1980s Yugoslavia, see Carol Rogel, *The Breakup of Yugoslavia and its Aftermath,* revised edition, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004).

children an authentic reality. In many ways, this made punk youths arguably one of the best embodiments of the Yugoslav ideal of imagining and propagating a third, alternative way to the status quo.

Prior scholarship has tended to focus on youth subcultures,[4] such as punk, in other areas of the West and the Eastern bloc, namely the UK, Russia, and Germany. Although more attention is being paid to other areas, such as Austria and Poland, more scholarship is required in Yugoslavia's case to capture the convoluted and multifaceted components of punk in the region. With that being said, the methodologies academics developed to analyze subcultures both within and outside the region are constructive.

When analyzing subcultures, narratives of exceptionalism are easy to replicate, albeit dangerous and misleading. Subcultures place themselves in opposition to the mainstream, seeking to create a level of distance, even severance. This oppositional nature facilitates an initial focus on the ways in which subcultures are distinct from the majority, furthering preconceived perceptions of subcultures being exceptional, out of place, or abnormal. However, this notion fails to acknowledge the ways in which subcultures, by definition, have to be in conversation with the mainstream; in order to create distance from the mainstream, subcultures must create a perception of what the mainstream is, garner mass acceptance of that perception, and then

[4] For analysis of term "counter-culture" as a term of analysis, see Manuela Marin, "The Struggle for the Minds of the Youth: The Securitate and Musical Countercultures in Communist Romania," in *The Politics of Authenticity: Countercultures and Radical Movements Across the Iron Curtain, 1968-1989,* ed. By Joachim C. Häberlen, Mark Keck-Szajbel, and Kate Mahoney (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), 193. Although punk was characterized by its oppositional stance towards the status quo, I find "counter-culture" to imply a greater degree of separation than subculture. I conceptualize subculture as one that is still within the broader system but is also distinct from the broader community as a whole, thus a more fitting term for how punk operated in the broader Yugoslav system.

intentionally choose the ways in which they will engage in opposition with it.[5] Subcultures must constantly navigate and negotiate in-between spaces, simultaneously living within and outside of mainstream society, while always remaining in conversation with the broader system.[6] Although Yugoslav punk youths characterized themselves as existing in opposition to certain facets of Yugoslav society, their positionality necessitated conversing and negotiating their identities in relation to the broader community.

An analytical framework that serves to assuage this impulse is Fürst's conception of "dropping out" of socialism. The primary function of this construction is to acknowledge the ways in which those who were dropping out did not necessarily set out to be subversive or counter to the mainstream but rather consciously sought to distance themselves from the it. According to Furst, those who were "dropouts" sought to achieve this by doing nothing rather than doing something.[7] Rather than directly fighting the system or state, punks performed protest through conscious distance from mainstream society, a significant choice given the collectivist nature of the socialist republic. Conceptualizing the actions of those who identified with subcultures as "dropping out" functions well in the specific case of punk for two reasons: the framework recognizes the directionality of punk, specifically in the way it placed itself in opposition to an imagined mainstream while not primarily seeking to subvert it; conjointly, it acknowledges the individual and communal agency to choose both distance from conventional society and inaction in refusing to act at and within the given system. However, utilizing this

[5] Juliane Fürst, *Flowers Through Concrete: Explorations in Soviet Hippieland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 7.
[6] Fürst references historian Alexei Yurchak's labelling of these spaces as *vne* in her in work *Flowers Through Concrete: Explorations in Soviet Hippieland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 7. These spaces were conceptualized as spaces in which people could both live within and outside of the Soviet system at the same time.
[7] Fürst, *Flowers Through Concrete: Explorations in Soviet Hippieland,* 3.

framework does require a wary and cautious implementation. The term "dropping out" itself implies a certain degree of separation from a larger body; it implies a level of removal rather than encompassing the symbiotic conversation that takes place. In certain ways, this framework could be applied to perpetuate the same exceptionalism it proposes to address and solve. Contingent on the accurate, and perhaps proper, use of this framework is the acknowledgement and implementation of the idea of continuous conversation and exchange between conventional society and subcultures.[8] By doing so, one can conceptualize subcultures as "dropping out" of society while still engaging with normative conventions in order to have something to drop out of.

In the specific case of punk, a conversation happens between the East and the West. It is undeniable punk was a Western import that came through Yugoslavia's most accessible cities, such as Zagreb, Belgrade, and Ljubljana, although youth sometimes ventured West themselves to find punk sounds. Regardless of punk's status as a Western import, it is useful to view these cultural imports as being translated into an Eastern context, as it acknowledges their Western origins while also recognizing the new forms and meanings these ideas possessed in different cultural contexts.[9] Punk may have been a phenomenon that occurred in the Western world involving similar patterns of youth discontent, however there are certain qualities that set Yugoslavia, and other areas of the Eastern bloc, apart: the lack of youth escapism characteristic

[8] Fürst acknowledges this potential issue well in her introduction to *Flowers Through Concrete* and provides a similar qualifier on utilizing the framework.
[9] Russian historian Eleonory Gilburd discusses understanding cultural exchanges between the East and West as translations into new contexts in the introduction to her book *To See Paris Die.* See Eleonory Gilburd, *To See Paris Die: The Soviet Lives of Western Culture,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2018).

of Western punk space,[10] the pseudo presence of communism, and both the state sponsorship and control of culture and music production.[11] Much like the state itself, Yugoslav punk emerged in a context that was somewhere in between both East and West. Although it is important to prevent the imposition of an East versus West dichotomy where there isn't one—and certainly the case can be made for punk—the expression of youth discontent inevitably varied to some degree from region to region depending on the cultural milieu. Rather than argue that Yugoslav punk was exceptional, or that this expression of youth discontent was unique to the region, this paper argues that Yugoslav punk emerged in a unique context that impacted the way punk space was created and propagated. As hippies were a Western import translated into Russian space in Fürst's case, punk possessed different connotations in the East, taking on a form and life of its own.

However, with the analysis of youth subcultures comes the seemingly impossible task of defining punk; in many ways, it seems antithetical to the essence of punk to even try. Historically, punk has been used to describe everything from a music genre to a clothing aesthetic, ideology, and lifestyle. Most definitions appear to be too limiting, acknowledging one facet of punk while disregarding another. However, punk may best be understood through the

[10] An example of this escapism is seen in the ambiguity of the Sex Pistols song *Anarchy in the UK,* in which the band reflects ambiguous attitudes towards anarchy. As Chen writes in their work, this was specifically done to allow a wide audience of youth to identify with the sentiments and experiences being highlighted, hence the ability for Yugoslav punks to relate to or be inspired by Western punk music. Although punk differed itself from the extreme escapism of hippie culture, it manifested in Western punk music in a different way through these ambiguous expressions of reality. See Ye Che, "Design as Alternate Reality" (Master's Thesis, Pratt Institute, 2022) for more on escapism in punk and post-punk lyrics and spaces.

[11] Miljenko Jergovic, "What Punk Rock Meant to Communist Yugoslavia," *The New York Times,* accessed March 4, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/18/opinion/punk-rock-communist-yugoslavia.html and Gregor Tomc, "'Comrades, We Don't Believe You!' Or, Do We Just Want to Dance With You?: The Slovenian Punk Subculture in Socialist Yugoslavia," in *Made in Yugoslavia: Studies in Popular Music,* ed. Danijela Š. Beard and Ljerka V. Rasmussen (London: Routledge, 2020), 196.

general attitudes of opposition, non-cooperation, and a desire to be apolitical. As prior scholars of Western punk have discussed, the reflexive, oppositional perception punk had was a general antagonism to ""other music cultures, the establishment, the industry, rock and roll cliches, gender roles, class divisions, society, and even itself once codes and expectations of what punk should be became fixed."[12] At its core, punk was against conformity, even as it sought to establish a collective. Arguably, a defining feature of punk in its most distilled form is its inability to be strictly defined; punk is malleable, fluid and, in certain ways, undefinable.

With this in mind, this research views punk as a fluid space, both physical and abstract, that allowed for the unique expression of identity for those seeking to "drop out" of mainstream society and "drop in" to an in-between space, an alternative form of existing, thinking, and being. This framework of analysis acknowledges the agency of youth populations to willingly place themselves in opposition while also acknowledging the ways youth, even as part of a subculture, remained members of and in conversation with mainstream society. Thus, conceptualizing punk as a space allows one to acknowledge the multifaceted and mutually inclusive forms punk embodies as it relates to spaces of identification and belonging. By implementing this framework, punks can best be understood as those who entered these spaces, felt a sense of belonging in and to these spaces, and inevitably shaped and were shaped by them in the process.

Throughout this paper, youth is used as a term of analysis due to its relevant connotations of simultaneous promise and concern. In a paradoxical fashion, youth are portrayed

[12] Matthew Worley, "Riotous Assembly: British Punk's Cultural Diaspora in the Summer of '81" in *A European Youth Revolt: European Perspectives on Youth Protests and Social Movements in the 1980s,* ed. by Knud Andresen and Bart van der Steen, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 219.

concomitantly as the key to a society's future while also being the predominant scapegoat surrounding moral panics. [13] Punk youths in 1980s Yugoslavia were no exception to such sentiments.[14] Secondly, the 1980s saw a break from previous generations in activist practices, in which younger generations' movements became more disorganized and less concerned with strict ideology or dogma; although the primary goal of progress remained the same, the approach largely changed. Punk activists adopted a similar approach and ideology surrounding, hence the productivity of identifying these individuals as punk *youths.* Lastly, in the years leading up to the 1980s, educational careers and entry into the workforce became elongated, which, in turn, delayed economic independence for those affected by the term "youth." This resulted in an expansion regarding who fell under the "youth" category and "opened up possibilities for experimenting with alternative lifestyles and ways of living together, in which alternative and radical youths were at the forefront."[15] Thus, the term "youth" adequately accounts for the socioeconomic context in which punks were constantly negotiating – dealing with the rise of unemployment, economic hardship, and strict social stratification. Ergo, this term accurately reflects the alternative space punk afforded to individuals who wanted corporeal and metaphysical distance from the mainstream.

