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From the geopolitical space of Yugoslavia
to the virtual space of the Web Yugosphere

Francesco Mazzucchelli

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e-Diasporas Atlas

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Reference to this document

Francesco Mazzucchelli, *What remains of Yugoslavia? From the geopolitical space of Yugoslavia to the virtual space of the Web Yugosphere*, e-Diasporas Atlas, Avril 2012.

Plateforme e-Diasporas

http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=section&section=32

Abstract

The paper works from the double hypothesis that: (1) a Yugoslav socio-cultural space still exists in spite of the dissolution of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; (2) the communities "occupying" this space can be considered, in some measure, "diasporic", if the "Yugoslav diaspora" is defined by not only the geographic displacement of people but also the loosening of the connections between the members of an ex-nation who still consider themselves a national community. The "space" mapped in the essay is the so-called "virtual space" of the Web, including all websites that reconnect to the "cultural languages" of the "past-country". The author observes how these "different Yugoslavias" are "staged" and linked together on the Web, and verifies how some far-flung communities rally around the "virtual re-foundation" and "virtual representations" of Yugoslavia. The corpus is constituted mainly of "yugonostalgic" websites that are subjected to a content analysis. The 191 websites of the corpus and the hyper-textual map of their edges are analysed using semantic features together with other tools of categorization.

Keywords

Mots-clefs

The subject of this paper is the "virtual space" occupied today by Yugoslavia in the Web. The (double) starting hypothesis is that: (1) a *socio-cultural space of Yugoslavia* still exists today and has survived the violent dissolution of the geo-political space of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; and (2) the communities "occupying" this space can be considered *diasporic*, on condition that we assume a particular definition of diaspora, which we discuss below.

The space we are talking about is the so-called (perhaps too summarily and perhaps loosely) "virtual space": the space of the World Wide Web, which is inhabited, colonised and territorialized through sites, blogs, forums, social networks and online communities. Our aim is to draw a "cartography" of the Yugoslav websites: not the ones which talk *about* Yugoslavia, but rather the ones that *speak* – and "act discursively" – *as Yugoslav,* or rather that still today *speak* the "languages" (not in a linguistic but in a semiotic sense) of the disappeared Republic of Yugoslavia, and which, by some means, recall it. All these websites discuss, represent, remember, re- (and de-) construct Yugoslavia in many different ways. The aim of the paper is to investigate, on the one hand, how these "different Yugoslavias" are digitally *mis en scene* and, on the other hand, in which way and to what extent today different communities scattered throughout the world connect and "gather around" the digital discursive representations of a no-longer existing nation.[1]

A nation without a space?

Yugoslavia ceased formally to exist in 2003, after a popular referendum abolished the denomination Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which by that time comprehended only Serbia and Montenegro. As is common knowledge,[2] the disintegration process of Yugoslavia had already begun in the Eighties (following several events: the death of Tito, the Albanian protests in Kosovo, a deep crisis of the country's economic system, the centrifugal tendencies of the more industrialized republics of the Federation in the north of the country), and then had speeded up in the early Nineties through the secessions of Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia (1991) and finally Bosnia-Herzegovina. The boosts to secession and the revived nationalisms led to a chain of terrible civil conflicts involving all the populations until 1995, breaking up the social and collective fabric of Yugoslavia and drawing a new map of the south-western Balkans, with new borders and new senses of national belonging. Events such as the siege of Sarajevo, Operation Storm in Knin, the "urbicides" of Vukovar and of Dubrovnik or the Srebrenica massacre are just a few notorious episodes in a cruel civil war that at times assumed the form of a genocide.

In 1995, the so-called "Dayton Peace Agreement" ratified the new institutional structure of the new states born out of the rubble of Yugoslavia, transforming the boundaries between the former federal republics of Yugoslavia (Croatia, Bosnia, Slovenia, Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro**,** which remained federated to some extent) into state boundaries and subdividing Bosnia-Herzegovina into two "entities" (the Muslim-Croat Federation and Republika Srpska) included within the same national institutional frame.[3]

After 1990, therefore, Yugoslav citizens – who were nourished with the slogan of *bratstvo i jedinstvo*, the "brotherhood and unity" preached by the rhetorics of the socialist regime guided by Marshall Tito – found themselves in the uncomfortable position of citizens of a nation that no longer existed. That miracle of composition of different and, perhaps, apparently incompatible (ethnic, religious, national, cultural and linguistic) elements collapsed violently due to the war and the explosion of nationalisms.

They call "old Yugoslavia" a still-existing area

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1. On this regard, see the notion of "imagined community" by Benedict Anderson (1991).

2. The historiographic literature in this subject is very large; for a synthetic but exhaustive reconstruction of the events, see Silber & Little (1996).

3. Meanwhile, in 1996, the situation in the region of Kosovo (at that time part of Serbia) began deteriorating with the escalation of the conflict between Albanian and Serbian ethnic groups. Among the Albanians (Muslim, the majority of the population in the region) military movements such as UCK, which fought for independence from Serbia, gained strength. The war between secessionist Albanians and Serbian (Yugoslav) army intensified in 1999 when NATO decided to intervene with a military air operation against the violent Serb repression. The operation, called *Allied Force*, resulted in the recognition of the autonomy of the region (*Rambouillet Agreement*). Kosovo became an international protectorate administered by a NATO mission (KFOR), until 2008 when, after the failure of the negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo conducted by ONU, the Kosovar parliament declared unilaterally independence from Serbia.

of the Balkans, whose regions are no longer part of the same state and whose geo-politics, after the destruction, is under reconstruction. […] Political and geographical spaces are dissociated. […] Through the compulsory use of the seamy "former" prefix, along with the history, the past itself is denied, including the individual past (as if it was a "black chapter") (Ivekovic, 1999: 6-7; my translation).

