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# The Politics of Privacy on State Socialist Television

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Existing theories of television often emphasize the inherently private nature of the medium: its propensity for personal narratives, its modes of address, and its centrality to domestic life. Yet, is this perception of television universally applicable? As this article argues, state socialist television was marked by a different relationship with the private–public boundary, rooted in the public thrust of the communist vision of modern society. Although television became a medium consumed in the comfort of one's home, the narratives it offered were rarely centered exclusively on the private realm and often privileged communal and public values. The nature of televised representations of privacy in the socialist world also changed over time and differed across countries, with some countries markedly more open to depictions of privacy than others. This is demonstrated through a longitudinal and comparative investigation of domestic serial fiction covering the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. The results suggest that theories of television need to pay more attention to the multiple forms of modern television cultures globally, anchored in competing visions of modern society.

*Keywords: television, state socialism, privacy, television series, Yugoslavia, Soviet Union*

At first sight, state socialism may seem an odd choice for an inquiry into private life. The utopian vision of a communist future left little room for private matters. As individuals regained control over the means of production and overcame the alienation generated by capitalism, went the argument, the need for privacy would disappear. In line with this vision, communist-led states are said to have had little respect for the privacy of their citizens—a point noted in several canonical theories of totalitarianism. As Arendt argued in *Origins of Totalitarianism*, totalitarian bureaucracy sought not only to destroy the public realm but also "intruded upon the private individual and his inner life with equal brutality. The result of this radical efficiency has been that the inner spontaneity of people under its rule was killed along with their social and political activities" (Arendt, 1951/1976, p. 253). A sizeable scholarly literature examining the pervasive infiltration of the state and its security apparatus into the private lives of citizens lends further support to this view (e.g., Hornsby, 2013; Miller, 1999; Verdery, 2014). As a result, state

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socialism is often seen as a political regime that demanded a complete subordination of personal interests to public goals and, hence, severely limited the scope of privacy.

Yet, recent research has gathered substantial evidence suggesting that the ubiquitous forms of state control did not wipe out the private sphere altogether, and that in some cases the party-state itself encouraged investment in individual and family-oriented activities and spaces. The final decades of Communist Party rule saw a recalibration of the relationship between public and private life and a gradual or partial withdrawal from public matters to private concerns (e.g., Betts, 2010; Field, 2007; Siegelbaum, 2006). In the Soviet Union, the seven-year economic plan adopted in 1959 promised to raise the living standards of Soviet citizens by improving the provision of consumer goods and access to private apartments; the mass housing campaign, launched in 1957, enabled 38 million Soviet families to move to new apartments by 1970, prompting profound changes in domestic life (e.g., Harris, 2006). Similar changes occurred elsewhere in the communist world.

Changes in leisure practices, including the growth of television viewing, have also been identified as an integral part of this retreat from public life: a symptom of the broader depoliticization of socialist societies, rooted in the changing nature of Communist rule, as well as a contributing factor that helped foster political apathy among citizens. As Kristin Roth-Ey (2011) suggests in her study of Soviet mass media, the adoption of domestic television gave rise to a cultural experience that was incompatible with Soviet cultural ideas and diminished the capacity of Soviet culture to act as a mobilizational tool. In a manner reminiscent of arguments about the effects of television on public engagement in the United States (e.g., Putnam, 1995; M. J. Robinson, 1976), Roth-Ey argues that by the late 1980s, Soviet mass culture, with television at its core, was no longer able to inspire and mobilize audiences, and had instead turned into a conduit of "experiences and ways of being in the world unconnected to broader political projects of any kind" (p. 24). Examining television in post-1968 Czechoslovakia, Paulina Bren (2010) reaches a similar conclusion, pointing to the depoliticizing effects of popular television series. Bren argues that in the politically stringent atmosphere following the Soviet invasion in 1968, these series acted as vehicles of "privatized citizenship," emphasizing the primacy of family life, leisure and intimate relationships over politics and civic engagement.

What emerges from the discussion so far is a perception of socialist television as an inherently privatizing force, which facilitated a decline in public engagement and a retreat into domesticity. Yet, such an interpretation is too quick to assume that the domesticity and privacy of television was accepted without resistance, and that it worked in favor of the Communist elites, which found a politically withdrawn, apathetic population easier to manage. As we show in this article, the relationship between television, the private sphere, and Communist rule was more complicated, varying from country to country, as well as over time. To demonstrate this, we conducted a longitudinal and comparative investigation of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, focusing on depictions of privacy in domestically produced serial fiction, a genre that has a particular affinity with private life and attracted top audience ratings.

**Privacy, Personal Life, and Television**

The category of *private* is used in a wide variety of senses, linked to considerably different understandings of the social location of things considered "private" and their relationship to things considered "public" (Rossler, 2005; Sheller & Urry, 2003). Private interests, for instance, are typically associated with individuals, families, or commercial enterprises and corporations, and contrasted with public interests defended by the state. By contrast, private life is associated with individuals and families, and excludes the realm of the economy as well as politics. Any attempt to develop a universally applicable distinction between the private and the public is complicated further by the divergent criteria used to assess the degree of privacy/publicity. According to Weintraub (1997), two such criteria can be distinguished: The first one associates the public with visibility; the second associates it with collectivity. Although the two often coincide, this is not necessarily so: A group pursuing individual interests can do so in public view. To capture the varied meanings of privacy, Rossler (2005, pp. 5–6) links privacy to control of access, and argues that "something counts as private if one can oneself control the access to this 'something'" (p. 8). In this sense, no space, mode of action, or type of information can be seen as inherently private. Rather, privacy is a particular state or quality that different spaces, actions, or types of information may or may not possess.

The notion of privacy as something an individual can control does not fare particularly well in the socialist context. The varied forms of surveillance and the widely cast webs of unofficial informants made personal life more open to state scrutiny and diminished the scope of individual control (Betts, 2010). Moreover, although socialist citizens gradually moved out of collective apartments into single-family homes, typical socialist dwellings were more standardized and more exposed to the prying gaze of neighbors and authorities than their counterparts in the West (Harris, 2006). The numerous official publications also clearly signaled that personal life, although acknowledged as an important element of socialist existence, in many ways remained a profoundly public matter (Reid, 2009).