Concomitantly, this research focuses primarily on the experiences of Yugoslav youth in the former republics of Slovenia, with mention of those in Serbia and Croatia, from the 1970s to

[13] For more on moral panics and youth movements, see Jack Young, "Slipping Away – Moral Panics Each Side of 'the Golden Age'" in *Crime, Social Control, and Human Rights: From Moral Panics to States of Denial,* ed. David Downes, Paul Rock, Christine Chinkin, and Conor Gearty, (Oregon: Willan Publishing, 2007).
[14] One such instance of these sentiments is in the case of the "Nazi Punk Affair" that spread throughout Yugoslavia. See Mulej, "A Place Called Johnny Rotten Square" for a brief introduction into the situation.
[15] Knud Andresen and Bart van der Steen, "Introduction: The Last Insurrection? Youth, Revolts, and Social Movements in the 1980s," in *A European Youth Revolt: European Perspectives on Youth Protests and Social Movements in the 1980s,* ed. by Knud Andresen and Bart van der Steen, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 6.

the 1980s. The geographic limitation imposed on this research is necessary for a variety of reasons. Primarily, the major cities in which punk was able to thrive – Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Belgrade among others – largely depended on their proximal geographical locations and relations with the West, along with the marginal spaces afforded to them by the nature of their urban spaces. That is not to say that punk was not a space that occupied other areas of Yugoslavia; quite contrarily, it found a foothold all across the former republic. However, the issue of resource accessibility posed a limitation to the geographical scope of this research. Due to a lack of time and funding, resources exclusively stored in physical government archives proved to be inaccessible. Because of these limitations, the majority of bands and art analyzed originate from the former Slovenian republic of Yugoslavia. Although it would be compelling to provide further analysis of the art production of bands from other republics, the bands analyzed were those that frequently appeared in the digital archive and, according to other scholars, seemed to influence the creation of punk in the region immensely.[16] Additionally, there was a strong desire to not exacerbate regional differences when punks across the republics would not have perceived such categories or, if they had, saw them as unimportant. According to Gregor Tomc, founding member of Pankrti and current punk scholar, Yugoslav punks listened to music produced by bands across the geographical Yugoslav space.[17] Punks in Slovenia would listen to Serbian punk bands and identify with their music and vice versa. Even though there may have been some

[16] Inevitably, a degree of nuance was lost due to the lack of attention paid to specific punk communities and cities. Given more time and resources, it would be compelling to further explore punk in other republics to understand the local identities that were created and appreciate the diversity of punk in the region. As a result of source limitations, this research almost entirely relied upon digital access to government documents, photographs, and other audiovisual sources that were either digitized or digital in nature. Therefore, this research primarily studies the visual-cultural history of Yugoslav punk space. Regardless, these obstacles both underscore the value of digital archives while also presenting an opportunity for this research to be continued and supplemented by sources found in the physical archives of the Yugoslav region.

[17] Tomc, "'Comrades, We Don't Believe You!,'" 203.

language barriers between the two, the messaging and affiliation to the ideas being expressed remained. Rather than serve as a complete narrative, this research intends to address the lack of attention paid to childhood experiences in contextualizing and analyzing punk youth.

Consequently, this paper argues that central to punk identification were *pionir* experiences in the *Savez pionira Jugoslavije (SPJ)*. To make this argument, the experience of those who were *pionirs* in the 1970s were analyzed, arguing that utopian promises made to children by the state would contribute to their frustration as they aged. Regarding this transition, the *SPJ* was interrogated through three different lenses: initiation and oath making, uniforms, and spaces. An analysis of the *SPJ* initiation and oath were examined to grasp the ideology Yugoslav children were taught by the regime and how this active performance of identity shaped their ideas and identifications with Yugoslavia. Uniforms were utilized to further understand how ideology and belonging were conceptualized through material culture and how this communicated Yugoslav socialist ideology to the broader community. Finally, the investigation of *pionir* spaces demonstrated Yugoslavia's concern with creating happy, socialist children through the physical, material spaces children occupied. Education is a nationalizing tool where most children begin to construct their identities both to the nation and to more personal communities. Hence, the *pionir* experience provides an important context to understanding the process of Yugoslav children aging out of their *pionir* scarves and into their punk leathers.

Tito's *Pionirs:*

Young children with expectant faces gathered in the gymnasium of a Croatian school, the walls ornately decorated with blue and red banners, the hardwood floors glistening in their yellow hues. Yugoslav children were neatly lined up in rows like birds sitting on a telephone

wire, their uniformity and consistency prevailing despite their excited fidgeting. Across the rows, shirts were bleached white, blue bottoms neatly pressed, red scarves securely tied around children's necks. Rising above the gathering hung a picture of Marshal Josip Broz Tito, president of Yugoslavia from 1945-1980, looking down on the gathering with paternal approval despite the formality of the black and white photograph. In the audience sat the ambivalent faces of parents, listening to their children recite with a disinterested calm "today, as I become a pioneer…"

The Union of Pioneers of Yugoslavia, or *Savez pionira Jugoslavije* (*SPJ*), was first conceived in 1945, initially as a biproduct of the Partizan youth brigades of WWII. However, by 1950, the organization would be co-opted by the Yugoslav state as a nationalist-propagating organization that would ensure the vitality of the socialist regime, following a broader Soviet model for youth nationalization.[18] From 1950 to the late 1980s, children across Yugoslavia were engaging in similar performances of collective identity, despite their diverse republic and ethnic backgrounds. Although membership to *SPJ* was "voluntary," families rarely prevented their children from joining, the organization heavily intertwined with youth education and socialization.[19] Through their membership to this organization, children as young as six were officially welcomed into the fold of socialist society, pledging the *pionir* oath, completing the initiation ceremony, and taking on the responsibility of embodying Yugoslav values.

Similar to Soviet pioneer organizations, and other socialist derivatives, the *SPJ* reflected state concern for the enjoyment of the youth population, specifically children, along with the

[18] Ildiko Erdei, "'The Happy Child' as an Icon of Socialist Transformation: Yugoslavia's Pioneer Organization," in *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe,* ed. John Lampe and Mark Mazower (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004).
[19] Štefka Batinić, Igor Radeka, and Snježana Šušnjara, "*Today, as I Become a Pioneer…:* Education in the Spirit of Socialism," *Historia Scholastica 2,* no. 1 (2016), 32.

desire to regulate childhood behaviors and activities. These intentions manifested in the form of state-sponsored celebrations, competitions, and social spaces specifically designed for both the entertainment of children and performance of collective identity. Paired with socialist ideology, these state-sponsored spaces intended to create an idyllic, socialist child who would eventually age into a happy, socialist adult. This vision was sold with the promise of adulthood entailing reaping the benefits of having aged under socialism. However, it was the crumbling of these paradisal promises made to Yugoslav children that would create the mental and physical space for punk to flourish in the 80s.

Becoming *Pionirski:* "My pioneer's promise…"

In order to be part of Yugoslav society, it was not enough to simply be born in Yugoslavia; there was a process of becoming, of transforming into someone who was both physically and mentally a part of the rest of Yugoslavia. This process of becoming Yugoslav for children began with the *SPJ* initiation ceremony and oath that functioned as a collective performance of identity and belonging to the broader national community. The ceremony itself involved future *pionirs* gathering in their uniforms, the symbolism of which will be discussed later, in front of their family and community members, all of whom would bear witness to their ideological confirmation to Yugoslav socialism. In this politically charged ceremony, the *pionir* oath was arguably the most integral part, given its explicit transformative power. Although the oath changed throughout the years and deviated slightly depending on the republic, the general message remained: pledging *pionirs'* loyalty to the Yugoslav state and the embodiment of Yugoslav, socialist ideals.

Today, as I become a Pioneer,
I give my Pioneer's promise:

That I shall study and work diligently,
respect my parents and my seniors
and be a loyal and honest friend, who keeps the given word;

that I shall follow the example of the best Pioneers,
value the glorious deeds of the partisans
and progressive people of this world
who value freedom and peace;
that I shall love my country, self-managing socialist Yugoslavia,

and all of its brotherly peoples
and build a new life
full of joy and happiness.[20][21]

With this oath, children pledged both their love to the "self-managing socialist Yugoslavia" and to uphold Yugoslav ideals, such as aligning themselves with the partisans, freedom, peace, and brotherly love. However, the oath also emphasized the *pionirs'* promise to build a *new* life full of joy and happiness, implying children would be creating and experiencing joyous lives from that point on. Therefore, initiation into *SPJ,* and Yugoslav society more broadly, entailed leaving behind a previous, artificial life for a new, joyous one under the socialist regime.

Although the oath clearly demonstrated the political motivation behind this ceremony, to young *pionirs*, and even their parents, the performance and symbolism of the ceremony mattered more than the content — few primary-school aged children understood terms like "progressive" and "self-management." As one former *pionir* vocalized, "'brotherhood-unity! Brotherhood-unity!' we shouted our heads off. Those words were a puzzle to me. There was nothing more natural than wish Tito a long life, since… towns and cities were named after him, 'the greatest son

[20] Batinić, Radeka, and Šušnjara, "*Today, as I Become a Pioneer…*", 32.
[21] For another example of the *pionir* oath, see Erdei, "'The Happy Child' as an Icon of Socialist Transformation."

of our peoples.' But the slogans about brotherhood and unity sounded a bit too abstract."[22] Evidently, understanding the concepts or ideals of the ceremony was less important than the young children participating in it.