These words were written by Rada Ivekovic at the end of the Yugoslav wars – when the geo-political face of the area determined by the new borders risen between the new countries appeared uncertain yet – and they clarify pretty well the tenor of the diffusion of both a collective and an individual sentiment of traumatic loss of an "identity" that was, among other things, geographic too (inasmuch as it was based also on the territorial unity of the country). Even more than ten years later, the words of Ivekovic still sound topical and not much changed within those borders that emerged after the conflicts – except for the independence of Montenegro from Serbia, peacefully achieved through a referendum in 2005, and the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo, which merely ratified the situation sanctioned by the Rambouillet Conference after the NATO Operations. Nevertheless, in the following years, the new independent countries strengthened their national identities and are currently committed to a process of normalization and stabilization, easier for some (like Slovenia, which is a member of the European Union, and Croatia, which will join[4] in 2013), harder for others (like Bosnia-Herzegovina, whose institutional profile is still affected by all the tensions and instabilities that the Dayton Peace Agreement left unsolved, or Kosovo, which has not been recognized as an independent state by Serbia and other countries). Yugoslavia today is no more than a ghost of the past, a "lost civilization", as Ivekovic herself calls it.

What remains, then, of Yugoslavia today? Does a common (cultural, social, economic) space – having survived the appearance of the new borders that made it explode – still exist? And, if so, which (and what kind of) places does Yugoslavia occupy today? Who are, today, the Yugoslavs?

4. Serbia has been an official candidate since 2011, Montenegro since 2010, while Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo are still in the stabilization and association process.

From Yugoslavia to Yugosphere: the Yugoslav semiosphere

Yugoslavia ceased to exist in 1991, with the secessions that announced the ensuing wars. The emergence of new political entities and national identities testifies to the process of *fragmentation* ("balkanization", as they say) *of a geo-political space* but also to the *division of a people*, of a nation made of diversity but accustomed to living together. "Six states, five nations, four languages, three religions, two alphabets and only one Tito": this old saying was very popular during the socialist period, testifying to the complex mosaic of ethnic, religious and cultural differences held together by the charismatic Yugoslav statesman. According to a widespread opinion, the impact of the disappearance of Josip Broz Tito was strong enough to bring about the collapse of the already crumbling Yugoslav edifice. But can we really consider the death of the leader of Yugoslavia the main reason for the fragile and unstable balance that held the country together? And was this balance really that unstable? This paper will not cover the issues related to the historical reasons of the Yugoslav wars nor those related to the actual (contractual or conflictual?) nature of multiculturalism in the western Balkans, land of clashes but also of encounters among different civilizations and gateway between the East and West; conversely, this paper aims to demonstrate that a common heritage – of shared memories, experiences and cultures – characterizes even today the countries comprised in the fragmented area of former Yugoslavia.

Some years ago, in a provocative article published by *The Economist*, the journalist Tim Judah (2009) coined the term *Yugosphere*, to refer precisely to the still-existing "texture" of relationships and exchanges among the persons and the people from the countries of former Yugoslavia. According to his argument, even some years after the breakup of Yugoslavia, the space of the western Balkans is less fragmented than one could expect, and the new borders that now divide Yugoslavia are more permeable than they seem. Therefore, the end of Yugoslavia didn't lead to a real breakdown of the links among western Balkan peoples, and today, more than ten years after the wars, it is possible to speak again of a "common area", of a *Yugosphere*:

The Yugosphere has its roots in shared experience, in trade and in business. Most former Yugoslavs – Bosnians, Serbs, Montenegrins and Croats – speak the same language with minor variations. Many Macedonians and Slovenes still speak or understand what used to be called Serbo-Croat as a second language. Within most of the region, people can travel freely using just their identity cards. They like the same music and the same food. Political, religious and ethnic differences persist of course […] but opinion polls show a certain commonality of outlook: people have similar fears, worries and hopes (Judah, 2009).

Judah's *Yugosphere* stresses particularly the economic exchanges and the fact that where there is business even the more ingrained nationalism gives way to forms of internationalism. But it's not only about that: as Judah himself specifies, the *Yugosphere* is also made of shared experiences and memories, cultures, music tastes, expectations and life-styles. The advantage of Judah's notion is that it calls to mind another concept, highly relevant for the goals of this paper: the *semiosphere*, a word coined by the semiotician of culture, Yurij Lotman (1985), based on Vernadskij's theory of "biosphere". According to Lotman, a semiosphere is a homogeneous cultural universe: a semiotic space that occurs as a *continuum* in which all the – broadly speaking – "texts" of a culture are immersed and circulate, interacting with each other and producing new meanings. The main device of the semiosphere is the *border*, considered as that element which keeps the different semiotic/cultural universes separated from the external (the "extra-semiotic") and from each other (the "hetero-semiotic"); however, the border is "porous", it allows crossing from outside to inside, acting as a "linguistic filter of translation". These borders/filters run through the inside of the semiosphere as well, producing internal differentiations.

Borrowing the word from Judah, in this paper I will use the term *Yugosphere*, to mean, according to Lotman's theory, a homogeneous cultural universe, and I will try to prove its existence in the Web. I posit that a Yugoslav semiosphere still exists, sometimes overlapping with the new national semiospheres (i.e. the different national cultural universes strengthened with the rise of the new Balkanic nation-states), but is often unable to fit and "conciliate" with them. This "translation incapacity" of the survived (or re-born) Yugosphere

into the new national semiospheres appears as well in the different and contrasting processes of collective identification in the cultural universes of the new countries: Can one feel one belongs at the same time to a *transnational Yugosphere* and to a *national* (Serbian, Croat, Bosnian, Slovenian) *semiosphere* (which can also count on a "geo-political territorialization")? This question is also relevant for determining the presumed diasporic feature of the members of this "ideal community" that we call the Yugosphere.

Moreover, considered from another perspective, the "diasporic feature" of this community is confirmed by the evidence that the extension of the Yugosphere (and of its semiotic borders) exceeds the geographic borders of former Yugoslavia; due to the waves of migration that began during and immediately after the wars, the "members of Yugosphere" – meant again in a lotmanian sense – are spread all over the world.

