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Occulture and Media Before and During the Dissolution of Yugoslavia: The Case of *Tajne* Magazine (1987-1994)

Abstract: This study examines the Yugoslav magazine *Tajne*, published between 1987 and 1994, as a key example of the rise of “occulture” in the years surrounding the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Operating under the slogan “Journal for the frontier regions of sciences,” the publication, more than a repository of esoteric texts, served as a dynamic alternative media space that integrated spiritual and occult ideas into broader cultural discourse. Drawing on Christopher Partridge’s framework of occulture, we argue that *Tajne* bridged private esoteric practices and a wider readership by validating marginal topics such as parapsychology, alternative medicine, and ufology, situating them at the intersection of scientific inquiry and occult belief.

As a cultural artifact, the magazine transcended a passive information role, functioning as a vehicle for community-building. Reader participation fostered a network that provided a sense of belonging for people across the country. The study traces *Tajne*’s editorial evolution, particularly under Petar Luković (1991–1994), who combined esoteric content with pop culture and entertainment to broaden appeal.

We also identify a shift during the deepening Yugoslav crisis, where economic instability contributed to the commodification of spirituality, seen in advertorials and paid divinatory services. In parallel with worsening political conditions, content shifted from optimistic self-exploration toward politically charged conspiracy theories and futurology. Ultimately, this paper positions *Tajne* as a cultural barometer reflecting the “re-enchantment” of sectors of Yugoslav society, offering both a space for socialization and a flexible spiritual framework through which readers could interpret an uncertain socio-political reality.

Keywords: occulture, alternative media, popular culture, esotericism, Yugoslavia

Introduction

The magazine *Tajne* (“*Secrets*” in Serbian), whose slogan was “Journal for the frontier regions of sciences”¹, was a Yugoslav publication edited between

¹ “Časopis za granična područja nauke”, in Serbian.

1987 and 1994 by the publishing house BIGZ². Created by the journalist Aleksandar Milinković, it covered a wide range of topics that were novel for the time, especially themes related to what Partridge (2004) defines as “occulture”. Its recurring topics included tarot, parapsychology, alternative medicine, and ufology, along with sections where readers could participate by sharing paranormal experiences and games. In 1991, journalist Petar Luković took over as editor, giving the magazine a more entertainment-focused twist, oriented toward alternative entertainment and popular culture. Under his leadership, the magazine incorporated content such as horror movie reviews and interviews with public figures of the music business, expanding its original scope.

Luković, known for his irreverent style, had already built a career as a journalist in cultural and rock publications such as *Rock*, *Rock 82*, *Džuboks* and *Polet*. During his time as editor of *Tajne*, he was also editing *Sex Klub*, Serbia’s first pornographic magazine, reflecting his interest in niche projects and counterculture (Janjatović 2007; Tončić 2024). While *Tajne* maintained its focus on the esoteric, Luković helped position it as a dynamic space that connected the esoteric with other aspects of alternative culture.

Among the prominent contributors to the magazine was Živorad Mihajlović Slavinski (1937-2022), a key and pioneering figure in Yugoslav esotericism. Slavinski contributed a section dedicated to various authors and innovative spiritual practices, influenced by his work in the Ecclesia Gnostica Alba, and introduced readers to esoteric authors, techniques, and concepts. His participation in *Tajne* not only reflected the growing interest in alternative spirituality in the late 1980s and early 1990s Yugoslavia (L. Radulović 2007) but also once more made evident the role of the magazine as a meeting point for these discourses in a period of cultural and editorial effervescence.

Unlike contemporary magazines, such as *Kulture Istoka*, *Tajne* was not intended to be an academic or specialized publication (Jovanović 2019). Instead, it adopted an accessible and casual approach, exploring this boundary between the scientific and the marginal, as stated in its slogan. A distinctive feature of *Tajne* was its emphasis on reader participation, where readers not only sent letters but also contributed stories, paranormal experiences, and promoted services such as astrology and tarot readings. This simultaneously built a community around the magazine and reflected a broader trend in Yugoslavia toward spiritual seeking and interest in esoteric practices. Sections like “My Paranormal Experience” or “Personal Contact” helped forge an occultural network where the magazine

² BIGZ (*Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod*) was one of the major publishing houses in late-socialist Yugoslavia, which remains active today. Its magazine catalogue was highly diverse, ranging from influential political titles such as *Duga* to popular magazines like *Praktična Žena*, as well as niche publications including *Računari*, focused on technology, and *Galaksija*, oriented toward popular science.

acted both as a mediator and promoter. This participatory approach, combined with its specialized content, solidified *Tajne* as a vehicle for the exchange and commercialization of esoteric knowledge, which will be explored later through this work.