However, that's not to say former *pionirs* do not look back on their time in the organization with great fondness and pride. Dressing up in fine clothes, experiencing the excitement of a family event, and enjoying the treats that would follow would reasonably be aspects of the ceremony young children would have enjoyed. As one young *pionir* expressed, "'what I most clearly remember of my Pioneer membership ceremony are small sandwiches and fruit juice we were given.'"[23] Consequently, children's experiences with the state were not always dictated or influenced by state ideology; they were simply happy children enjoying the candies, food, attention, and excitement that came along with the event. Furthermore, in an interview on the podcast *Remembering Yugoslavia,* Mario Milaković positively viewed his time as a *pionir*, remembering it as a "moment of pride of every kid back then… a nice memory,"[24] even holding onto his *Titovka*[25] after all these decades. From a top-down perspective, this ritual functioned as a literal performance of collectivism and communal belonging. However, from a bottom-up perspective, it was also a joyous occasion, celebration, and parade for children to look forward to and have pride in completing. Undeniably, the pageantry, collectivism, and joy brought by this

[22] S., Drakulić, "Kako Smo Preživjeli," *Feral Tribune,* Split, 2001, as cited in Batinić, Radeka, and Šušnjara, "*Today, as I Become a Pioneer…*," 34.
[23] Batinić, Radeka, and Šušnjara, "*Today, as I Become a Pioneer…*," 33.
[24] Peter Korchnac, "Made in Yugodom - Mario Milaković," in *Remembering Yugoslavia,* July 27, 2020. Podcast, MP3 audio, 32:59, https://rememberingyugoslavia.com/podcast-mario-milakovic/.
[25] Another name for *pionir* hats.

ceremony and organization would contribute to positive memories and associations with Yugoslav childhood.

As Milaković addressed, these anecdotes are memories, or more appropriately "rememberings,"[26] of life under socialism. Although some may argue working with nostalgia or rememberings obstruct a perceived objective truth, these narratives possess the same level of objectivity and subjectivity of any primary source reflecting on life experiences, whether that be diary entries, memoirs, or news articles. Rather than conceptualize these narratives as questionable, nostalgic rememberings of an equally questionable past, these anecdotes should be understood as productions of the present, nostalgia being the primary tool to "make sense of the present through symbolically retaining lost values, status, stories, and memories."[27] By no means are these narratives indicative of perfect childhoods sans struggle and discontent; however, these narratives are indicative of childhood experiences being deemed worth missing later in life, and thus triggering nostalgia. Conclusively, these rememberings demonstrate a nostalgic presence surrounding childhood and perceived notions of identity and belonging. As Tanja Petrović writes, "Yugoslav collective identity, based on the ideology of 'brotherhood and unity,' is associated with the times when people's living standards and their sense of security were better and when the spectrum of possibilities was much larger."[28] As will be evidenced later in the paper, it is this sense

[26] Maria Todorova provides an explanation of the utility of using the term "rememberings" over "memories" in the introduction to her edited book *Remembering Communism.* Maria Todorova, "The Process of Remembering Communism," in *Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation,* ed. Maria Todorova (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2010).
[27] Tanja Petrović, "'When We Were Europe": Socialist Workers in Serbia and their Nostalgic Narratives—The Case of the Cable Factory Workers in Jagodina," in *Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation,* ed. Maria Todorova (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2010), 148.
[28] Petrović, "'When We Were Europe": Socialist Workers in Serbia and their Nostalgic Narratives," 144.

of security, opportunity, and possibility that punks perceived themselves as missing out on later in life, sparking the creation of oppositional punk spaces.

Uniforms: Communicating Belonging Through Clothing

Although the *pionir* oath was imperative, the process of becoming a *pionir* was not complete without donning on the uniform, which implicitly communicated children's allegiance to the Yugoslav state through clothing. The *pionir* uniform involved three main components: white shirt, dark blue trousers for boys and skirts for girls, and a red scarf.[29] Although all pieces were necessary for creating the *pionir* ensemble, the red scarf was imbued with specific powers of transformation.

From the blood of the partizans who fought in WWII[30] to symbolizing the proletariat flag,[31] the red color of the scarf carried symbolic meaning, specifically "Yugoslav struggle" in a variety of contexts, whether that be global conflicts or class struggle. Although the color factored into its symbolism, it was the physicality of tying the scarf around one's neck that facilitated the completion of children's transformation into *pionirs:* "tying the scarf around the neck was symbolic of a Pioneer's ties with the community of Yugoslav children."[32] Ergo, the tying of the scarf was more than abiding by a dress code; it bore the physical and ideological connection between children and socialism. Coupled with the oath, the *pionir* scarf both denoted a linkage between a child and other Yugoslav *pionirs* and communicated this linkage to society in general.

[29] Uniforms would also include a *pionir* hat called a *Titovka,* as previously mentioned, and a *pionir* badge, although these are seen less frequently in photographs.
[30] Anna Bogic, "Tito's Last Pioneers and the Politicization of Schooling in Yugoslavia," in *Childhood and Schooling in (Post)Socialist Societies: Memories of Everyday Life*, ed. Iveta Silova, Netta Piattoeva, Zsuzsa Millei (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018): 133.
[31] Batinić, Radeka, and Šušnjara, "*Today, as I Become a Pioneer…*," 33.
[32] Batinić, Radeka, and Šušnjara, "*Today, as I Become a Pioneer…*," 33.

However, as Erdei states, this red scarf had transformative power on both the behavior and personality of the wearer. Because the scarf indicated children's "ideological determination," Youth organization leaders stipulated all *pionirs* must wear these red scarves as a reminder to both the wearer of their responsibilities to the state and to adults to monitor the wearer's behavior, ensuring children did not stray from state expectations of propriety. As a result, the red scarf functioned as a self-managing tool, which aligned with the state's self-management policy regarding labor, that was believed to compel *pionirs* to be well-behaved.[33] Consequently, becoming a *pionir,* although still perceived as a joyous occasion, also came with a level of self-control and surveillance exerted from the general public and endorsed by the state.

While the *pionir* uniforms played a significant role in communicating belonging in the initiation ceremony itself, it was this same repeated color palette that would constantly remind Yugoslav youth of the state's presence in their lives well into the 1980s. According to Bogic, one of the last inductees into the *SPJ*, "the blue-white-red color theme, which was also featured in our Yugoslav flag, provided a color palette for our daily lives and practices, not only in celebrations but also in our uniforms."[34] Visibly, the daily life of children, and youth more generally in Yugoslavia, hinged on their engagement with this inescapable color palette that served as both a reminder of state control and state promises.

Displays of Joy: *Pionir* Youth Events

Beyond the *pionir* ceremony, the *SPJ* sought to foster positive childhoods through the creation of youth competitions. Although all varied in level of decoration and pageantry, the Youth

[33] Erdei, "'The Happy Child' as an Icon of Socialist Transformation," 164.
[34] Bogic, "Tito's Last Pioneers," 133.

Relay, exemplified the Yugoslav state's expression of explicit concern in raising ideologically abiding socialists and contributing to the overall happiness of the Yugoslav child. Originally created to celebrate the birth of Tito, the Youth Relay became a more general celebration of Yugoslav youth and the future of the socialist state.[35]

After 1958, the Youth Relay involved children relaying a baton inscribed with messages to Tito on a single route to Belgrade.[36] Each year, the starting point changed, although the location always held symbolic value: "centres of the war-time uprising, from places which became legendary during the war [WWII], or from big construction sites, republican capitals, from Kumrovec, the birthplace of President Tito, etc."[37] The intention surrounding the Youth Relay, like the *pionir* ceremony, was multifaceted: it functioned as a performance of the vitality and health of the youth population, which was a political symbol for the future of the Yugoslav state; it was a way to instill collectivism into the youth population even as they aged; it was a nationalizing tool, as each starting point was chosen for their national symbolism, harkening back to a historical narrative, struggle, or national project that could be specifically utilized to emphasize unity among the republics. Consequently, this relay route operated as a symbolic stitching of each of the republics together, culminating in a final collective outburst of Yugoslav pride and belonging with the final passing off of the baton to Tito, the paternal figurehead of the nation.

Along the route, Relay of Youth participants carried messages to Belgrade highlighting their loyalty and affection to Tito and the Yugoslav state: "You, comrade Tito, are the sun of our freedom… we the Pioneers see you as the father of our dear homeland. You are our bright role

[35] Vojislav Vojnović, "The Youth Relay in Yugoslavia," in *Yugoslav Survey: A Record of Facts and Information*, no.3 (1969), 122.
[36] Vojnović, "The Youth Relay in Yugoslavia," 122.
[37] Vojnović, "The Youth Relay in Yugoslavia," 122.

model that teaches us to be daring, courageous, hardworking and above all loving and loyal to our socialist country."[38,39] The optimism in this statement is clearly present, along with the expression of a collective *pionir* identity, one that abides by socialist values of brotherhood, unity, and loyalty.