The Yugo-diaspora: migratory phenomena and the "lost civilization syndrome"

The Yugoslav "explosion of the nations" – as Nicole Janigro (1993) defined it – determined one of the most intensive migratory movements of the last two decades of the 20th century. Wars, political instability, the rise of new borders, the led to demographic movements inside the Balkan area, on the one hand, and accelerated the migration process from the territories of former Yugoslavia to other parts of the world, on the other hand. Therefore, we have to distinguish between an external emigration (from former Yugoslavia to abroad) and an internal one (from a former Yugoslav republic to one of the new state that replaced federal republics).[5] The latter case should also consider the *citizenship (and non-geographical) migration* that entailed the change of the citizen status of the individuals: from Yugoslav citizens to Serb, Croat, Bosnian and Slovenian citizens. These migrations show that some typical features of diaspora and the diasporic status had in some cases an institutional acknowledgement through

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5. It's not easy to find aggregate data only organized by country; for example, according to the Serbian Ministry of Diaspora there are more than 3 millions Serbs living abroad.

the establishment in some countries (like Serbia) of a Minister of Diaspora.[6]

I will not tackle these diasporas from a strictly national perspective (say, from the point of view of the new post-Yugoslav nation-states), but instead I will try to theorize what I consider to be a further level of the phenomenon, that is the *Yugoslav diaspora*. My hypothesis is that the sudden and violent breakup of Yugoslavia led to the dispersion of a particular community – the "Yugoslav community" – into other spaces that are both internal and external to the territories of former Yugoslavia. This could be seen as a double diasporic movement, with both *centrifugal boosts* (towards European countries and the United States, above all) and *centripetal boosts* (towards the new western Balkan countries).

But in what sense may we speak of diaspora for the Yugoslavs, citizens of a country that no longer exists but was replaced with new national re-foundations – with which the new citizens should apparently identify? In *Global Diaspora*, Robin Cohen (1997) defines diaspora with regard to those scattered communities that left the homeland but which continue to recognize themselves in a common culture. At the same time, generally, the definition of diaspora refers to all migratory movements determined by an external cause (such as wars, or persecutions) but not to those caused by other reasons (such as non-identification with own country). The Yugoslav case shows a peculiarity: if it is true that the emigration flow was very high during and immediately after the war, many people continued to live in the same geographic area (the western Balkans); but in many cases they were forced (by different reasons which could be in any case considered "external") to move to another city, region or even country in that area.

Furthermore, the spread of nationalistic feelings lead to a situation in which many citizens of the new western Balkan nation-states recognize themselves completely in their new nationality, even proudly claiming this national belonging. At the same time, it is impossible to deny the existence of a community that instead continue to identify themselves with a no longer

existing nation (or, at least, to not recognize the new countries as their homeland). In all events, the whole former Yugoslav people experienced a violent and radical breach of the identitarian and communitarian ties through a chain of traumatic events (civil wars, new nationalisms, a *damnatio memoriae* of the recent past).

There is, therefore, a transnational and scattered community – partly in the Balkan area (redistributed in the new countries), partly outside the Balkans (mostly in the biggest European countries and in the United States of America) – afflicted by a sort of a "extinct civilization syndrome" (to use the words of Rada Ivekovic) and kept together fundamentally by two "binding forces": the collective trauma of the war and a feeling of "collective nostalgia" for the past life in former Yugoslavia and their common cultural heritage strengthened in that period. I will go on to prove and verify the existence of such a community and to piece together and map its presence in the Web.

Jugonostalgija: the past between seized memories and sewed-up life-experiences

The diffused collective sentiment of nostalgia toward the past is probably the principal sign of the existence of this "post-Yugoslav" ideal community. Such feelings of yearning offor the socialist past, known as *jugonostalgija,* is a social phenomenon that has recently becoame very popular in Westernthe western Balkans. If immediately after the war – as pointed out by Nikole Janigro – in the Nineties the word *jugonostalgicar* (yugonostalgic) was still meant yet as insultingan insult and was used to indicate the "traitors to country" and the "suspected communists", today it seems instead to be a widespread "fashion trend", and mostly in Bosnia but also in Serbia, Slovenia and to a lesser degree in Croatia, there is a great "cultural reappearance" of former Yugoslavia and its symbols in popular culture. But towards what is directed this nostalgia directed?

This question was recently investigated by manya number of scholars[7] along with all the other "ostalgic" phenomena (fromcomposed of *ost,*

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6. Yugoslavia was an emigration country before the wars as well. For the impact of pre-war diaspora and on the development of the nationalisms and support by groups of Yugoslav activist émigrés that fostered radical national movements in the home countries, see Hockenos (2003).

7. See Todorova & Zsuzsa (2010); Modrzejewski &, Sznajderman (2003).

East in DeutschGerman, and nostalgia),[8] i.e. the attitude of longing offor the past spread inspread throughout all the eastern socialist countries thatwhich duringat the end of Eighties and the beginning of the Nineties came acrossunderwent radical cultural and political change.

This attitude of collectiveThis collective memory was studied by Svetlana Boym which in his book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), in which he distinguishes between a *restorative nostalgia*, thatwhich aims to restore the (national) past and refers to a historical temporality, and a *reflexive nostalgia*, more focused on individual memory and on the pair desire/loss in relation to the biographical identity. The cultural revival of yugonostalgic movies, of Yugo-rock and even of commercial products offrom the past testifiesattests that yugonostalgia today is a mix betweenof different tendencies (let"s say, restorative and reflexive at the same time) that put togethercombine, on the one hand, the "longing for the security and prosperity experienced during the socialist era" (Bonfiglioli, 2012), but also, on the other hand, a yearning for the idealised but lost past of the individual existences, which manifests itself in some aspects of the material culture and of the former everyday life of the past. This tendency partly remindsrecalls the retro-fashion and the vintage trends studied, among others, by Appadurai (1996) as cases of "imagined nostalgia".