Aesthetically, *Tajne* stood out for its cover designs, created by Rade Tovladijac, a recognized illustrator in the comic and fantasy fields (Ivkov n.d.). His psychedelic compositions and vibrant colors gave the magazine a distinctive visual identity, reinforcing its innovative character.

Nevertheless, despite its casual tone, the magazine can also be interpreted as a barometer of the region's economic challenges. The rising prices, the reduction of contributors, and the eventual pause in its publication in 1993 reflected the inflationary pressures and editorial changes of the time. In its final stage, the magazine shifted toward more serious and less interactive topics, reducing entertainment sections and reader contributions, while giving prominence to themes such as tarot, divination, and political and social concerns, issues we will analyze further on in this work.

Lastly, in this study, *Tajne* is considered a paradigmatic case for understanding how esoteric and alternative discourses found space in late Yugoslavia, transforming into a cultural phenomenon that went beyond entertainment to reflect the tensions, interests, and hopes of its time, and the displacement of the religious beyond its conventional limits.

Theoretical Framework

The Significance of Magazines

Magazines are understood in this work as powerful cultural artifacts, embodying both the material and symbolic dimensions of societal life. They serve as mirrors of their time, reflecting the social, political, and cultural realities of their context. Beyond reflection, magazines actively participate in the construction and dissemination of collective identities (Metcalfe and Vanclay 1984). According to Canavire (Canavire 2013), cultural industries, including magazines, are strategic resources for shaping social imaginaries. In this sense, *Tajne* can be understood not merely as a repository of esoteric content but also as a dynamic medium through which individuals engaged with broader social transformations, negotiating their place within them.

In the Yugoslav region, magazines have been the subject of considerable academic interest, with studies exploring various aspects of their cultural, social, and historical significance. For instance, Magaš Bilandžić examined tourism and media representations in the magazine *Jugoslavija* (Magaš Bilandžić 2023), while Simić analyzed feminist periodicals like *Ženski pokret* and *Vesela sves-*

ka (Simić 2019; Simić 2021). Additionally, works by Milinković (Milinković 2017) and Pajin (Pajin 2013) explored inter-culturalism and the cultural heritage of *Profemina* and *Kulture Istoka*, respectively, the latter also examined by Jovanović (2019). Although research also exists within theology, philosophy of religion, and studies of alternative knowledge, there are comparatively fewer works focusing specifically on magazines situated within the intersection of spirituality, esoteric and alternative worldviews in the Yugoslav late-socialist and post-socialist context³.

Through the case of *Tajne*, this work complements existing scholarship with the aim to offer additional perspectives on the cultural and spiritual landscape of late 20th-century Yugoslavia.

Magazines as Social Spaces

Magazines do more than disseminate information; they promote social interactions and contribute to community-building. Drawing once again on Canavire (Canavire 2013), reading can be understood as a social practice, embedded within specific networks of interaction, whether familial, friendly, or professional. In this way, magazines facilitate not only the circulation of ideas but also the creation of social bonds among readers. Letters to the editor and other participatory sections enable readers to actively engage with the magazine and transform it into a shared space for discussion and exchange.

Magazines also operate as sites for the production of collective meaning. Semán and Rizo argue that even seemingly solitary acts of reading occur within networks of exchange; for example, through recommendations, shared interpretations, or even the gifting of magazines (Semán and Rizo 2013). In the case of *Tajne*, this collective dimension is evident in its role as a medium for connecting individuals interested in spirituality, the paranormal, and alternative content, accentuating its importance as a social phenomenon.