We should therefore acknowledge that despite the gradual acceptance of privacy as a legitimate part of socialist societies, the private–public boundary remained blurred. Rather than giving rise to a separate private realm, neatly separated from public life, the shift to privacy in the latter decades of communist rule led to the growth of hybrid forms of *public privacy* and *private publicity* as discussed by Gerasimova (2002). The former encompasses instances in which the Communist Party allowed aspects of privacy such as personal life as a family member, but sought to retain a measure of control over them by seeking to prescribe acceptable forms of privacy. Collective apartments offer a case in point: Here, personal life was open to the scrutiny of neighbors and spaces were organized in ways that encouraged collaboration. Private publicity, on the other hand, refers to forms of publicity emerging in private realms that were beyond the reach of the party, such as discussions of public matters in family homes.

How did the peculiar nature of privacy in the socialist world intersect with the mass media, and, more specifically, with television? Television has been repeatedly singled out as a medium inherently drawn to personal matters. Television's visual character, the one-to-many mode of communication it engenders, the domestic context of viewing, and the temporal organization of its programming have been linked to a distinctly personal or intimate nature of its content and forms. Meyrowitz (1985), for instance,

argues that television's focus on nonverbal messages, such as gestures and appearance, has meant that "a politician's demeanor on television is often more important than his political programs" (p. 100). In his study of the rise of "the intimate society," Sennett (1977) likewise associates television with the growth of personality politics. Due to audience size and the lack of interactivity, a politician giving a speech on television needs to treat the addressees in abstract terms, which leads to an avoidance of ideological issues and a focus on the politician's personality, trustworthiness, and so forth. The centrality of personality on television is also at the core of Horton and Wohl's (1956) classic study of parasocial relationships. Such relationships, they argue, are based on an "illusion of intimacy" between the media personality and the spectator, rooted in the visual nature of the medium.

Horton and Wohl (1956) highlight the repetitive nature of television programming and the tendency of television personalities to enter spectators' homes at regular intervals, as is the case with one's friends and relatives. More recent literature likewise highlights the link between the personal nature of television content and the temporal organization of television programming. According to Scannell (1996), television's connection with the unfolding present gives rise to the structuring of programming as a continuous flow, which becomes interwoven with the temporal organization of domestic lives. This constant interweaving with the personal sphere also has had an effect on television's mode of address and genre conventions. Serial fiction, in particular, evolved in close conjunction with the domesticity of television viewing, and relies on audience's sense of intimate connection with the lives of characters, who live their lives in parallel with theirs (cf. Geraghty, 1981). The inherently intimate nature of the television series also has led to an intimization of its content: Even if a series focuses on public themes such as crime or politics, the story is typically told through narratives focusing on personal lives (Creeber, 2001).

It is important to note that the theorizing of television as a medium drawn to the private does not preclude acknowledgment of its public functions. Indeed, television is regularly seen as a medium central to public life (e.g., Corner, 1995; Dahlgren, 1995). Yet, this public function is predicated on the ability of television to make physical travel into the outside world unnecessary, and instead to bring public life into private homes, thereby enabling TV viewers, as Moores (2000) puts it, to combine "staying at home" and "going places" (p. 96). This hybrid, at once public and private nature of television is captured in Raymond Williams' (1974/2003) discussion of "mobile privatization," coined to describe a situation in which humans, while living in a world of unprecedented mobility, increasingly function in self-enclosed family units, removed from places of work and government. This particular condition, argues Williams, created a need for new kinds of communication, capable of bringing news or entertainment from otherwise inaccessible sources into private homes—a need fulfilled first by radio, then by television. Thus, television—at least as it developed in the context of industrial capitalism—was not simply an inherently private medium, but rather a medium capable of bridging the distinctive divide between public and private worlds characteristic of modern urban living.

How did the inherently personal features of television, and its ability to bring public messages into private homes, fare in the context of a political system that gradually acknowledged the legitimacy of domestic life, but also required citizens to abandon their private enclaves to participate in communal life? Could television in such a context be equally intimate and domesticated as its Western sibling? Some of the existing research seems to suggest that this was indeed the case. As noted in the introduction, Roth-

Ey (2011) shows that Soviet television became associated primarily with domestic viewing, and Bren's (2010) analysis of Czechoslovak television examines how the popular serial dramas of the era, centered on everyday life, fostered a retreat into "privatized citizenship." Research on the German Democratic Republic likewise suggests that during the 1970s and the 1980s, East German television sought to promote private values through TV drama (Pfau, 2009). On the other hand, however, a recent study of Yugoslav television (Mihelj, 2013) suggests that the relationship between television and privacy changed over time, as did its involvement with wider social changes.

In this article, we offer a more detailed examination of televised representations of personal life in state socialist societies. We argue that in the socialist context, televised privacy was often closely intertwined with public values, but also that it had ambiguous consequences for Communist rule. On the one hand, television offered a means of promoting a form of public privacy—that is, an acceptable form of private life, in which individual interests were subordinated to communal goals. The potential to use television to showcase a model form of socialist privacy also meant that the production of such dramas could receive political backing even in contexts in which the party grip over public and private life was stronger. On the other hand, televised representations of privacy could reveal facets of personal life that were out of tune with communist ideals or reveal the limits of party control over personal matters. Due to this, the relationship between Communist rule and televised privacy changed over time and differed across countries.

## Method

The two case studies examined here—the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia—are in many ways unusual, and arguably represent two polar opposites of socialist rule and two very different forms of socialist television. Yugoslavia followed its own path into socialism early on, and sought to position itself as a country that was aligned with neither the socialist block nor the capitalist world. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, was a model socialist country, which saw itself as the polar opposite of the capitalist world. The media and their relationships with political control differed as well: Soviet media were subjected to greater political control than Yugoslav media, and Soviet television fiction was more inclined to focus on public narratives such as spy thrillers and historical war dramas (Lovell, 2013; Prokhorova, 2003). Yet, it is precisely this unusual position that makes the two countries particularly suitable for our inquiry: As two extreme articulations of socialism, they enable us to reflect on the shared traits and distinctive features of socialist television.