One interesting interpretation of this question comes from Dubravka Ugresic (1996), who affirms that this form of nostalgia has to be considered as a reaction to the violent process of "confiscation of memory" suffered by Yugoslav people during the war and with the raiserise of new nationalisms that rewrote the history of the country, erasing the cultural values of socialist Yugoslavia and of the commonshared past. We could consider this process of memory rewriting as a "semiotic diaspora", thatwhich completely redefined the landscape of collective memory, generating a sense of cultural disorientation amplified by the trauma of war. Indeed Yugoslav people have experienced a quickrapid dissolution of their shared cultural horizons that is, by some means, comparable to the experience of forced emigration, characterized by a cultural shock and a feeling of yearning offor the home-country (and indeed nostalgia is the typical passioncharacteristic sentiment of diaspora). According to Ugresic, such for post-Yugoslav nostalgia emerges as a sort of disjointed regret for what is lost forever, for a sort of Atlantis, and eventually as an incapacity of memory:

> "Nameless ex-Yugoslav refugees scattered over all the countries and con- tinents, have taken with them in their refugee bundles senseless sou- venirs which nobody needs – —a line of verse, an image, a scene, a tune, a tone, a word. In the same bundle of memory jostle fragments of past reality, which can never be put back together, and scenes of war horrors. It is hard for their owners to communicate all these shattered fragments to anyone, and with time they wrap themselves into a knot of untranslat- able, enduring, soundless distress" (Ugresic, 1996: **TEXT MISSING**36).

In frontthe face of the incommunicability of a common memory, yugonostalgia becomes a force that buildst a community not on a collective memory, but on a denied memory: a "parable" (as Ugresic definesterms it) against the imposed oblivion.

Virtual Yugoslavias: national spaces, cultural spaces and the World Wide Web

In this section I seek to map the Yugoslav ideal community through the traces left by them in *cyberspace*.[9] On the one hand, the starting hypothesis (which is shared with the more general hypothesis of the e-Diaspora research group) is that the Web is a digital territory that can be mapped: indeed, the Web is not a chaotic space, and there are hierarchies and clusters, depending on the ways through which the different websites are hyper-textually linked (Gibson, Kleinberg & Raghavan, 1998). On the other hand, cyberspace is also a political space, in a foucaltian sense: a space that reproduces power relationships but also forms of subjectivities and of discourses of

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8. **Many Eastern countries have different but similar versions of this phenomenon**: Germany (*ostalgie* is the longing for life under the DDR), Russia (the so-called *soviet chic*, which regrets Russia's loss of power when it was the CCCP), Poland, and so on.

9. On the capacity of new digital media to keep track of every interaction, see in particular Mitchell (2009) and Ferraris (2009). The term *cyberspace* appeared for the first time in *Neuromancer*, the novel ofby William Gibson published in 1984.

e-Diasporas Atlas Project

10/26/2010

Where is Yugoslavia ?

Introduction to the map

Methodology : this graph is based on a random
selection (by crawling) of websites of the six
ex-Yougoslavian countries + Yugoslavia : ".yu".
nota : the ".yu" top-level domain name totally disappeared
on 30 march 2010: the websites do not exist anymore but
are still quoted by "living" websites.

The graph unveils the connections, proximity/distance, etc.
of the "national webs" of the ex-Yougoslavian countries. It also
shows the "place" of Yugoslavia (.yu) in this new geography.

Legend

● Bosnia (.ba)

● Croatia (.hr)

● Macedonia (.mk)

● Montenegro (.me)

● Serbia (.rs)

● Slovenia (.si)

● Yugoslavia (.yu)

Number of links

Nota: the color of the link is
the link's source node
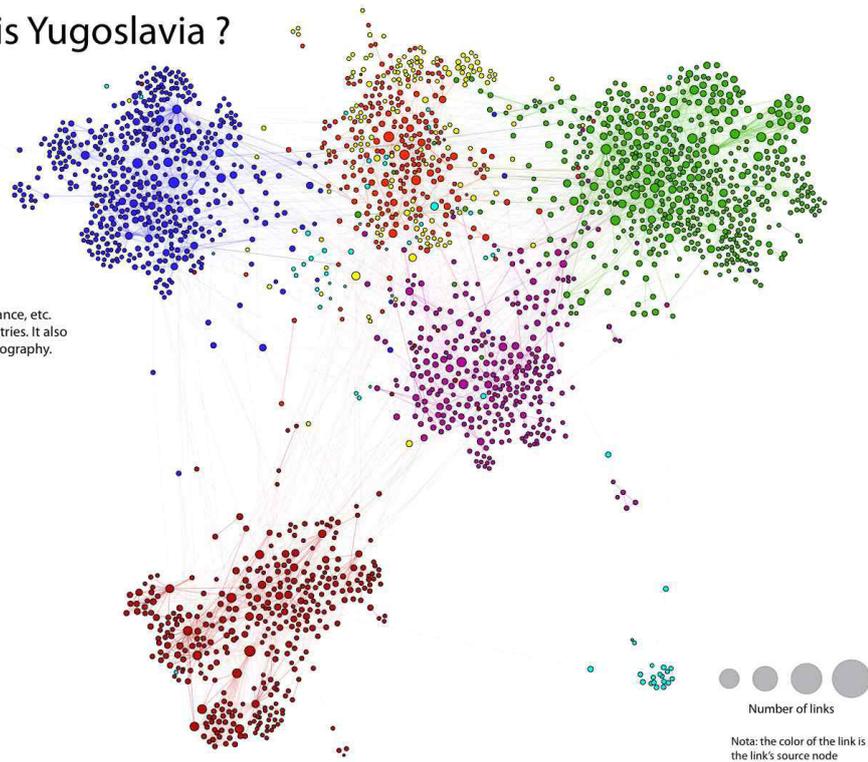
power (and counter-powers) (Crampton, 2003). It is matter of discussion if (and how) cyberspace should be studied as a geographical space; nevertheless many scholars have stressed that the coming of the Internet forces us to rethink completely all the categories typical of the geographical analysis: the notion of place, of course, but also region, nation, sovereignty, citizenship, centre, periphery, border and so on.[10] Whilee, on the one hand, some claimed that the Internet and new ICT are leading to an "end of geography" (Virilio, 2000**=not in refs**1998),[11] caused by the speed of virtual information and the consequent destruction of the ideas of distance and place, on the other hand, there is another current of thought againstthat argues against this vision (e.g. Dodge and& Kitchin, 2001) whic, callingh calls for a "new geography" capable of investigating (and mapping) with geographical categories the space created by the vast networks of computers: a cyber-geography. Moreover, many studies have pointed out the interest of an observation of Internet uses in order to for the study of migrations and migrants communities (Diminescu, 2008).