As was the case with initiation, the Relay of Youth similarly involved a communal performance of joy and pomp inextricably tied to Yugoslav socialism. As seen in the photographs from the 1961 and 1987 Day of Youth (*Dan Mladosti)* celebrations respectively, the Relay of Youth attracted crowds, mainly young children who likely idolized their older counterparts in this display of unity and physical struggle in the name of love for one's country. In both images, the faces of expectant children are clearly seen, clapping their hands and cheering as the relay racers go by. As is apparent, competitions like the relay of youth propagated and maintained a transnational, Yugoslav identity while also creating a joyous, utopian childhood and socialist ideal for Yugoslav youth.

Figure 1. *Dan Mladosti,* Youth Relay, 1961.[40]

[38] Paravina, E. *Pionirska štafeta*. Zagreb: Savez društava „Naša djeca" SRH, 1965, 76-78; as cited in Batinić, Radeka, and Šušnjara, "*Today as I Become a Pioneer…,"* 36.
[39] It is worth noting that for the inaugural Relay of Youth, Yugoslav children wrote messages to Tito which were compiled into a book commonly known as "Tito's Blue Book." The item is on display at Muzej Jugoslavije in Belgrade. "Plava Knijga," Muzej Jugoslavije, accessed March 11, 2024, https://www.muzej-jugoslavije.org/art/plava-knjiga/.
[40] "Dan Mladosti: Kult Ličnosti, Zajedništvo i Još Malo Više," *Moje Vrijeme,* May 5, 2016, https://www.mojevrijeme.hr/magazin/2016/05/dan-mladosti-kult-licnosti-zajednistvo-i-jos-malo-vise/.

Figure 2. *Dan Mladosti,* Youth Relay, 1987.[41]

Pionir Cities: The Little Utopias

In addition to *pionir* events, the Yugoslav state sought to create an idyllic childhood through the creation of spaces explicitly designed for the enjoyment of Yugoslav youth, known as *pionir* cities. These cities operated as spaces that enhanced youth enjoyment and allowed for youth to physically perform and enact their joy in connection to socialist ideals. Although inextricably tied to party ideology, these spaces would inevitably contribute to positive childhood memories of youth in Yugoslavia. However, as the luster of youth faded, so too would these cities, as they took on new meanings for youth involvement in society.[42]

[41] "Dan Mladosti 1987. Godine: Taj Bizarni Znak na Titovoj Štafeti Najavio je Raspad Jugoslavije," *24 Sata,* May 5, 2021, https://www.24sata.hr/news/dan-mladosti-1987-godine-taj-bizarni-znak-na-titovoj-stafeti-najavio-je-raspad-jugoslavije-763972.

[42] There are efforts in the former region to revitalize former *pionir* cities into new cultural spaces and areas of leisure for all ages. As seen in Milica Božić Marojević and Marija Stanković, "Pioneer City in Belgrade: Legitimate Oblivion or Non-Culture of Remembering," in *Modelling Public Spaces in Culture: Rethinking Institutional Practices in Culture and Historical Dis(continuities)*, ed. Biljana Tanurovska Kjulavkovski, Nataša Bodrožić, and Violeta Kachakova (Macedonia: Lokomotiva, 2017).

Given the context of the Yugoslav state's effort to control *pionir* behavior and youth experiences, utopian spaces discernibly were created to allow state control of children's experiences and behavior. In the Košutnjak *pionir* city located in Belgrade Serbia, children had the opportunity to engage in a variety of activities and enjoy a space conducive to their socialization. The space was constructed as "a children's colony of a pavilion type, with the interspaces in the form of a park, with sports terrains, children's playgrounds and a summer stage. The complex consisted of a main building, central pavilion (with a theatre and a dining room), nine ground residential pavilions… a summer exhibition pavilion, museum, sports' facilities, telephone exchange and a post office."[43] The interspaces of the Košutnjak *pionir* city demonstrated a focus on children's extracurricular activities, specifically with a focus on physical fitness and exercise, evidenced by the creation of playgrounds and sports facilities. Similarly, the city was architecturally designed to foster socialization and

Figure 3. *Pionirski grad,* "Pioneer City," 1966.[44]

[43] Marojević and Stanković, "Pioneer City in Belgrade: Legitimate Oblivion or Non-Culture of Remembering," 229.
[44] "Pionirski grad, 1966. Godina," Belgrade History Images, accessed March 11, 2024, https://beogradhistory.com/archives/4902.

engagement in a confined space, as residential pavilions, a central area for youth performances, and other structures were created for controlled interaction with the outside world.

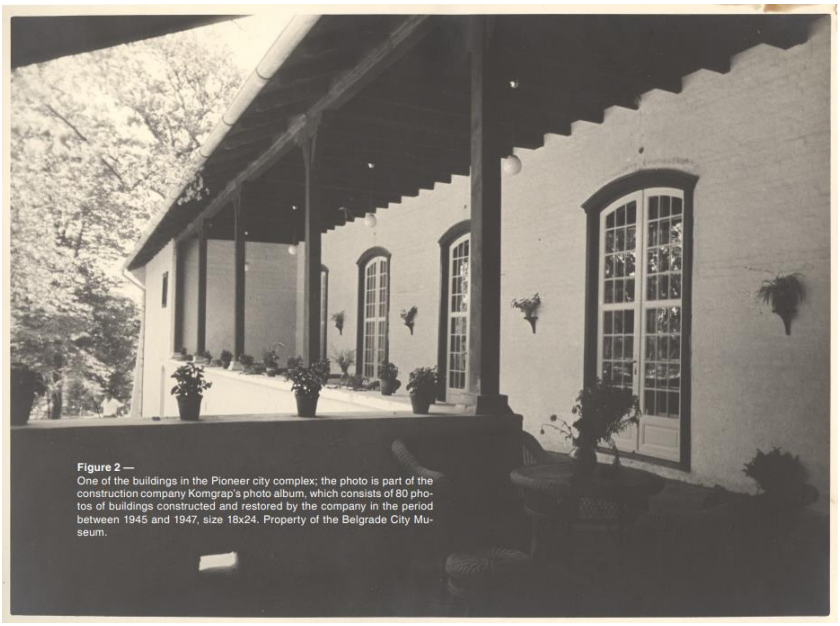

Figure 4. Photograph of *pionir* facilities included in "Pioneer City in Belgrade."[45]

While staying in *pionir* cities, children were able to engage in a space specifically created for their pleasure and leisure with the dual function of exposing them to state ideology and positive, childhood memories. Even when completing work mimicking vocational training, children generally enjoyed the time they spent in *pionir* cities. In the case of Belgrade's city, one *pionir* reflected on their experience staying on the *pionir* grounds:

> "As soon as we arrived in Pioneer City, we began to live a new life. We get up at 7:30 [a.m.], and we go to bed at 21:00 [9:00 p.m.]. We work six hours a day, but we have plenty of free time. In the technical center we are divided into three groups…The work is so very interesting that we can hardly wait to start work. We spend the free time swinging on the swings, seesawing, and riding the merry-go-round, playing basketball and soccer. Our free time passes very quickly, and then

[45] Marojević and Stanković, "Pioneer City in Belgrade," 228.

> again we work. The days pass and we learn very much… Day-by-day, everything is interesting and good. Pioneer City is very beautiful, and we will remember it for a long time."[46]

From this child's description, entering and occupying space in Belgrade's *pionir* city meant embarking on a new adventure that afforded them exciting and interesting opportunities of both physical and mental stimulation. Most notable in this anecdote is both the exclusive use of "we." At no point did the child refer to their experiences in terms of their individuality but rather conceptualize their experience as centering around a collective: "we" complete work, "we" begin a new life, "we" will never forget this experience, etc. Therefore, this source specifically reflects the way occupying space in the *pionir* city fostered children's identification with a broader community of Yugoslav children, focusing on their collective identity versus an individual one.[47]

As previously stated, *pionir* cities were created with the intention of providing youth a space of leisure and entertainment fused with socialist ideology, demonstrating that the establishment of spaces for creative youth expression was a primary goal of the party. The Yugoslav government, and the Yugoslav Youth Association more specifically, intended for the *pionir* cities "to enrich the various kinds of recreation with those forms of creativeness and content which allow man's free and universal personality to come to full expression."[48] However, with that came the desire to control such expressions and the exchange of ideas. According to the

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[46] John Georgeoff, "Yugoslav Youth and Student Organizations," *Comparative Education Review 8,* no. 1 (June 1964): 107.

[47] Although the positive attitude towards the *SPJ* is apparent in this anecdote, it is important to note that this specific diary entry was likely curated by the socialist state to further the perception of the happy, socialist child to both those within and outside the nation's borders. Evidently, the source material contains some selection bias that could be combatted with a more thorough exploration of children's anecdotes from the socialist period; however, even then, these attitudes could be ones imposed on children in their acculturation to socialist values. In spite of the selection bias and potential for state-imposed notions of positive experiences, this anecdote still denotes the leisure time allotted to young *pionirs* and the idea that their experiences in *pionir* cities would leave a lasting impression.

[48] "Seventh Congress of the Yugoslav Youth Association," *Yugoslav Survey: A Record of Facts and Information* 13 (1963), 1857.

Yugoslav Youth Association, "the commission for juvenile culture and recreation and the social activity of young people, stress that the Youth Association will continue… to oppose all anti-socialist manifestations and trends in culture as well as the harmful influences exerted on young people by the press, cinema, publications, and other public media."[49] Although the state advocated for creative spaces, it is undeniable that they also sought to exert a level of control on youth expressions of creativity. For young children, this set a precedence for state involvement in creative youth spaces under the guise of ensuring socialist values. As some children aged out of the *pionir* organization and into their punk adolescence, it were these state-created spaces that punk youths utilized for their own creative purposes, forced to navigate the dynamics of control and surveillance by the state and their own artistic choices.