The decision to focus on television series was motivated by the already-noted intimate nature of the genre, but also by its popularity with audiences. The vast majority of serial fiction was scheduled during prime time, and records from the period suggest that several series were viewed by more than 80% of the population with access to television (e.g., Radio-televizija Zagreb, 1982). Let us also note that the label *series* is used here in a generic sense, and is meant to encompass different forms of serial fiction, ranging from sitcoms to family and war dramas.

The analysis of the series combines two methods: content analysis of all domestic serial fiction and qualitative case studies of two selected shows. Content analysis was used to identify the relative

prominence of serial drama focused on personal life and to establish changes over time. The logic of such a procedure was as follows: First, if it is the case that privacy was at odds with communist ideals, then it is feasible to expect relatively low levels of dramas focused on the private in both countries. Second, one would expect Yugoslav television—as more politically liberalized and more open to Western influence—to be more open to dramatizations of the private than Soviet television. Finally, if it is true that dramas of private life served to facilitate a retreat into privacy when political control over the public realm increased, then one would expect the proportion of serial fiction centered on private life to be higher when the political grip over public spaces was tighter.

To identify serial dramas focused on personal life, we used two separate measurements: (a) the relative prominence of domestic and public settings and (b) the relative prominence of personal and public plots. Domestic settings include apartments and houses, holiday houses, peasant dwellings, and collective apartments; public settings cover party organs, security organs, assemblies, courts, workplaces, battlefields, universities and schools, parks, concert halls, restaurants, pubs, and cafes. Personal plots include narratives focused on love and intimate relationships, family themes, and relationships with friends and neighbors; public plots include narratives focused on fighting internal or external enemies, labor, and student life. Two most prominent plots were identified for each series. Based on this, the series were divided into those focused predominantly on personal plots, those containing mixed personal and public plots, and those focused mostly on public plots. Settings were coded using the same procedure. The recognition of multiple plots and settings was important; as shown by Reifova, Bednařík, and Dominik (2013) in their analysis of a Czechoslovak television serial produced in the 1970s, the personal plot can be subordinated to the public plot, and in fact functions as a means of enhancing a political message rather than fostering a focus on privacy.

The coding was based on descriptions published in TV guides, supplemented by information collected from other published sources or a brief scanning of the series, where available. The coding covered programs broadcast by the two main channels of Central Television in the Soviet Union, and the two main channels of TV Belgrade and TV Zagreb in Yugoslavia. All domestic series broadcast between 1959 and 1991 were covered. (However, given the low numbers of programs produced in the early years, the analysis of longitudinal trends is limited to the period when the number of series per year reached five—from 1971 for the Soviet Union and from 1965 for Yugoslavia.)

An intercoder reliability test was conducted based on a randomly selected subset of 50 series for each country, coded by two reliability coders, using the online tool ReCal. Cohen's kappa and Krippendorff's alpha were chosen as indices because they are commonly used in cases involving two coders and nominal variables. The results indicated a good level of agreement for both variables for Yugoslavia (setting: 90%, $\kappa = .83$, $\alpha = .83$; plot: 86%, $\kappa = .80$, $\alpha = .80$) and for setting for the USSR (88%, $\kappa = .83$, $\alpha = .83$), but somewhat lower level of agreement for plot for the USSR (84%, $\kappa = .72$, $\alpha = .72$). The latter was due to misunderstandings arising from the external coder's lack of specialist knowledge. The results derived from the main sample were therefore judged to be sufficiently reliable.

Of course, quantitative results can tell us only so much. They cannot reveal the actual nature of privacy depicted on screen, nor can they tell us whether it was in tune with communist ideals of

domesticity and personal relationships. To tackle this, we complemented quantitative analysis with two qualitative case studies of dramas focused predominantly on the private: the Yugoslav series *Theatre in the House* (*Pozorište u kuči*, TV Belgrade, 1972–1984) and the Soviet series *Day After Day* (*Den' za dnëm*, Gosteleradio, 1971).

Before turning to television series analysis, we first outline the historical context in which Soviet and Yugoslav television evolved, noting key differences between the countries and changes over time.

## Soviet and Yugoslav Television in Historical Context

From the very beginning of its existence, mass media in the Soviet Union were tightly controlled. Although the Soviet constitution ostensibly guaranteed citizens freedom of speech, this guarantee was in reality circumscribed by the political monopolization of mass media outlets and the belief that freedom of expression should be subordinated to the needs of communist construction. The low point of this process was reached in the Stalin era when editors and journalists lived in fear of making mistakes.

After Stalin's death, and especially after Khrushchev's Secret Speech of 1956, Soviet media underwent a marked liberalization, accompanied by widespread recognition that the tired formulae of the Stalin era were failing to connect with audiences. This led to a search for new forms of communication that would help to mold new citizens. Reformist newspaper editors such as Aleksei Adzhubei had studied the forms and practices of American journalism, and sought to create a journalism that would be both sensationalistic and transformatory. Adzhubei's newspapers focused on moral and ethical themes and encouraged viewers to come to their own opinions, rather than accepting dogma (Wolfe, 2005). The Adzhubei era in the press coincided with the emergence of television as a mass medium. Although television was subject to close control, the Communist Party was slow to recognize its potential, which meant that supervision was not as close as it would become (Roth-Ey, 2011).

In the second half of the 1960s, controls over media started to tighten once more. Many leading newspaper editors were fired and, after the Prague Spring of 1968, media were placed on a tighter leash. In 1970, many leading television staff were fired by incoming State TV and Radio Chief Sergei Lapin, whose ascent to the leadership coincided with a long period of conservatism (Evans, 2016; Roth-Ey, 2011). Improvements in recording technology allowed for close supervision of all stages of the production process from script to broadcast. Many of the most famous Soviet TV series, such as the iconic *17 Moments of Spring* (*Semnadtsat' mgnovenii vesny*, d.Tat'iana Lioznova, 1973), were produced with input from important state ministries, including the KGB (Lovell, 2013). Only with the advent of *perestroika* after 1985 did Soviet media move toward loosening controls. This process culminated the end of the state broadcasting monopoly (Mickiewicz, 1999), and the new press law of 1990 declared that "censorship of the media is not allowed" (SSSR, 1990, p. 1).