In the case of the "Yugoslav cyberspace", it is worth considering that, while Yugoslavia ceased formally to exist in 2003 (even if one could say that it had disappeared *de facto* since its breakup in 1991), it continued to officially exist in the Web until the 30th of September 2009, when Icaan (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, which oversees the assigning of top-level domain names) removes the .yu domain from the Internet.[12]

10. On the impact of electronic media on the "sense of place", see the classic work by Meyrowitz (1985), written before the invention of World Wide Web. On new geographies of communication after the advent of the Internet, see, among others, Bonora (2001).

11. "La continuité visuelle (audiovisuelle) remplaçant progressivement la perte d'importance de la contiguïté territoriale des nations, les frontières politiques allaient elles-mêmes se déplacer de l'espace réel de la géopolitique, au temps réel de la chronopolitique de la transmission de l'image et du son" (Virilio, 2000: 23).

12. The last .yu sites disappeared from internet on 30 March 2010, after an extension requested by about 4000 sites. The .yu domain (with all the second level domains gov.yu, co.yu, ac.yu, edu.yu and org.yu) was assigned to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1989 and registered by the University of Maribor in Slovenia. The .yu domain registry remained in Slovenia after the breakup of Yugoslavia, and the University of Belgrade asked Slovenia for the domain name, which they refused to relinquish. The domain became a succession matter until the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority decided that the domain name should pass to the

If the year 2009 marks the final disappearance of the last (in this case, digital) relic of Yugoslavia, until a short while earlier that year the .yu domain was very popular among the yugonostalgic websites and proudly displayed as a sort of "fetish" from the past. Its ban, however, aroused controversies on the part of some of the website owners (somebody even spoke of "ethnic cleansing" in the Web for whoever still proclaimed himself Yugoslav), and a huge portion of the "Yugoslav websites" that have not migrated to new domains have simply disappeared from the Web. At any rate, the disappearance of the domain seems to confirm the fragmentation of the Balkan space in the Internet as well. In 2010, the e-Diaspora group asked the question: "Where is Yugoslavia in the Web today?" Starting from the observation of the *clusterizations* of a random group of sites (selected through a web-crawl) belonging to the six new domains and comparing them with the surviving (and now offline) .yu-websites, they drew a map which shows a rising "intra-national" inter-linking among websites of that zone.

But Yugoslavia and *yugonostalgics* never disappeared completely from the Web, and someone like Maja Mikula (2003) tried even to reconstruct the "virtual landscapes of memory" of the dissolved socialist republic. One of the cases she studied is probably the mort curious experiment of *cybercitizenship* in the Web of the last years: *Cyber-Jugoslavia* (www.juga.com, now offline). Created by Zoran Bacic, Serbian writer and playwright, the website was addressed to "those who lost their country in 1991 and became citizens of Atlantis", but also to those who "feel Yugoslav, regardless of their current nationality and citizenship". It provided members with a virtual passport validated by an official coat of arms that parodied the one of the deceased country, and even proposed a "virtual constitution", inspired by "hyper-democracy" principles. According to Mikula, the entire project was traversed a clear strain of irony and parody, which made free use of the repertoire of *jugonostalgija,* of Tito-era socialist symbols from movies, pop songs, pictures, kitsch memorabilia, through a recombina-

tion of all these elements into a *post-modern and cyber (and maybe a little steampunk) aesthetics*.

> Cyber-Yugoslavia simultaneously conjures up the passing away of the traditional national discourses and ushers in the new, more fluid concept of cyber-nationhood, which transgresses and at the same time replicates conventional territorial, cultural, ethnic or linguistic national boundaries. Cyber-Yugoslavia's author also perceives himself as a Cyborg, with the machinic element ironically dubbed the "Algorithm of Social System", this open-source robotic software representing the highest authority in Cyber-Yugoslavia (Mikula, 2003: 173).

Today *juga.com* no longer exists,[13] perhaps also because of its backwardness, if we compare it to the new social paradigms that appeared with the Web 2.0. This is an important clue to why yugonostalgic sites, still numerous, are declining today: it seems that *Cyber-Yugoslavia* today has landed mostly on the more popular social networks, Facebook *in primis,* where there are hundreds of pages and groups devoted to Yugoslavia and yugonostalgia, with hundreds of thousands of members.[14]

Analysis: the Web-Yugosphere

Corpus construction and pertinence criteria

This section analyses a corpus of 191 websites that talk about Yugoslavia. The main *criterion of inclusion* in the corpus was a thematic one: each considered website should have Yugoslavia as main topic: the corpus includes only those websites that explicitly refer to former Yugoslavia and recall it in different ways, with regard to the political ideology that inspired the faded socialist republic but also (and maybe especially) to the different aspects of the "common-life" of Yugoslav citizens before its fall, from cultural features (such as cinema, literature, music, shows, "pop stars") to those referring the everyday life of the "life under Jugoslavija" of citizens (and particularly former citizens) often emigrated somewhere

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Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the *YUNET* association. Since then, the .yu domain has been replaced by .rs for Serbia and .me for Montenegro, while the domains of the other countries (.sl for Slovenia, .hr for Croatia, .ba for Bosnia-Erzegovina and .mk for Macedonia) already existed. Kosovo doesn't have a domain yet, but requested it from ICAAN.