Tajne Within the Framework of Occulture

Christopher Partridge's concept of occulture provides a useful lens for understanding the thematic content of *Tajne*. Defined as "a vast spectrum of beliefs and practices sourced by Eastern spirituality, paganism, spiritualism, theosophy,

³ For the purposes of this study, post-socialism is understood following Martin as a process in which the decline of a socialist system reshapes cultural, social, and political life (Martin 2021). In the Yugoslav context, this process began in the late 1980s and extended through the early 1990s, highlighting how the legacies of socialism interacted with emerging market reforms, nationalist politics, and changing social practices, producing both ruptures and continuities in everyday life.

alternative sciences, and popular psychology” (Partridge 2004, 4), the concept of occulture also illustrates the ways in which spiritual and esoteric traditions are increasingly situated outside traditional religious institutions. *Tajne* exemplifies this shift, blending elements of occulture with pop culture elements and even historical narratives to create a unique platform for exploring spirituality in a secularized context.

Furthermore, the concept of Occulture is useful for reflecting the displacement of religious expression into broader cultural domains. Besides the works of Nemanja Radulović

(Radulović N. 2017, Radulović N. 2019; Radulović N. 2020) and Lidija Radulović (Radulović L. 2007), this phenomenon remains quite understudied in the region, despite its profound implications for understanding modern religiosity in this part of the world. By situating *Tajne* within this framework, this study not only aims to deepen our understanding of occulture in Yugoslavia per se, but also to contribute to a more complete and diverse appreciation of how spirituality was lived and represented in post-socialist societies.

Alternative Media and the Case of Tajne

Although it was published by one of Yugoslavia’s largest editorial houses, *Tajne* embodies the characteristics of alternative media. Alternative publications are defined by their focus on microsocial expressions, and their ability to provide platforms for narratives excluded from mainstream outlets (Aristizábal Jaramillo and Arias Moncada 2018). Unlike conventional media, which prioritize mass appeal, alternative media cater to specific communities, using language and perspectives tailored to their unique needs.

Tajne fits this description through its emphasis on esotericism, the paranormal, natural healing methods, and even conspiracy theories. As Metcalf and Vanclay argue, alternative lifestyle publications often act as both mouthpieces and vehicles for their respective movements, representing the diversity of practices and ideas within them (Metcalf and Vanclay 1984). Similarly, *Tajne* not only catered to its readership’s interests but might have also contributed to the broader dissemination of esoteric knowledge, positioning itself as both a cultural product and a participant in the spiritual currents of its time.

Ultimately, the creation and success of magazines such as *Tajne* not only reflect these cultural and spiritual currents but also indicate the existence of an audience actively seeking such content. The emergence of *Tajne* in the late 1980s coincided with the launch of other similar publications, such as *Arka* (Sarajevo, 1988) and *Treće Oko*⁴ (1989), which continues to be published today.

⁴ Nevertheless, it should be noted that *Treće Oko* has long been regarded as less serious or informative publication and more oriented towards entertainment.

This simultaneous rise of esoteric and alternative magazines signals a growing audience interested in spirituality, the paranormal, and self-exploration, portraying a broader societal shift toward alternative knowledge and practices. The persistence of *Treće Oko* after more than three decades further illustrates the enduring relevance of these themes, highlighting how these magazines both responded to and shaped public demand.

Methodology

The material analyzed consisted of 43 issues of the magazine *Tajne*, spanning from 1987 to 1994, with the exception of 1993, when the magazine was not published. These issues were retrieved from the National Library of Serbia (NBS). The analysis was conducted using a combination of Grounded Theory and Content Analysis.

Grounded Theory served as the primary framework, as it enables the identification of emergent themes and patterns directly from the data through an iterative process of coding and categorization (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This approach allowed the identification of emergent themes and patterns without imposing predefined hypotheses. Content Analysis, on the other hand, complemented this approach through the systematic examination of the magazine's articles, advertisements, and visual elements, quantifying and interpreting recurring topics (Neuendorf 2016), while also contextualizing them within the broader socio-political climate of Yugoslavia at the time.

Analysis and Results

To begin our analysis, the main categories used to classify the journal content will be outlined. A brief analysis of each category is provided at the end of the section, with a more in-depth discussion following later.