Yugoslav media enjoyed significantly more freedom than their Soviet counterparts. Regulatory changes introduced over the course of the 1950s and the 1960s reduced party-state control, brought greater editorial and organizational independence, and contributed to professionalization (G. S. Robinson, 1977). Even though similar changes can be identified in other socialist countries, Yugoslav reforms were

more far reaching and long lasting. Nonetheless, the levels of control over the media varied considerably over time. The 1960s were marked by lower levels of political supervision and a more vibrant public culture. As stated in a programmatic document issued in 1965, the media were expected to function not only as a means of top-down transmission of information, but as "political fora" designed to encourage bottom-up, working-class participation (Archives of Yugoslavia, 1965). These changes were paralleled by a rise in critical news commentaries and dedicated radio and television programs discussing contentious issues such as living standards, unemployment, and social inequalities (Mihelj, 2013).

Toward the end of the 1960s, public debate in the country became increasingly rife with nationalist sentiments. Outbursts of nationalist fervor became particularly acute in the republic of Croatia, culminating in a wave of mass protests calling for an independent Croatia in Autumn 1971. This escalation prompted the aging Yugoslav President Tito to intervene and initiate a large-scale purge of political, media, and cultural elites. Following the purge, political control over the Yugoslav media tightened. Party members operating within each media organization were tasked with monitoring the day-to-day work in the media, and each broadcasting center was required to produce yearly plans that required multiple approvals before being put into practice (Mihelj, 2015).

Political control over the media started to ease following the death of Yugoslavia's president in 1980. Although the legal framework remained largely unchanged, the 1980s were characterized by a progressive opening of public debate, starting first in literary journals and moving slowly into mainstream media, including television. Discussion of topics that had for decades been taboo, including the history of interethnic violence between Yugoslav nations during World War II and the notion of Yugoslav brotherhood and unity, became more common (Wachtel, 1998).

Apart from acknowledging differences and longitudinal shifts in politics–media dynamics, it is also important to note other differences between Soviet and Yugoslav television that may have impacted televised representations of privacy in serial fiction. Of particular importance is the openness to foreign imports, and specifically imports from the West. As existing research attests (Nordenstreng & Varis, 1974), the socialist world as a whole was firmly integrated into global circuits, but the countries differed significantly in their openness to Western content. Whereas Yugoslav television was among the most open to foreign influence and offered audiences a wide range of Western serial fiction, Soviet broadcasters were considerably more enclosed and largely reliant on imports from other socialist countries. In such a context, it is likely that Yugoslav producers sought to develop their work in conversation with Western models, and hence also focused their narratives more often on personal life and domestic dramas, not least because imported series of this type were evidently popular among audiences. Indeed, several Yugoslav dramas that focused on personal and everyday life—including, for instance, *The Whole Life in a Year* (*Čitav život za godinu dana*, 1971) and *Our Small Town* (*Naše malo misto*, 1970–1971)—were compared with Western counterparts, especially the U.S. drama *Peyton Place* (ABC, 1964–1969). It is important to note, however, that Soviet television, despite limited exposure to imports, was not immune to the pull of Western models either; shows such as *Day After Day* were, according to Soviet TV critics, modeled on U.S. shows, as well as other socialist dramas (Derevitskii, 1970). Socialist serial drama as a whole, therefore, should be seen as an integral part of the transnational circuit of imagery and narratives that stretched across the Iron Curtain.

It is tempting to argue that the influence of transnational flows from the West contributed to the domestic, private-centered nature of socialist serial drama. Yet, as we shall see, serial fiction produced in the socialist world depicted privacy in distinct ways. Although the influence of imports may have contributed to a greater proportion of dramas set in the private realm in the Yugoslav context, this did not mean that the vision of personal life presented in such dramas was a mere copy of Western templates. Rather, Yugoslav television professionals engaged in selective appropriation of foreign templates, and were harshly condemned in the press if their work was seen to follow Western formats too slavishly. For instance, *The Whole Life in a Year* was criticized for the lack of momentum and for its boring, unrealistic dialogues, as well as for failing to offer any valuable lessons about everyday life and human relations. In the words of one commentator, the series not only failed to provide a satirical take on the bourgeois values of *Peyton Place*, but was in effect merely an inferior version of the U.S. series ("Peyton ili živ," 1971). This suggests that the influence of Western imports did not simply result in the enhanced domesticity or intimacy of socialist dramas, but rather provided an impetus for developing a different, distinctly socialist vision of domestic life and personal relationships.