13. In all events, it is possible to visit it thanks to the many Web archives available on the Internet.

14. The most popular, named SFR Jugoslavija, counts 122,810 "likes" on 6 March 2012, while a page devoted to Tito has 53,230 "likes". There is also a page named Jugosfera.

else. Using a generic expression, one could say that all the websites registered in this map are, somehow, "yugonostalgic", but not all in the same way: each site recalls, regrets and represents the faded Yugoslavia in different manners. This section will try to discover the typological peculiarities among the different "Yugoslav discourses", in order to better understand the role yugonostalgia plays in the re-foundation of a feeling of national belonging (to a nation that no longer exists), in the "virtual territories" of a scattered community. Yugonostalgia itself, in all its meanings, will be the "compass" we will use to orientate ourselves in the *post–Yugoslav cultural space* and to map its digital version in the virtual territories of the Web.

For this reason, along with this criterion of inclusion into the corpus, a specular criterion of exclusion was also established, which excludes from the corpus those websites that deal with the former Yugoslavia but from a journalistic or historical (or, broadly speaking, "analytical") perspective which is "external" and refers to a generic "Balkan area": e.g. websites such as *Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso* or *Courrier des Balkans*,[15] two "authorities" on the Web for the information they provide and the research they conduct, are not part of the corpus.

The construction of the corpus was then based on such pertinence criteria. With regard to the selection of the websites, we started from an initial core, selected by the main *search engines* of the Web;[16] this core-corpus was then treated – following the methodological procedure developed by the e-Diaspora project – through a computer-assisted *web-crawl*,[17] at the end of which the core-corpus was extended to about 500 sites. These websites were then examined one by one in order to eliminate the non-pertinent ones (those that didn't fulfil the above-criteria) and to categorize those included in the corpus. Finally, the conclusive corpus numbered about 200 websites, which have been treated with another validation crawl using *Issuecrawler* and then with *Gephi*, a graphic tool that enabled a visual output (a "graph", or "map") of the hyper-textual links among the websites of the corpus, i.e. the inbound and outbound inter-connections. Finally,

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15. The Web addresses are: http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/ and http://balkans.courriers.info/ .

16. The main key-words used were: Jugoslavija, jugonostalgija, ex Jugoslavija, etc.

17. The software is the Web NaviCrawler.

the categories were projected on this general map (always following the e-Diaspora procedure), producing *eight thematic maps*.

Description of the base map

The general base map is not of great importance for the purposes of e-Diaspora methodology; the most important are the thematic maps, obtained through the operations of categorization and which give us an interpretative key to the communicative and "associative" dynamics of a Web community. Nevertheless, a glance at the base map is useful to individuate some processes and their trends, and, above all, to find the main communities, their structures and the most important "nodes" and "edges" ("authorities", "hub", "bridge", etc.).

At a glance, we can easily find the main topological structure of the "universe of discourse" of the Yugosphere on the Web, its hyper-links and its "geography of connection" among nodes. First, borrowing the terms from geographical sciences (which doesn't seem far-fetched, given the "cartographic purpose" of this research), we can find within the graph a huge *continental area* (with many inter-links) and an *archipelago zone* (with a constellation of unlinked nodes).

The *continental area* has a *dishomogeneous* structure with zones presenting a "thickening zone" by some nodes and "rarefaction zones" where inter-connections thin out. As a consequence, the topological structure is formed by at least *three peninsular areas* and a *thick central area* developed around a few nodes. This central area revolves basically around two "authorities": *titoville.com* (which seems to represent the real core of the whole graph, at least as regards the "continental part") and *slobodnajugoslavija.com* (with a slightly inferior number of inbound links). These two websites collect materials and information: the first, about Josip Broz Tito (biography, pictures, press articles, discourses, amenities); the second, on the faded socialist republic (images and pictures, documents, hymns and anthems, etc.).

Then we can see the first peninsula, separated from the rest of the continent and linked only by the "bridge-site" *nostalgija.com*; next, come two other peninsular communities, quite separated: the first orbits around *blogs* such as *burekeaters*, *balkancrew, balkaut* (collective blogs with a lot of commentaries) and sites such as *yurope.com* (an e-commerce portal); the second, more peripheral,

orbits around two or three small authorities (*jugozvuk.blogspot.com* and *yurock.blogspot.com*, two music blogs). Another peninsula, eventually, does not show particular real authorities but a huge number of inter-links (*tito-bihac.com*, *sfrj4ever.ch*, *jugoslavije.cz.tl,* all websites with archives containing many documents and images of the Yugoslav socialist past), and revolves around the above-mentioned authority, *slobodna-jugoslavija.com*. An important role of bridge-site able to link these different parts is played, among the others, by sites like *leksikon-yu-mitologije.net* (which concerns the editorial project, recently published, of a "dictionary of former Yugoslavia", a reference text for many yugonostalgics), www.cnj.it (Italian-Yugoslav association with a political scope), while websites like *balkanrock.noblogs.org, nasa-jugoslavija.org, titanik.bloger.hr, konzulatsfrj.com* (all full of "pop-culture memorabilia" from former Yugoslavia) are the most prominent hubs (even if the graph shows that almost every hub has a strong authority and each authority is often a hub).

The archipelago shows a large number (about 50) of *monad-sites*, not connected to the rest of the sites of the map (only seldom − in about ten cases − are these sites coupled two by two). The presence of these monadic single sites is, in part, a consequence of the method of corpus construction (which used not only the browsing assistance of web-crawlers, which would have found only linked sites, but also search engines). Nevertheless, these websites talk about Yugoslavia, often in a nostalgic manner, but are not part of the rest of the "digital Yugoslav world" and don't generate any community. The presence of this archipelago lowers the "density value" of the graph (only 0.9%), which instead considerably increases in the continental zone.