Utopia Crumbling

As these narratives of utopian socialist society were propagated by the state, adolescents in the 80's faced harsh socioeconomic realities that did not align with the story they were given as *pionirs.*[50] In 1978, the second global oil crisis would strike, resulting in the increase in oil prices during the skyrocketing of demand. From 1970 to 1979, Yugoslavia drastically increased its foreign borrowings, resulting in economic gridlock in the late 1970s once countries began calling in their debts. In 1980, the symbolic figurehead of the multi-ethnic Yugoslav nation, Josip Broz Tito, would die, resulting in new nationalist narratives rising to the surface as political

[49] "Seventh Congress of the Yugoslav Youth Association," 1857.
[50] According to "Seventh Congress of the Yugoslav Youth Association," in the 1960/1961 school year, 2,357,750 out of 2,594,000 elementary school children were involved in various clubs, groups, or *pionir*-related activities. That leaves only approximately 8% of the elementary school age population as not participating in the *SPJ*. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the vast majority of punk youths were former *pionirs.*

leaders sought power and individuals their sense of identity.[51] Forced to confront with their shifting identities and realities, adolescents began to question the authenticity of these top-down performances of Yugoslav national identity and alleged economic prosperity. It is in this context that a space was created for punk youth to flourish, as youth began to simultaneously identify as Yugoslav while also challenging what that meant according to the state.

Reflecting back on this period, Aleksandar Hemon addressed his cynicism towards both socialist prosperity and its display by the state in his article "My Mother and the Failed Experiment of Yugoslavia." Specifically regarding the Relay of Youth, Hemon felt the event demonstrated the extreme conformity present in Yugoslavia, perceiving it as an idiotic and foolish performance of propaganda: "as soon as I entered adolescence, I had no compunction about mocking the atmosphere of idiotic uniformity, the ideological clichés and the young muscly men twirling wooden rifles and lifting their female comrades over their heads, while the commentators treated the whole propagandistic display as a spontaneous expression of the youth's love for Tito and as a work of public art."[52] As is apparent, as children aged out of their *pionir* uniforms, these performances of identity became increasingly more, for lack of a better word, performative. Adolescents, like Hemon, increasingly saw these displays as inauthentic, propagandic demonstrations of a state-filtered version of Yugoslav identity.

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[51] See Milica Ulavić, "The Rise and Fall of Market Socialism in Yugoslavia," Project of the Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute (DOC RI), *Inequalities, Economic Models and the Russian October 1917 Revolution in Historical Perspective*, University of Perugia, 2018; Bernd Christoph Ströhm, "A Federation in Peril: Yugoslavia's Economic Crisis of the 1980s," Vienna School of International Studies, 2019. "GDP in Yugoslavia: 1980-1989," World History Commons, https://worldhistorycommons.org/gdp-yugoslavia-1980-1989, accessed April 20, 2024; "The Economic Development of Yugoslavia (in Six Volumes)," World Bank Documents, 1973; Egon Žižmond, "The Collapse of the Yugoslav Economy," *Soviet Studies* 44, no. 1 (1992): 101-112.

[52] Aleksandar Hemon, "My Mother and the Failed Experiment of Yugoslavia," *The New Yorker,* June 5, 2019, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/personal-history/my-mother-and-the-failed-experiment-of-yugoslavia.

By 1986, only 16% of the youth population in Croatia expressed desire to join the League of Communists, despite their likely happy childhoods as *pionirs*, underscoring the disconnect youth felt between reality and utopian, socialist promises.[53] Hemon expresses not only this disconnect but the bitterness he felt in his adolescence as he saw the socialist promises made to him in his youth fall short: "I accused my parents' generation—and Mama in particular—of failing to live up to the utopian promises that should have handed me a future that I could find worthy and comfortable. I was oblivious to the fact that they had to work for what I took for granted."[54] Consequently, there was a degree of resentfulness and frustration among the youth population, which provided the foundation for the angst and opposition that punk space offered to Yugoslav youth.

Although the indoctrinate and socialist motive of the *SPJ* is undeniable, it is apparent that the organization was primarily concerned with creating paradisal, socialist childhoods and, in certain ways, was able to provide positive childhood experiences for young *pionirs.* Excursions with fellow classmates, enjoying parades, the buzz of dressing up, enjoying music and sandwiches, and the excitement and electric energy of the Youth Relay were aspects of the organization young children reasonably enjoyed. More broadly, children likely enjoyed the social space that the organization offered for building community and belonging in their most formative years. When referring to the Brotherhood and Unity Highway his mother helped to build, Hemon stated that "now I envy her; I envy the sense that she was building something larger; I envy the nobility and honor that comes with being part of a civic endeavor."[55] Discernibly, Hemon's

[53] Batinić, Radeka, and Šušnjara, "*Today, as I Become a Pioneer…*," 35.
[54] Hemon, "My Mother and the Failed Experiment of Yugoslavia."
[55] Hemon, "My Mother and the Failed Experiment of Yugoslavia."

opposition towards the socialist realities he experienced in the 80s was in this context of envy for what once was. As is apparent, the opposition and jaded attitudes towards the lived, socialist experiences of the 80s was in light of the socialist opportunities witnessed by previous generations.

Tito's Punks:

Hemon's sentiments towards Yugoslav nationalism were not exceptional; similar sentiments can be seen in the punk spaces that grew with increasing rapidity in the 1980s. Punk bands across the state, such as Pankriti, Paraf, and Azra, critiqued the social realities of the state, challenging the social conformity and nationalist narrative emphasized by the Yugoslav government. As Mulej addresses in his work, punk bands across the republic were "not condemning the self-management socialist order as such, or even openly attacking the ruling League of Communists, but rather engaged in imaginative criticisms of socialist realities, which entailed a disrespectful disinterest towards the official ideology and its promises."[56] In their song "Paralelne Linije," Croatian band Paraf demonstrates this commentary on socialist society, criticizing the indoctrination of both children and adults into a socialist utopian dream that runs parallel to a more sinister reality of social conformity and asphyxiation, so much so that life was a kind of vegetative, Orwellian reality.[57] Ostensibly, these narratives impelled by the state helped create the perfect storm for punk spaces to burst through the concrete, youths trading their *pionir* uniforms for punk ones when idyllic, socialist promises of socioeconomic prosperity began to crumble.

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[56] Oskar Mulej, "A Place Called Johnny Rotten Square,"193.
[57] Paraf, "Paralelne Linije," on *A Dan je Tako Lijepo Počeo,* 1980, Dallas Records Slovenia, streaming audio, accessed December 8, 2023, Spotify.

Although oppositionality is characteristic and part of the core of what punk spaces entailed, punk youths were not necessarily against the state and its existence; to this day, many former band members express their pride and adoration for the country of Yugoslavia. However, Yugoslav punks specifically protested the socialist realities of their lived experiences. In their music, clothing, performances, and art, youths questioned the national identity pushed by the state through youth events, such as the Youth Relay and *Dan Mladosti,* and expressed discontent at their socioeconomic realities.

Enjoyment and Discontent: Punk Spaces of Performance

On October 18th, 1977, a group of teenagers would perform in the gymnasium of Mostar High School in Slovenia. This band called Pankrti, which roughly translates to "bastards," would utilize this space inextricably tied to the state to creatively express themselves and their experiences as youth growing up in socialist Yugoslavia. Following their first performance, Pankrti would go on to perform in student dormitories and cultural centers established by the state. As a result, punk would spread throughout the region, bringing with it a new space for youth to express and experience not only their enjoyment but their discontent.[58]

As previously stated, the Yugoslav state expressed explicit concern in fostering spaces for youth engagement with the arts, whether it be for the advancement of Yugoslav culture or to control the narrative; musical spaces and youth clubs were no exception, even when they seemed anti-state. Whether it was performing in school gyms or cultural centers explicitly created for students, punk spaces were inextricably tied to the youth organizations established by the Yugoslav government and its republics. This complex web of power dynamics associated with

[58] Tomc, "'Comrades, We Don't Believe You!' Or, Do We Just Want to Dance With You?," 199.

both cultural spaces and production is best summarized by renowned ex-Yugoslav music critic, Aleksandar Dragaš, who stated, "in Zagreb, punk started in the 'Student Centre' at a picture exhibition where Pankrti played. These clubs were supported by state money because in socialism it was the idea that youth has to have cultural places and places where you could play. And then you had radio – public, state-owned radio and they played it as well."[59] Consequently, these state-controlled spaces served as both an outlet for youth frustration and as a means of furthering state ideology. However, as Tomc writes, the government saw these music and media institutions as "'social property' - a code word for Party-controlled state ownership."[60] Major record labels, such as Jugoton, were therefore controlled by the Yugoslav state, resulting in punk bands and audiences utilizing creative lyrical forms of expression and methods of production.

Although punk spaces of performance across the Yugoslav republics were not able to function with the same level of liberty and were inevitably different based on the cultural context, the link between these spaces, the state, and the performance of youth identification was consistently present. From the time they were *pionirs*, youth experienced the state prioritizing their enjoyment through space, then once again as students, then finally resulting in their desire to create their own, independent spaces for not only their enjoyment but also for their dissatisfaction. As punk youths sought to disentangle themselves from the state apparatus, independent spaces and the proliferation of do-it-yourself producing and publishing became an important component for this performance of enjoyment and discontent. As Miljenko Jergović stated in their article, "it is less dangerous for something to exist in the shop windows of record stores and

[59] Barry Philip, *In Search of Tito's Punks: On the Road in a Country That No Longer Exists* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023), 19.
[60] Tomc, "'Comrades, We Don't Believe You!' Or, Do We Just Want to Dance With You?," 196.

on the stages of Party-sponsored 'houses of culture' than for it to live underground, conspiring against the system." [61]

In the case of Slovenia, Disko FV was arguably both the first and most influential punk and alternative club to be established in Ljubljana. Founded and created by members of the band Borghesia, the club was created out of a desire, and some would say necessity, for musical expression independent of state involvement.[62] In a documentary by Neven Korda of Disko FV from 1982 to 1983, punk as a physical space, community, and performance were recorded and artistically put on display for the viewer.[63] Throughout the documentary, identity and artistic expression were enacted through multiple facets: on the walls through graffiti, posters, and photography, through the clothes and styles being adopted, in the interactions of club-goers smoking and drinking together, and in the dancing and bodily movements to the music being performed.