## Analysis and Discussion

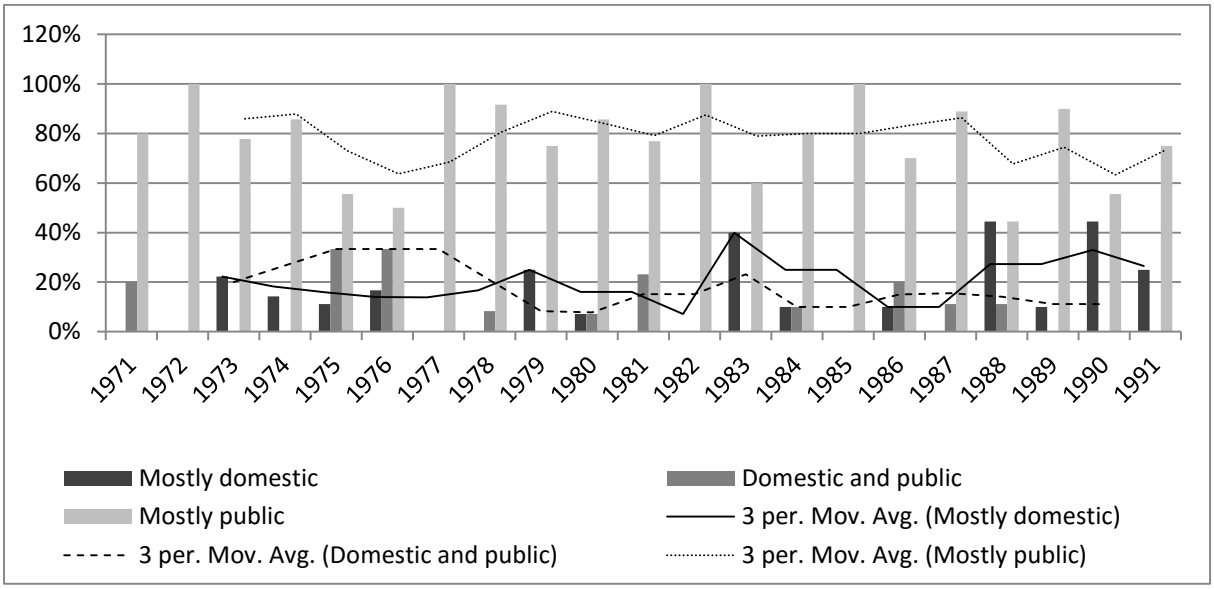
The first thing to note when looking at the proportions of different settings is the strikingly low percentage of dramas set mostly in domestic settings—14.7% in the Soviet Union and 8.8% in Yugoslavia (see Table 1). This result already indicates that socialist broadcasters, although attracted to depictions of domesticity, rarely abandoned the public realm altogether, but at the very least (as in the Yugoslav case) sought to construct narratives that traversed both domestic and public domains. This is, arguably, more consistent with the distinctly hybrid nature of socialist privacy, and would suggest that socialist television, rather than fostering a wholesale retreat into privacy, sought to offer narratives that firmly tied domestic spaces to the world outside.

Despite this shared trait, differences between the two countries are notable as well. The markedly higher proportion of Soviet dramas set in mostly public environments (75.8% as opposed to 35.3%) suggests that tighter political control over the media coincides with higher proportions of series set in public spaces. This difference is also consistent with Yugoslavia's greater openness to Western imports, and hence possibly greater influence of Western-style serial drama set in domestic spaces.

***Table 1. TV Series Settings: Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, 1959–1991 (N = 544).***

| | Soviet Union | | Yugoslavia | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Setting | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| Mostly domestic settings | 28 | 14.7 | 31 | 8.8 |
| Domestic and public settings | 18 | 9.5 | 198 | 55.9 |
| Mostly public settings | 144 | 75.8 | 125 | 35.3 |
| Total | 190 | 100.0 | 354 | 100.0 |

The analysis of longitudinal trends, however, reveals a more complex picture. In the Soviet Union, the period of conservatism brought by Sergei Lapin in 1970 initially went hand-in-hand with a decline in the proportion of series set mostly in public settings, which dipped from 80% in 1971 and 100% in 1972 to 50% in 1976 (see Figure 1). This seems to confirm the argument that tighter control over public space leads to a retreat into domestic space, but this does not hold true for the rest of the period. Instead, the proportion of such series returned to its previous high levels already in 1977, and a mild decline occurred again only toward the end of the 1980s, at a point when political scrutiny over the media began to soften with the arrival of *perestroika*. At this point, the relationship between political control and domestic settings seemed almost the reverse of what was seen in the early 1970s: The relaxation of control was accompanied by a resurgence of domesticity.




Note: 3 per. Mov. Avg. = 3 period moving average (average of previous three years)

***Figure 1. Domestic and public settings over time: Soviet Union, 1971–1991 (N = 181).***

In Yugoslavia, the longitudinal analysis reveals a similar pattern (see Figure 2). During the initial period of tighter political control in the early to mid-1970s, the majority of series were set mostly in domestic settings or in mixed domestic and public settings (the only exception is 1974, which could in part be a consequence of the unusually low number of series produced that year—only six). As with Soviet series, this seems to suggest a positive relationship between stringent political control and retreat into domesticity. However, by 1978, the proportion of series set in mostly public settings had returned to its previous high levels. We should also note that the decline in the proportions of series set mostly in public settings had started in the late 1960s, during the period of relative liberalization. Likewise, the gradual softening of control that started from 1980 onwards was accompanied by a marked decline, rather than a rise, in the proportion of series set in public settings.

As with settings, the results of plot analysis reveal a rather low proportion of series focused exclusively on personal relationships—10.9% in the Soviet Union and 35.8% in Yugoslavia (see Table 2). Yet again, we find that socialist broadcasters gave preference to dramas that either eschewed personal plots altogether, as in the Soviet case, or combined them with public plots, as in the Yugoslav case.