 After this brief illustration of the general structure of the Yugosphere, we can now move to the analysis of the thematic maps obtained through the categorization of the corpus. The sites of the corpus are indeed classified through both a content analysis and other types of categories (websites typologies, actor/author typologies, languages used, geographic localization, domain, state of activity). We will then return to this graph in the light of the data obtained from the application of the categories.

Categories of analysis and thematic maps

Typologies of websites and actors/authors

The first interesting data item to underline regards the composition of the typology of websites that generate this "digital version" of the Yugoslav nation: the large majority (almost absolute, 44%) of the considered websites are blogs (many of them individual blogs, but there are also a few collective ones); a good percentage (36%) refer to a more traditional category of static sites (a Web 1.0 typology, one could say). Significant but minor percentages refer to more interactive and "social" websites, such as forums and music and video channels. These statistics need to be interpreted as a symptom of the progressive switch of the "digital Yugoslavia space" from a Web 1.0 to a social Web: the frequency of updating of many static sites is in fact dropping,[18] while the opening of many blogs is more recent. The e-Diaspora methodology for data-collection (crawling and graphic visualization) unfortunately does not allow the mapping of the main social networks (like Facebook and Twitter, which are a sort of second web inside the main Web); but a quick glance at the results of the internal search engine of Facebook, for example, is enough to collect hundreds of results of pages, groups and profiles devoted to former Yugoslavia and *jugonostalgija*; similarly, in Twitter there are a lot of accounts speaking of these topics, as many as YouTube channels (we included in the corpus only those which made a clear reference to former Yugoslavia in the account name, but there are thousands of videos by huge yugonostalgic fans). Many static sites (Web 1.0) of the corpus are still online, and in many cases they are updated; however this new trend seems significant (partly confirmed by the high percentage of blogs in the corpus) given the reconfiguration of the "Yugosphere web territory" in direction of the "social transformations" introduced by the Web 2.0, from the interactivity in the production and sharing of contents up to the tendency to produce stable online communities with a strong volume of communicative exchanges.

As regards the authorial typology, the majority of sites are individuals (mostly blogs), but there are also many collective sites (20%, mostly but

18. Many of them are "dead sites" and have been visualized through tools like the Internet WebArchive.

not exclusively blogs with several authors) and sites administered by institutions and associations (15%), like the website of the Museum of Yugoslav History, funded by the Serbian government. Finally, a significant percentage (13%) are commercial sites, which occupy an interesting position in the graph.

Semantic "dominants": Main and secondary topics

These are perhaps the most important categories for the interpretation of the data. *Main topic* refers to the general theme of the site and to its global "discursive configuration", which identify the "semantic isotopies" (Greimas) of the website (in other words, its main subject). Every site is then classified according to its main topic (the main one the website deals with), which doesn't mean that in the same website there could not be different topics. After a general observation of the main contents, as many as six recurrent main topics may have been identified: (1) *Tito, SFRJ and/or Socialist Ideology* (sites focused primarily on the figure of Tito, on the socialist past in its political-ideological aspects, or on the peculiar Yugoslav way to socialism); (2) *History, Politics and Culture in former Yugoslavia and Balkans* (websites which recall some political, cultural, social and historical features of Yugoslavia in relation to the wider Balkan context); (3) *ExYU Music and Films* (websites which collect materials on musical, cinematographic and mass-culture production during the Yugoslav period); (4) *Jugonostalgija* (websites that seems more explicitly committed to yugonostalgia; of course this is a cross-category, but in these particular websites the reference to yugonostalgia is more pivotal); (5) *ExYU sport* (websites which collect information about athletic performances of Yugoslav athletes and teams); (6) *Traditional food* (websites about typical Balkan food but with a strong emphasis on former Yugoslavia).[19]

26% of the nodes of the map belong to the first class; they are mostly "politically nostalgic" sites, which in some cases mythicize the figure of Tito, while in other cases commemorate the "splendour" of socialist Yugoslavia or sing the praises of Yugoslav socialism. 23% of the corpus is made up of sites on history, society and culture

in the Balkans; 21% of sites are about Yugoslav music, movies and mass-culture; while the remaining 19% are more pronouncedly yugonostalgic. This last category draws on different "discursive genres":[20] a yugonostalgic website can talk about Tito, or Yugoslav pop music or even about consumer goods of that period, just as many sites devoted to Tito or to Balkan culture can be to some extent yugonostalgic.

This first "thematic patrol" over our map does not turn out to encompass all of the semantic dominants of the corpus. Apparently, indeed, the relative majority of the sites express a "political" nostalgia; however, if we add together all the percentages of the websites which express regret for the loss of a common heritage (the culture, art and social values of Yugoslavia), we reach the absolute majority of the sites considered in the corpus, highlighting a nostalgic feeling that is not political but "cultural" (or addressed to other features of life during the Yugoslav period). Of course, the majority of the sites that stress this "cultural nostalgic trend" are those tagged as "yugonostalgic" in our categorization.

For these reasons, we need another, more specific semantic category: the *secondary topic*; if main topics concern general semantic levels, secondary topics deal with more specific thematic and figurative paths. The distribution of the sites over this category allows a more accurate interpretation of the data of the previous category: here the websites that draw on the pop culture and "memorabilia" of that period are in the majority (39%), while those more focused on socialist and communist ideology are far fewer (only 10%). 31 sites (16%), which in the main topic category would be filed under "Tito and Yugoslavia", are considered here as "titonostalgic",[21] introducing a more accurate specification to the first: indeed the Tito remembered in these sites has more to do with a "pop version" of the Marshall than with his political or ideological figure; and this clarifies the different tenor of the *jugonostalgija* of many websites: non-ideological but closer to a "cultural fashion trend". 6% of websites are more focused on historical issues and reconstructions

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19. The websites have been classified as "unknown" in doubtful cases or whenever it was impossible to visualize a relevant part of the contents.