Although the space was founded and created by Borghesia, it is apparent that the space was designed for artistic expression *en masse*. Graffiti, depicting both symbols and words, covered the walls, along with a variety of posters, and even a gallery in the entrance hall to the club. Club-goers both engaged with the art displayed on the walls, performed in front of their eyes, and with each other; some couples warmly embraced, others conversed or laughed with friends, while some sat on the floor with disinterested expressions smoking cigarettes. As various

[61] Miljenko Jergovic, "What Punk Rock Meant to Communist Yugoslavia," *New York Times*, Sept. 18, 2017, accessed March 23, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/18/opinion/punk-rock-communist-yugoslavia.html.
[62] "FV Music," Culture.SI, accessed March 23, 2024, https://www.culture.si/en/FV_Music.
[63] Neven Korda, "Disko FV 82-83," FV Video, recorded on film, Diva Station Project, accessed March 23, 2024, https://www.e-arhiv.org/diva/index.php?opt=work&id=411&lang_pref=en.

Slovenian punk bands performed their sets, some audience members danced, their erratic movements expressing a sense of anger and frustration but also liberation.

Beyond being a space for punk musical performances, Disko FV became a haven for the expression of sexual identity and freedom. In an interview with punk author Barry Philip, Marin Rosić, a prominent figure in the Yugoslav music scene, discussed the relationships between Disko FV and the queer community: "…in this disco called 'Disko FV 112/15' – which is now a Mormon Church – they made the first gay festival, in '83 or '84. The first two days were with gay philosophers and people speaking, and then they had a party. It was, I think, the first time in Eastern Europe when the gay population came into the light – legally – and nobody had a problem."[64] Ostensibly, Disko FV was a multifunctional space: it operated as a social scene to meet and socialize with people, as a platform for artistic expression, a space to create a collective community and perform that collective identity, a venue for philosophical thought and questioning, a space to vocalize political discontent, a social release for youth, and a space for youth to experience enjoyment and culture. As *pionirs,* children engaged with spaces specifically designed for their enjoyment with the intention of creating positive associations and memories with socialism; those memories did not go away. However, as these children aged into their youth, these spaces were no longer able to reflect the socialism that they were living. As a result, punks created spaces for their own enjoyment in which their joy and community could be performed alongside their frustration and angst.

[64] Philip, *In Search of Tito's Punks*, 75.

"You're Infected…": Punk Ideology in Song Lyrics

In order to understand punk as an ideological space, one need look no further than the dystopian, sometimes satirical lyrics of punk bands. Within these lines, containing both literal and figurative elements, are arguably the most unfiltered portrayals of the issues that punk youths were concerned with and their attitudes towards the state. From these lyrics, one can gain an understanding of youth sentiments, specifically their discontent at the level of conformity and oppression pushed by the Yugoslav state.

A characteristic of many of Yugoslav punk songs is the implicit messaging found in the subtext. Because of the state's presence in the music industry, Yugoslav punk bands were not always able to explicitly express their criticisms of socialism or the state regime. Given that many of these record labels, such as Jugoton or Radio Študent, were either created or funded by the Yugoslav government, explicitly criticizing Tito or the regime was frequently impossible. Censorship for these bands became a primary issue, resulting in punk bands creatively weaving their ideas and beliefs within their lyrics, utilizing satire or irony to get their point across.

In the song "Parallel Lines" by Croatian band Paraf, although not explicitly stated, allusions to *pionirs* and their Yugoslav childhoods are apparent. Within one of the earliest stanzas, Paraf sang about perfect order and conformity tied to Yugoslav youth: "everything is perfectly ordered/ Yellow lines are followed/ Children happily wave their flags…"[65] In these lines, Paraf implicitly addressed the *SPJ* and young *pionirs* engaging in performative displays of

[65] Paraf, "Paralelne Linije."

nationalism and conformity, performances children could not fully comprehend yet naively partook in. In subsequent lines, Paraf expanded on the education system as contributing to this extreme level of conformity, with people mindlessly following the "government-mandated way" well into their old age as pensioners. Within these lines is a sense of bitterness and hopelessness regarding a predetermined path for youth from childhood into their elderly years. The song concludes with their loss of hearing and the realization they will not need their senses now or later in life anyway. In the song, this loss is seen as losing touch with reality, the final step in achieving conformity and a state of mindlessness. As previously stated, although state ideology may not have been the focal point of their childhood memories, certainly seeing *pionirs* standing where they once stood, possessing an air of disillusionment and naivety, had an impact on how Paraf, and punk kids more generally, retroactively understood their childhoods. This imagery functioned as a contrast between the joyous, Yugoslav childhood the state sought to create and the more dystopian reality that adolescents perceived.

The prevalence of conformity as a lyrical theme among punk bands is more digestible in the context of the two-tract education system in Yugoslavia. Heavily based on class and social stratification, the education system had two designated paths for youths to follow: vocational training or academic institutions, often referred to as gymnasiums. The path chosen, or perhaps determined for youth, largely depended on their academic scores but also the accessibility of resources. Conjointly, as was the case in a variety of economic systems, occupation status and title were the primary determinant of the social value assigned to a person.[66] In this context,

[66] Jana Bacević, *From Class to Identity: The Politics of Education Reform in Former Yugoslavia,* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014), 35.

Paraf's connection between the education system, conformity, and a predestined future becomes clearer. Punk youths did not feel their future was their own but rather was laid out for them to mindlessly follow. Evidently, a major component of punk ideology was the protest of conformity, with this song and its performance operating as a form of anti-conformist and anti-authoritarian protest.

Conjointly, the title "Parallel Lines" can thematically hold a variety of meanings. Firstly, the parallel lines, outlined both in the title and in the song as the parallel, yellow lines on a road, addressed the conformity and strict following of boundaries. The inclusion of the parallel, yellow lines on the road tied heavily to Paraf's sense of going on autopilot or subconsciously following rules and orders, criticizing this facet of life in Yugoslavia. Secondly, one can understand "Parallel Lines" in terms of parallel mental spaces of consciousness. In a dystopian flourish, the song begins with the vocalist aware of a mechanized, fabricated world running parallel to an authentic reality. With the final lines of the song, as the vocalist begins to lose his hearing, he also loses touch with a reality in which he was able to discern an "other," foreign consciousness. This lyrical element demonstrated the belief that the state was propagating an inauthentic reality or narrative that ran parallel to a more authentic one, as was expressed by the vocalist's realization of others being "infected" and his awareness of his own descent into a dystopian autopilot-state of consciousness.

Paraf continued to play with parallelism as a thematic element to their songs on the same album. In their song "Živelja Jugoslavija," the final line in all stanzas is "we love our lines, long

live Yugoslavia."[67] Preceding this line is the repetition of Paraf expressing that they do not want other peoples' things, they only want their own. Paraf clearly played into the irony of strict adherents to Yugoslav nationalism, specifically in the context of not questioning the authoritarianism and conformity present in nation. Ergo, Paraf's play on parallelism is dually in the context of nationalism and identity, both of which were communicated to them as *pionirs*. These lines, although certainly ironic, spoke to punks' desire to remove state involvement in their conceptions of their futures and national identities; in this way, the song expressed punk youths' disdain for the version of the future and nationalism the state tried to sell them.

Similar to Paraf, punk bands across the six republics addressed similar concerns of conformity, authenticity, and state authoritarianism in their songs. In the case of Slovenia, punk bands Pankrti and Ljublanski psi, in their songs "Seventeen" and "Anthem of Our Youth" respectively, protested extreme compliance in government-mandated ways of life and thought. Pankrti's song "Seventeen" largely criticized the vacuousness of youth brigaders and the way the Union of Socialist Youth of Slovenia sought to control the future lives of youth in the republic through jobs.[68] Within the song lyrics, there is an implication that members of the Union of Socialist Youth of Slovenia became both vegetative and automatic, possessing radars in their heads in lieu of brains.[69] Similarly, Ljublanksi psi's song characterized official youth rituals and anthems as both primitive and inauthentic, describing "youth rituals as 'clenching our fists' and official slogans as 'alien thoughts.'"[70] Undeniably, issues of authenticity regarding identity and

[67] Paraf, "Živela Jugoslavija," on *A Dan je Tako Lijepo Počeo,* 1980, Dallas Records Slovenia, streaming audio, accessed December 8, 2023, Spotify.
[68] Mulej, "A Place Called Johnny Rotten Square," 193.
[69] Pankrti, "Sedemnajst," on *Dolgcajt,* 1980, ŠKUC, accessed March 23, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/master/237474-Pankrti-Dolgcajt.
[70] Mulej, "A Place Called Johnny Rotten Square," 193.

nationalism also factored into the punk ideology of the time. Youths were searching for an authentic consciousness and were not finding it through the state.