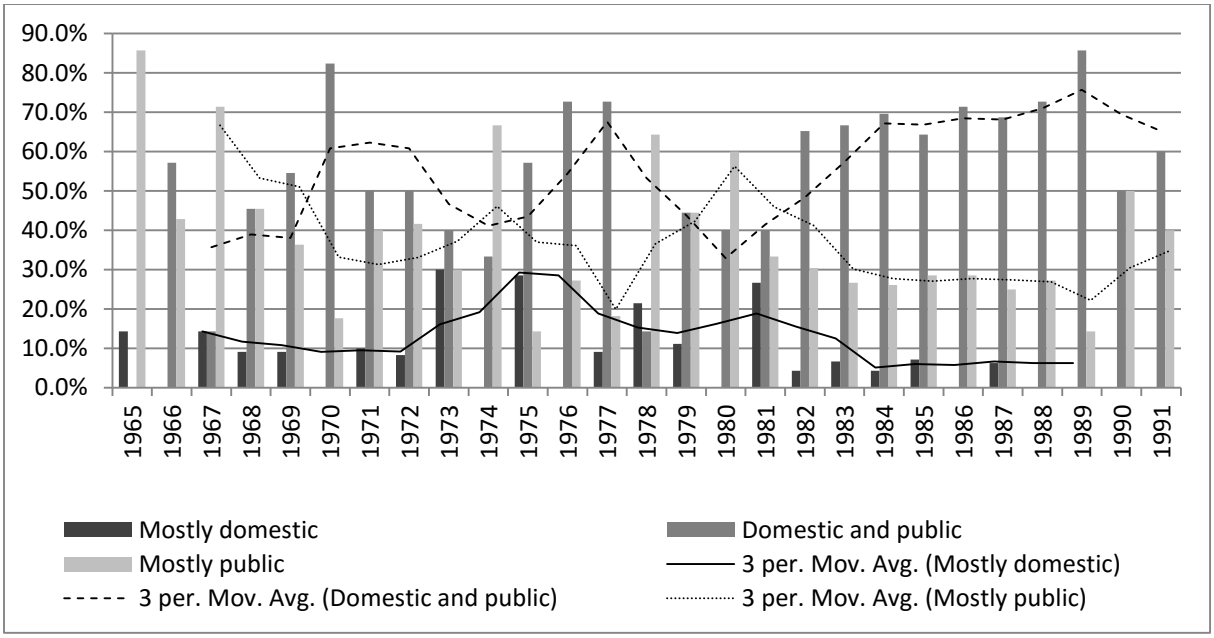



***Figure 2. Domestic and public settings over time: Yugoslavia, 1965–1991 (N = 344).***

As was the case with the settings, the comparison of prevailing plot structures in the two countries also reveal notable differences: Consistent with the more relaxed political environment, the majority of Yugoslav series includes at least one prominent personal plot (77.1%), whereas the proportion of such series in the Soviet context is considerably lower (25.5%).

***Table 2. TV Series Plots: Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, 1959–1991 (N = 580).***

| | Soviet Union | | Yugoslavia | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Plot | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| Mostly personal | 26 | 10.9 | 122 | 35.8 |
| Personal and public | 35 | 14.6 | 141 | 41.3 |
| Mostly public | 178 | 74.5 | 78 | 22.9 |
| Total | 239 | 100.0 | 341 | 100.0 |

However, longitudinal trends again reveal a more complex relationship between plot and political context. Much as with public settings, the proportion of Soviet series centered on public plots declined through much of the 1970s, reaching its lowest point at 50% in 1977 (see Figure 3). Yet, the proportion of series with mostly public plots soon returned to its previous levels, well before any loosening of Communist Party control was in sight. The period of *perestroika*, on the other hand, did not lead to marked changes in public plots; if anything, their proportion saw a mild decline.

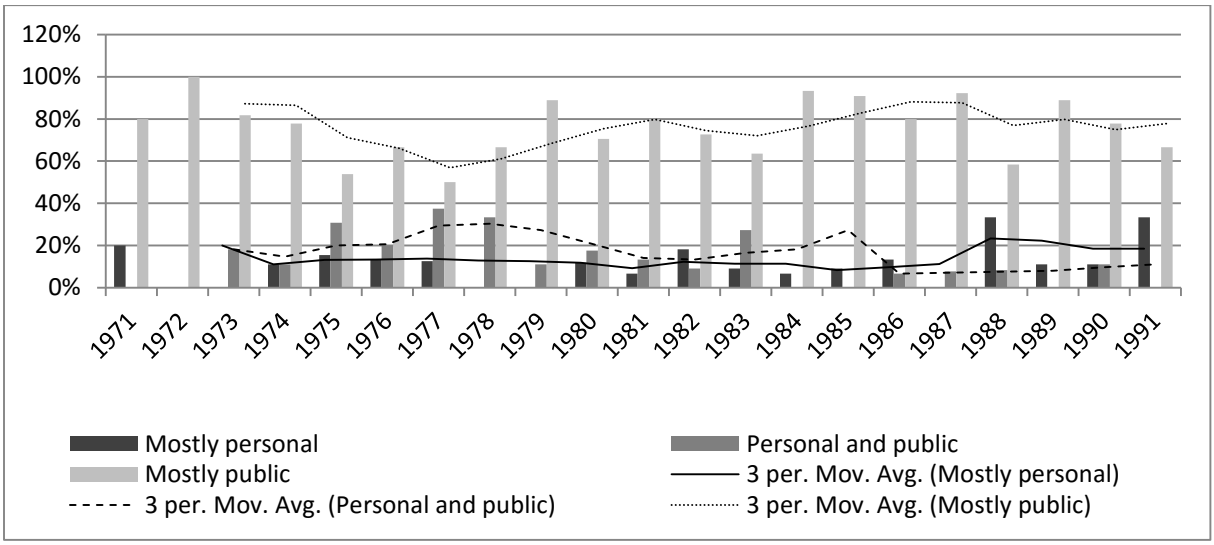



***Figure 3. Personal and public plots over time: Soviet Union, 1971–1991 (N = 229).***

In Yugoslavia, the contrast between the early 1970s and the 1980s was even clearer (see Figure 4). The initial period of tighter controls in the early to mid-1970s coincided with lower proportions of series centered on mostly public plots. However, the proportions of such series returned to high levels in the late 1970s, and declined (rather than rose) through most of the 1980s, in parallel with the softening of control over the media.