20. All the websites, in different ways, problematize the nostalgia for Yugoslavia, but the ways in which they speak of Yugoslavia are different (there are a few anti-nostalgic sites too). It seemed important to reserve a class for those websites which explicitly recall *jugonostalgija*.

21. For a discussion of "titostalgija", see Velikonja (2008).

of what happened in the Yugoslav period. An interesting class of sites is the one we have called "retro-yugoslavia": this label groups all of the sites that still refer to Yugoslavia but almost without mentioning its disappearance and the events that led to its breakup. These sites seem to deny the historical break with the past, *as if* Yugoslavia was still alive and united. They represent a relevant percentage (23%, about 43 nodes), and this underlines a facet that seems to be shared by all the sites of the corpus: the reference to the most traumatic aspects of the end of Yugoslavia are usually absent or don't play a primary role in the ways in which Yugoslavia is represented and "brought back to life" in the Web, almost a sort of *repressed trauma*. The regret for the life in old Yugoslavia is nearly always (even in the most politicized sites) expressed through harmless themes and referred to everyday life and to a kind of a shared "pop-culture heritage" that the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the consequent diaspora of Yugoslav people expose to a risk of oblivion.

Geographical distribution, languages and domain

The geographical localization of the websites of the corpus is a very relevant category. The location of the *servers* was obtained through tools such as *WhoIs,* but obviously that wasn't enough: there is no certainty that the site is maintained and updated in the same country in which the server is located. We therefore used the data of the registrant of the domain (if available) and especially other information derivable from the websites themselves to determine with sufficient accuracy the geographic localization.

It was not possible to determine with acceptable certainty the geographical position of many sites, but more than half of the corpus was localized; the final result does not deviate much from our early expectations: the virtual space of the *Web-Yugosphere* is not coextensive with its geographical space. The countries with the highest number of websites are the United States, followed by Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia; while many other sites are located in different European countries (especially Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, Austria), which are all main destinations of the emigration flows from former Yugoslavia.

This spread testifies to the strengthening of a cohesive but displaced community around a common cultural heritage that is also *transnational*. The use of different languages (with English as *lingua franca*) evidences a transnationalization of the digital territory of the Yugosphere.

Links among nodes and regions of nodes

The spatial groupings of the main graph now seem clearer. We identified different peninsulas: the first is characterized by an *ideological version* of the feelings of regret and belonging to the faded Yugoslavia, and the "galaxy of nodes" revolving around *slobodnajugoslavija.com* is in fact constituted by an "equal community" (in the sense that there aren't too many differences of authority) of websites and blogs primarily on political subjects and inspired by the ideals of socialism and communism. This is a relatively peripheral community and is linked to the rest of the Yugosphere by bridge-sites that "translate" and draw on documents and images from those sites to recombine them in non-politicized discursive configurations. A huge set of sites is centred on *titonostalgija*, in the sense explained above (strong emphasis of the "pop figure" of Tito): these sites act as *intruders* in the more politicized communities and play a translating role from political yugonostalgia to pop yugonostalgia.

The second peninsula, more homogeneous, operates as a blog community, hierarchically organized (some nodes have more authority than others) and with many reciprocal hyper-textual links: this community is built on a passion for a sort of vintage Yugoslavia, whose most remembered features are music bands, movie stars, artists and sports figures. Another interesting centre of attraction is the "commercial" sites: a group of reciprocally linked websites selling former Yugoslavia "memorabilia" (t-shirts, gadgets, mp3 music, movie downloads, etc.). Despite its commercial character, it is important to consider the role of *nostalgija.com*, which links all these sites to the rest of yugonostalgic virtual space, acting as a *portal*.

Finally, there is a very interesting blog community that frame the nostalgia for former Yugoslavia in the more general context of cultures and traditions in the south-west Balkans: these websites usually host a lot of commentaries and participant debates, and tend to become real spaces for discussions, where the citizens of "digital Yugoslavia", a country that exists only in the Web, meet

each other, discuss (sometimes violently) and recognize each other. The "retro-Yugoslav pole" (that uses a-problematically the word Yugoslavia, as though it still existed) sometimes creeps into this community.

Concluding remarks

All these different representations of a disappeared, regretted, re-called (and sometimes denied) Yugoslavia are re-unified through the *yugonostalgic discourse*, well represented by *titoville.com*,[22] the main territorial centre of the Yugosphere: this site is the real point of intersection=? among *socialist nostalgic pop Yugoslavs* "playing" with the "figurative grammars" of the Yugoslav repertoires and recombining its languages in a pop-culture version: *retro-Yugoslavs*, who "pretend not to notice" that Yugoslavia has faded away and *post-Yugoslavs* who wander the Web looking for a digital version of that "common space" they have lost in the geo-political world. The latter is the only community in which the theme of war is sometimes mentioned, even if incidentally. In the whole corpus considered, indeed, the "great absentee" is the trauma of the war. The disintegration of Yugoslavia was violent and cruel, but never, with a few exceptions, do these sites focus on the actual reason for its end: a long chain of civil, ethnic and nationalistic conflicts; as though the discourse on the past would prefer to keep at bay and de-activate this traumatic memory.

Moreover, it seems highly relevant that those sites which had the explicit intention to found a new Yugoslav "virtual nation" on the Internet (like *nova jugoslavia*, *cyber-yu*, etc.) are now offline. With the exception of one petition, the Web holds not a trace of these sites (in some cases there is only the domain). This could be the symptom of an increasing "unraveling" of a typology of aggregation once usual in online communities, which is also attested by the presence of the "archipelago", the constellation of monad-sites that do not communicate among themselves and are unable to build a community.[23] The sense of belonging to the past Yugoslav nation today

seems to be modulated only through the passion of nostalgia and of a nostalgic memory.

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22. For a critical discussion and an analysis of this site, see Mikula (2003).

23. This tendency is also clear in the movement of these communities towards the social-networks, where the interaction tool most used is the "sharing" of "archive entries" (video, images, etc.).

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