In addition to the plethora of songs reflecting punk beliefs, some punk bands explicitly expressed their beliefs in manifestos, such as Laibach. In their manifesto, Laibach expressed similar ideas of state ideology creating inauthentic forms of consciousness. The punk band believed that "ideology takes the place of authentic forms of social consciousness… Laibach reveals and expresses the linkage of politics and ideology with industrial production and the unbridgeable gaps between this link and the spirit."[71] Palpably, Laibach's *raison d'être* was to reveal the inauthentic life imposed by the state to their audiences with the hopes of cultivating more authentic forms of social consciousness. Similar to the song by Paraf, Laibach conceptualized parallel states of awareness, one genuine and one false, one awake and one asleep.

Arguably one of the most important tenants of Laibach's manifesto was their practice of provocation. Laibach frequently appropriated taboo symbols or imagery, such as the swastika, in their fashion and music videos in order to comment on the current socialist realities and compel audiences to question the meanings attached to symbols. The band specifically saw their provocation as targeting "the revolted state of the alienated consciousness (which must necessarily find itself an enemy) and unites warriors and opponents into an expression of a static totalitarian scream."[72] This tenant of the manifesto reiterated punk's concern with authenticity, as

[71] Laibach, "10 Items of the Covenant," Stream, *Garage Museum,* accessed March 23, 2024, https://garagemca.org/en/exhibition/nsk-from-kapital-to-capital/materials/laibach-desyat-statey-zaveta-laibach-10-items-of-the-covenant.
[72] Laibach, "10 Items of the Covenant."

the band sought to combat "alienated consciousness," and with fostering a collective, centralized community that would ideally share one voice or one scream.

Throughout the manifesto, Laibach asserts their language and art as political. They acknowledge the inextricable influence politics and ideology had on their conceptions of reality, therefore also influencing their language and art production. Although Laibach addressed the political nature of their existence and art, it is important to note that this did not entail taking a political side. In Yugoslavia at this time, many punks expressed the desire to be seen as politically unaligned or entirely apolitical.[73] There was a desire to have their existence to not be politicized by the state, although, as Laibach had done, many were forced to learn how to use their politicized existence as a weapon to criticize and reveal the hypocrisy of their socialist lives. Although Laibach is just one group, strains and patterns of punk ideology are clearly present, although they certainly cannot be universally applied to the whole.

Trading Red Scarves for Worn Leather: The Significance of Punk Fashion

As *pionir* uniforms communicated children's belonging to the *SPJ*, punk spaces utilized clothing to communicate identification. However, the punk uniform did not involve co-opting any singular style or aesthetic; the stylistic and aesthetic diversity of punk was evident in a variety of photographs of punk spaces. From the bold images of leather and studs to more preppy button downs and sweaters, Yugoslav punk fashion demonstrated the ways in which punk became a space for inclusive and diverse forms of expression. Rather than abiding by strict, parallel lines, Yugoslav punk fashion unabashedly zig-zagged, rejecting, much like Yugoslavia as a concept, the notion that homogeneity was required for community. Punk operated as a space of

[73] Mulej, "A Place Called Johnny Rotten Square," 198.

both collectivism and individualism, "fashion… [acting as] a form of imitation and distinction…"[74]

Figure 5. Niet, Slovenian punk group. Ljubljana, August 1984.[75]

Although black shirts, leather, and studs were uniform-esque among the punk community, the diversity of clothing Yugoslav punks chose to wear cannot be understated. Photographs capturing performances in clubs, like Disko FV, demonstrate that punks wore a variety of different clothing materials and styles. As seen in the photograph of Slovenian band Niet, some punks wore Black Flag shirts while others wore collared-shirts or sweaters; sometimes they wore leather jackets, and other times they dressed in plain white t-shirts. This is further evidenced by the cover art for the album *Everybody Dance Now*, which was a compilation of Punk and New

[74] Tajda Hlačar, "Laibach, Anti-Fashion and Subversion: Over-identification and Universality of a Uniform," Mast.'s Thesis (University of Zagreb, 2020), 79.
[75] Nataša Strlič, "Fotografski fond Janez Bogataj (1979-1991)," Muzej Novejše Zgodovine Slovenije, accessed March 23, 2024, https://www.muzej-nz.si/si/zbirke/1104/956-Fotografski-fond-Janez-Bogataj-1979-1991.

Wave songs from Yugoslavia in the 1980s. Designed by Mirko Ilić, this album cover art displays the various styles of punk and new wave music in the form of twelve differently dressed legs.

Figure 6. *Everybody Dance Now*, a 1980 New Wave Punk compilation featuring bands from different parts of Yugoslavia. Designed by Mirko Ilić.[76]

In this album art, the diversity of aesthetics and stylistic choices among the "alternative" groups in Yugoslavia are apparent. Although more "conventional" punk fashion aesthetics, like those demonstrated by Pekinška Patka, were present, punks also dressed like the more colorful palettes demonstrated by Električni Orgazam or the preppy style of Idoli. Plainly, this noticeable lack of a uniform demonstrates that anyone could be punk, regardless of how they chose to dress or

[76] "New Wave, New Look: Album Covers of Yugoslav Punk," Photography, Fashion, and Design, Yugoslav Punk: Sounds of the Last Yugoslav Generation, accessed March 23, 2024, https://yugoslavpunk.omeka.net/exhibits/show/photography---fashion/new-wave--new-look--album-cove.

outwardly express their identity. In the context of punk ideology, Yugoslav punk fashion can be understood as a protest against both the extreme uniformity and conformity in identity. Punk fashion may have had a conventional look in Yugoslavia, but this perceived "punk uniform" was unimportant; following some set of rules or guidelines on what a punk looked like would likely be seen as antithetical to the very core of punk. It didn't seem to matter what one wore as long as they were willing to participate in what Laibach called the "totalitarian scream:" a collective vocalization of opposition towards the current order.

Figure 7. Photography by Jože Suhadolnik, courtesy of Akina (publisher of *Balkan Pank*).[77]

Unlike the strict adherence to a uniform in the *SPJ,* punk spaces sought to foster a collective voice that allowed for the expression of individual and diverse styles.[78] Rather than

[77] Ashleigh Kane, "Unearthing Yugoslavia's Lost Punk Rock Scene," Dazed, accessed March 23, 2024, https://www.dazeddigital.com/photography/article/25986/1/unearthing-yugoslavia-s-lost-80s-punk-rock-scene.
[78] For more information on DIY aesthetic in Eastern Europe, see Jacopo Sanna, "Do-It-Yourself and Mobility in the Croatian Punk Scene," (Master thesis, University of Graz, 2022).

abiding by the blue-white-red color palette that had once dictated the colors of their childhoods, punk youths sought to express their non-conformist ideology through their clothing.

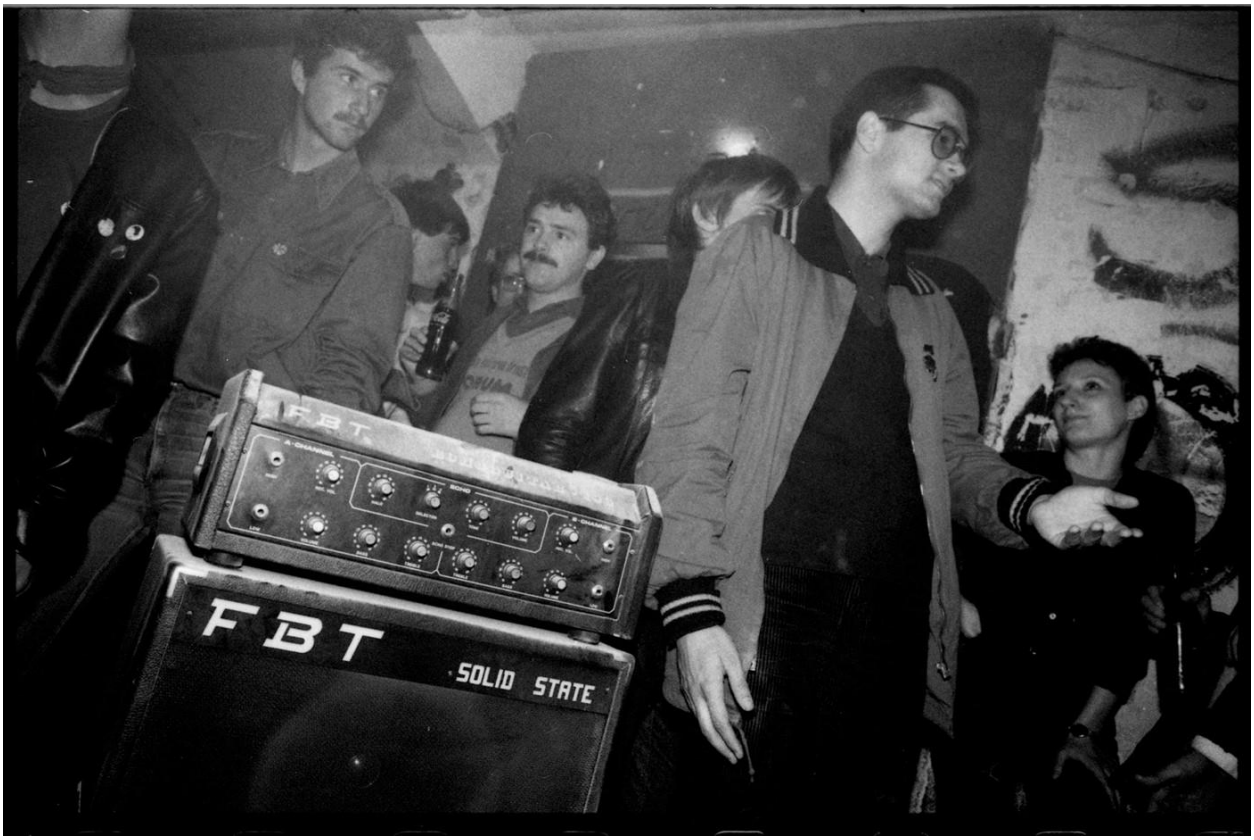

Figure 8. Photograph in Disko FV.[79]

Punk space embraced individuals from a variety of backgrounds, allowing for the free expression of diversity and individuality that also fostered a collective community. Understood in the long-standing tradition of "*bradstvo i jedinstvo,"*[80] which punks learned as *pionirs*, it is apparent that adolescents were influenced by the politicization of their childhoods and utilized that ideology to express collective identity in a more authentic version.