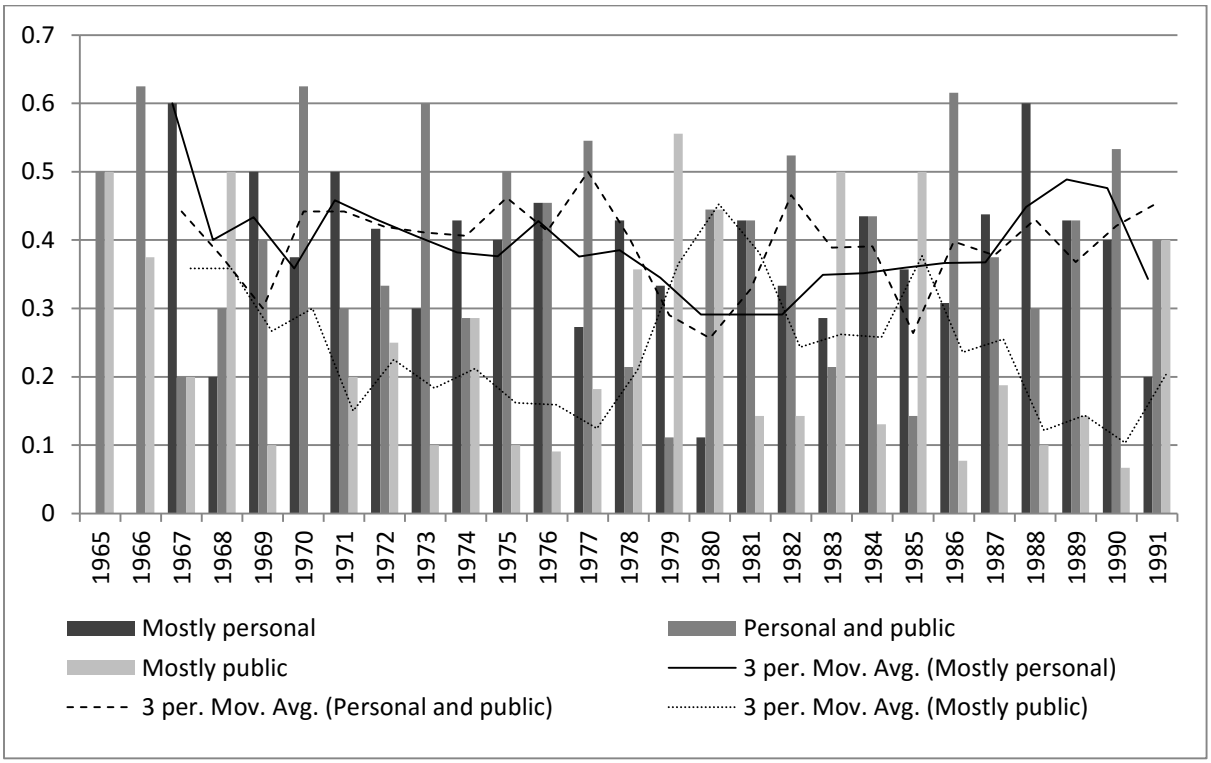



***Figure 4. Personal and public plots over time: Yugoslavia, 1965–1991 (N = 331).***

On the whole, the results of both setting and plot analyses indicate that socialist broadcasters in both countries rarely opted for narratives that were set exclusively in domestic spaces or focused solely on personal relationships. This result is consistent with the peculiar blurring of privacy and publicity in socialist societies and more generally with the uncomfortable position privacy held in the socialist context. As we shall see in our qualitative analysis, even dramas set mostly in domestic spaces, or focusing exclusively on personal relationships, often privileged communal values over individual interests, and were criticized if they were seen to present a form of privacy that was too disconnected from the public realm.

At the same time, quantitative results also showed marked differences between the two countries, with Yugoslav television being considerably more open to domesticity and private drama than its Soviet counterpart. As we have argued, this is consistent with the more relaxed form of Communist rule in the country and its greater openness to Western imports. At the same time, longitudinal analysis revealed that there is no direct correspondence between shifts in political context and volume of televised representations of private life. In both countries, the years following the introduction of tighter controls over the media in the early 1970s coincided with a (short-lived) surge in the proportion of both domestic settings and personal plots. Although this result is consistent with the argument—originally developed by Bren (2010) in relation to Czechoslovakia—that television fostered a retreat into privacy at a point when popular engagement with public matters became undesirable, it also indicates that this retreat did not

last. As our qualitative analysis suggests, this was because fictional representations of domesticity and personal relationships proved problematic.

An example of the ambiguous, potentially problematic nature of televised privacy is provided by the Soviet series *Day After Day*, which was written by the playwright and songwriter Mikhail Ancharov. It follows the lives of the residents of a communal apartment block in Moscow and focuses on melodramatic elements such as romantic relationships, marriage problems, or ongoing health issues. The series is more accurately described as a communal drama than a family drama, despite the fact that some characters are related. What connects the characters is not blood ties or even the fact that they live in the same apartment, but shared values, a shared culture, and a shared way of life. Similar features are found in a range of other series broadcast in the same period, many of which received an enthusiastic response among both audiences and critics. As archival documents suggest, this turn to personal life was a result of concerted political investment in using television as a means of representing the "socialist way of life" (Koginov, 1971, p. 3). This investment was closely tied to the policy of "Developed Socialism," which suggested that the country was entering a new stage of its development in which the absence of conflict between classes and nations meant that the country could now consolidate its achievements (Brezhnev, 1971). Among the key implications of the policy was a renewed emphasis on the present day and the well-being of the citizenry in the here and now. As a result, the Soviet media, including television, turned from epic tales of self-sacrificing heroes to stories about ordinary individuals whose main achievement was to work hard and care for their families (Huxtable, 2013).

However, a closer analysis of *Day After Day* suggests that this turn to the ordinary and the personal, despite its marked emphasis on shared communal values, was not without problems. First, the emphasis on personal matters left little scope for connecting the idealized vision of communal life to any recognizable goal of constructing communism. Second, the show was suffused by a nostalgic sense that older forms of social unity were disappearing. As noted earlier, the 1960s and the 1970s saw growing numbers of Soviet families abandon their communal apartments and move to individual family homes. This is also what happens to the characters of *Day After Day*: The communal apartment building is condemned, and the residents—much to their chagrin—are forced to move into separate apartments. In other words, although the show provides a positive vision of personal life within which communal values are maintained, it is also touched by a sense of doubt: Will it be possible to uphold the genuine collectivism and solidarity of communal apartments in an era of family homes, or will the personal ultimately overshadow the collective? Perhaps because of these problems, after an initial burst of enthusiasm for series dealing with personal life, the emphasis on personal matters was replaced by a focus on the individual at work and on action heroes. The remainder of the 1970s and the 1980s was marked by a large number of spy thrillers, such as the aforementioned *17 Moments of Spring* (1973) and historical epics such as *The Eternal Call* (1976–1984) and *State Borders* (1980–1988), which meant that the key focus of the action was typically the battlefield, the border post, or the workplace.

In Yugoslavia, televised domesticity proved to be even more problematic, although the exact reasons differ. On the one hand, narratives of personal life seemed to offer an attractive alternative to authors who wanted to steer clear of contentious public topics. As explained by Novak Novak, the screenwriter of *Theatre in the House*, his aim was to offer the audience "pure humor," without any

elements of social satire (Historical Archives of Belgrade, 1972, p. 1). The series, which combined the elements of family drama and sitcom, followed the everyday life of an extended family living in an apartment block in the Yugoslav capital, and for the first three seasons (broadcast during the 1970s), the camera virtually never left the apartment. Given that Novak was known as the writer of several satirical television series that openly engaged with the problematic aspects of Yugoslav politics and its economy—all broadcast before the tightening of political control over the media—this pointed emphasis on pure humor and the exclusive spatial focus on the family apartment was noteworthy and can be seen as an instance of self-censorship.

As contemporary reviews of the series suggest, the exclusive focus on the domestic sphere was not to everyone's taste, especially given that the plot often revolved around family squabbles over finances and tensions between family members and neighbors living in a crowded apartment block—all of which could be read as subtle satirical comments on the lack of privacy. According to some commentators, the show was "thematically narrow," its family "too hermetically closed," and its characters and situations too "repetitive" (Historical Archives of Belgrade, 1973, pp. 1–3). In short, *Theatre in the House* was criticized precisely for being too personal, too disengaged from the wider society, and offering little by way of a social commentary. In this climate, TV Belgrade seems to have been under pressure to discontinue the series. During the airing of the second season and the months that followed, three separate in-depth audience studies were conducted to ascertain the views of the audience. Despite overwhelmingly positive views, the series was discontinued and returned to Yugoslav screens only in 1980, precisely at the point when the party's grip over the media started to relax. Toward the late 1970s, the proportion of dramas set predominantly in domestic spaces or focused on personal plots declined, and Yugoslav screens were dominated by serial fiction that either abandoned the private altogether, or—in the majority of cases—combined it with public spaces and plots: historical epics celebrating the heroic acts of partisan guerrilla fighters and their supporters during World War Two, such as *Boško Buha* (1978–1980), *Cat Under the Helmet* (1978), and *The Return of the Outcasts* (1976–1978), or series centered on labor and set in characteristically socialist workspaces, such as *With Full Force* (1978, 1980).

## Discussion and Conclusions

Television may well be an inherently domestic and personal medium, yet the intimate nature of television—and of television series, in particular—sat uneasily with the public, collectivist orientation of the communist project. As the results presented here demonstrate, socialist broadcasters in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union largely avoided narratives centered exclusively on private dramas, and instead preferred to focus on public plots and spaces or combined both private and public narratives. Although in both countries the tightening of political control in the 1970s was initially accompanied by a shift from public to domestic settings and personal plots, this retreat into domesticity was short-lived. Television series focused on family affairs and friendship and set in communal or family apartments have been popular with audiences, but they were out of sync with the public goals of the communist revolution. This is not simply because such narratives failed to instill a sense of collective participation in the revolutionary project, or because they could not serve as the basis for political mobilization. Rather, the political messages inherent in them proved to be potentially antithetical to communist goals and threatened to undermine the legitimacy of Communist rule.

In the Soviet Union, the idyllic depiction of life in communal apartments in the Soviet serial *Day After Day* celebrated communal values over individual interests, and provided a characteristic example of how television could be used to showcase a form of public privacy—that is, a form of domesticity and personal relations attuned to the collectivist values of the communist project. Yet, at the same time, the series' nostalgic undertones and the fact that it was broadcast at a time when citizens were increasingly abandoning communal homes, suggested a dark side to Soviet development. In Yugoslavia, comic scenes of everyday life in crowded apartments and squabbles over family finances in *Theatre in the House* served as reminders of the country's stagnating economy and of the limits of personal pleasures in a socialist country. In both cases, presenting a politically acceptable socialist version of personal, domestic life—one that celebrated the collective good and eschewed the need for privacy—turned out to be fraught with difficulties. It required either a retreat into a nostalgic vision of a vanishing, idealized past, or a portrayal of day-to-day realities that were at least partly inconsistent with the socialist vision. Given such difficulties inherent in televised depictions of privacy, it is not a surprise that socialist broadcasters preferred to combine private dramas with public plots, or even, as was the case in the Soviet Union, mostly eschewed the private and the domestic altogether.

These results have important consequences not only for our understanding of television in state socialism, but also for general theories of television. The particular nature of privacy represented in socialist TV series suggests that the cultural form of television familiar from the liberal democracies of the West underwent important modifications in the state socialist context. It would be worth investigating whether other intimate or personal aspects of media content mentioned in literature—its focus on nonverbal messages and personality or the illusion of intimacy between the TV personality and the spectator—were likewise transformed. This would suggest that we need to acknowledge that the ways in which television interacted with the public–private divide differed importantly with context: The socialist environment gave rise to a different form of modern television culture, rooted in a distinctly communist vision of modern society.

These conclusions fit well with recent debates on modernity and modernization, which no longer operate with the notion of a single, universally applicable model of modernity, and have instead accepted the notion of multiple modernities, which share a belief in progress but follow different, competing visions of what a modern society should entail (e.g., Eisenstadt, 2000; Therborn, 2003). Although television cultures both east and west of the Iron Curtain had much in common, they were also drawn into the Cold War contest between two rival visions of modernity: one premised on liberal democracy and the market economy; the other on Communist rule and the planned economy (cf. Evans, 2016; Gumbert, 2015; Imre, 2016; Mihelj & Huxtable, 2016). The television formats, modes of engaging the audience, and ways of representing social life differed accordingly. In line with this, socialist television needs to be seen as a specific subtype of modern television, which was in many ways similar to its Western sibling, but also designated to promote an alternative vision of progress and belonging, one rooted in a teleological vision of history centered on the revolution and culminating in a socially equal, worker-led society oriented toward the collective good.

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