[79] Kane, "Unearthing Yugoslavia's Lost Punk Rock Scene."
[80] "brotherhood and unity"

However, this expression of non-conformity through clothing occasionally did include a uniform, or more specifically, the appropriation of one. The use of German SS uniforms and Nazi symbols in punk imagery has been a topic of both public concern and academic inquiry.[81] In the case of Yugoslav punk, the appropriation of taboo symbols and imagery was frequently used to critique the socialist regime. As previously discussed, Laibach's manifesto specifically outlined their intent to appropriate images and symbols to spark inquiry into the politics and nature of symbolic meaning. While Laibach may be the most extreme or well-known case, the appropriation of symbols associated with far-right political movements, or even state regimes more generally, were used by various punk bands and audiences across the republics.[82]

Figure 9. Laibach in Nazi uniforms with armbands of the Laibach cross.[83]

[81] See Oscar Mulej, "A Place Called Johnny Rottensquare" and "Censorship in the Age of Punk: Yugoslavia 1970-1989," State Censorship, Yugoslav Punk: Sounds of the Last Yugoslav Generation, accessed April 20, 2024, https://yugoslavpunk.omeka.net/exhibits/show/censorship/censorship-in-the-age-of-punk-.

[82] As Dragaš addresses in *In Search of Tito's Punks,* many punk youths were the victims of police brutality due to the inaccurate association between punk youth and Nazism. In the work, Dragaš shares, "in the eighties, we had the 'Nazi Punk Affair' in Ljubljana, when nobody was a Nazi punk. A friend of mine was six months in Youth Jail because he was scratching a swatiska on a table in school. But he was going to scrap it. You know, at that time you had a swastika and a cross through it like you are opposing Nazis? But they said, 'No, you are drawing a swastika, so you go to jail,' although he was not Nazi at all. But he had to go to jail." For more on the Nazi Punk Affair, see Mulje, "A Place Called Johnny Rotten Square."

[83] As cited in Tajda Hlačar, "Laibach, Anti-Fashion and Subversion: Over-identification and Universality of a Uniform," Mast.'s Thesis (University of Zagreb, 2020), 86.

Albeit in the form of album art, punk band Bijelo Dugme, with their album entitled "Spit and Sing My Yugoslavia," used military iconography from communist China to coyly address the conformity and even authoritarian qualities of the Yugoslav state. Evidently, the appropriation, and even subversion, of symbolic meaning was not exclusively confined to punk fashion but was a pivotal component to creating punk art and space.

Figure 10. "Pljuni I Zapjevaj Moja Jugoslavijo," album by Bijelo Dugme, 1986.[84]

From the *SPJ*'s beginning, the state was concerned with furthering Yugoslav man through culture, which meant that the means of production for punk as an artform would largely be state controlled. For punk fashion, in addition to punk lyrics, this meant Yugoslav punks were creative

[84] Bijelo Dugme, *Pljuni I Zapjevaj Moja Jugoslavijo,* 1986, Diskoton, accessed March 23, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/master/44498-Bijelo-Dugme-Pljuni-I-Zapjevaj-Moja-Jugoslavijo.

in their expressions of discontent. Although punk bands did not explicitly critique the regime, they specifically used over-identification, in the form of appropriating military uniforms and images, to point out the hypocrisy and ludicrousness of state apparatuses and ideology. As Žižek wrote in his work *Why are Laibach and NSK not Fascist,* "[this fashion] 'frustrates' the system (the ruling ideology) precisely insofar as it is not its ironic imitation, but over-identification with it – by bringing to light the obscene superego underneath the system, over-identification suspends its efficiency.'"[85] Although mainly part of the spectacle of performance with bands, anti-fashion and over-identification were also present among punk audiences in Yugoslavia.[86] Thus, punk fashion and art used in this specific context was an over-identification and subversion of military and totalitarian symbolism.

Undeniably, punks across Yugoslavia were exposed to the transformative and communicative power of image, color, and clothing while they were *pionirs*. Although they might not have consciously perceived these influences on their world, children recognized the ways in which socialist colors, the blue-white-red color scheme, not only shaped their engagement with the world but also dictated the communities they were welcomed into. The *SPJ* functioned as exposing children to the politics of belonging and expressing that belonging in a way that could be optically perceived by the rest of the world. However, the state likely did not anticipate these young *pionirs* eventually weaponizing tangential, and sometimes the very same, images for their political commentary. Laibach, Bijelo Dugme, punk bands, and punk audiences

[85] Hlačar, "Laibach, Anti-Fashion and Subversion," 85.
[86] The mainstreams misunderstanding of this stylistic choice would culminate into an environment of hysteria surrounding punks and far-right ideology. A series of yellow journalism press publications would result in this phenomenon being widely known as the "Nazi Punk Affair." Once again, for more information, see Mulje, "A Place Called Johnny Rotten Square."

had a keen understanding of the politicization of their existence that extended from childhood into adolescence and young adulthood. Moreso than the imagery of their lives, adolescence understood the important, if not imposing, role that the state played in their engagement with the arts, both in its production and the spaces in which it was produced and performed.

Dreams Not Realized, But Vocalized

Through lyrics, fashion, and spaces of performance, punks were able to express their discontent for their lived experiences under socialism. From protesting conformity to state-sponsored notions of self and belonging, punk bands creatively expressed their critique of the Yugoslav state. Similar ideas would be transposed into the aesthetic and stylistic choices used in clothing, reflecting their belonging to a community that shared these sentiments just as their *pionir* uniforms had done. Punk spaces of performance would thus be heavily influenced by these beliefs communicated through lyrics coupled with the aesthetic of dark leather and grunge, creating spaces that reflected the grit and angst of punk youth.

Punk in Yugoslavia was created in the context of utopian, socialist promises made to children failing to be realized in adolescence. Oath-making, collective uniforms, and *pionir* spaces were the blueprint for punk youths to be able to subvert and express their discontent for the ways in which the state failed to uphold their end of the bargain. In certain ways, their song lyrics were oaths themselves, communicating their ideals while promising to hold Yugoslav society accountable. Their clothes contrasted the color scheme of their childhoods, their lack of uniformity being the uniform they chose to don on. Punk spaces inextricably tied to the Yugoslav state youth organizations would be where punks poetically expressed their discontent and distrust for authority after the realities of their youth proved to be a betrayal. Where was the prosperity

they were promised? The feelings of unity and belonging to something greater? The freedom? As Tomc writes in his academic work, "for us, the problem of socialist Yugoslavia was not that it was a multinational state, but that it was not democratic."[87] Evidently, punks were not protesting Yugoslavia as a concept. They protested a lack of freedom and autonomy. Punks' criticism of the state was never really about socialism in Yugoslavia but rather about the power exerted by the state and its party officials.

In the context of the *SPJ*, the complicated relationship youth had with Yugoslavia becomes clear. In an interview with Pero Lovšin of Pankrti, Dragaš asked Lovšin , "'I know that you are not against socialism which would mean you were for capitalism, you were for democracy, but you tried to improve socialism…He said, 'No, we were not against socialism because we thought that socialism would stay forever and it just needs to be improved.'"[88] This generation of Yugoslavs experienced nostalgia for happy childhoods and associations with the *pionir* organization and socialism. They were exposed to state ideology and systems of belonging through uniforms and spaces, both of which would later be transformed by youths into versions that more authentically represented their senses of self. However, those sentiments of "brotherhood and unity" remained even when punks began to feel that this state-propagated slogan was performative, "because in that time in Yugoslavia it was peaceful, and nobody cared which nationality you were – especially not in punk."[89]

Yugoslav punk as a liminal space left behind an extensive legacy, however none more compelling than an exploration of Yugoslav youth. The legacy of Yugoslav punk demands a

[87] Tomc, "'Comrades, We Don't Believe You!' Or, Do We Just Want to Dance With You?," 203.
[88] Philip, *In Search of Tito's Punks,* 21.
[89] Philip, *In Search of Tito's Punks,* 20.

reconsideration of dissent among youth populations, in the sense that it did not involve a complete overhaul but rather a transformation, perhaps as the red scarves had done, of what already existed. Punk youths existed in conversation with mainstream society, developing their ideals, dreams, and songs through their lived experiences in a nation that is now no more. Yugoslav punk songs, clothes, spaces, and frameworks of understanding life reflected the experience of youth navigating a frustrating world of dreams vocalized but not yet realized. And yet, by creating this liminal space, punks did make their dreams a reality; this reality may not be transposed onto the physical realm, but it certainly lives on in the minds and imaginations of those who engaged with Yugoslav punk space. From punk reunion tours to academic papers, the legacy of Yugoslavian punk is very much alive and kicking. As punk scholar Barry Philip wrote, "punk is not dead, it just got a Ph.D…"[90]

[90] Philip, *In Search of Tito's Punks,* 6.

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