Alternative Medicine

The first category is alternative medicine⁵. This category, which remained a constant throughout the publication's seven years, encompassed a wide range of practices aimed at preventing and curing various ailments. Prominent among

⁵ Understanding alternative medicine as “a broad domain of resources that encompasses health systems, modalities, and practices and their accompanying theories and beliefs, other than those intrinsic to the dominant health system of a particular society or culture in a given historical period (Zollman and Vickers 1999 in Thelwall 2021).”

these were acupuncture, aromatherapy, ayurveda, radiesthesia, and herbal medicine, which frequently occupied center stage in the magazine's content. Over time, articles increasingly focused on integrating these practices into everyday life.

In the early issues (1987 to 1991), this section prominently featured natural remedies, bioenergy practices, and macrobiotic diets, to the point that one of the earliest numbers of 1987 was specially dedicated to these types of healing. The magazine's emphasis on alternative practices was also evident in its advertisements. For instance, in November 1987, there was an ad that promoted a device enabling home acupuncture without the need for needles. Other illustrative titles of articles were "Acupressure at home"⁶, "Ayurveda, Hippocrates from India"⁷, or the cover article called "Tumor, unborn offspring"⁸, from October 1989, where an 'amateur doctor' from Pula claimed he studied cancer 'in the light of energy'.

This section of the magazine reflects the growing popularity of alternative therapies during this period, emphasizing their integration into daily routines. This trend toward natural and holistic approaches continued to define the magazine's editorial direction in the following years. While this theme remained consistent, it evolved in notable ways. For example, starting in 1991, the section increasingly became a platform for advertising therapists offering these services, often in the style of *publinotas*. Derived from the Spanish words *publicidad* ('advertising') and *nota* ('article'), *publinotas* are articles explicitly designed to promote a product or service. This shift could be interpreted in two ways (not mutually exclusive): it may reflect the magazine's need to generate additional revenue through advertising, and it may also indicate the growing commodification of the alternative medicine sector.

**AKUPUNKTUROM
savladajte migrenu**

glavobolju, lumbago, išijas, zubobolju, upalu sinusa, reumatske bolove, bronhijalnu astmu i druge bolesti kao i razna bolna stanja. Smanjite telesnu težinu ili prestanite da pušite uz pomoć akupunkture.

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Figure 1 - Advertisement for the Acupressure machine.
Issue 4, November 1987.

⁶ "Akupresura u kući". Issue 42, November 1991.

⁷ "Ajurveda: Hipokrat iz Indije". Issue 7, May 1988.

⁸ "Tumor: Nerođeno potomstvo." Issue 18, October 1989.

Additionally, from this period onward, there was a notable increase in articles addressing AIDS as an issue to treat or cure. Examples include the article “How ghosts see AIDS”⁹, or the one titled “Valjevo resident against AIDS”¹⁰, which made it to the cover of the magazine, where a reader claimed to have received the cure for AIDS in a dream, involving the use of a local plant, among others. The sudden and frequent inclusion of this topic likely reflects the influence of current events or circulating narratives, demonstrating the magazine’s responsiveness to its social and cultural context. Interestingly, these mentions of AIDS, along with other health-related themes, addressed societal concerns of the time.

Another notable feature was the inclusion of articles on traditional or “folk” healing techniques. Examples include discussions of practices from regions such as Bosnia or Montenegro, or an article that presented practices allegedly used by the ethnologist and folklorist Vuk Karadžić¹¹, or the section “Herzegovinian Teachings”, with articles such as “The Chain of Lead magic”¹² or “Silence Silhouette”¹³. This eclecticism can be interpreted in several ways. On the one hand, it may have been a strategy to appeal to a broader audience, particularly those interested in traditional customs, or as a strategy to gain some legitimacy and portray their articles as culturally grounded. On the other hand, it might also reflect and simultaneously promote a worldview in which all practices, whether ultramodern or traditional, rural or international, held equal validity. This not only reflects a commitment to diversity, but also resonates with broader cultural currents of late Yugoslavia. The inclusion of both ultramodern techniques, such as bioenergy and deeply rooted folk practices and narratives suggests a tension between modernity and tradition, emblematic of a nation negotiating its identity between East and West.

Also, this plurality of approaches aligns with the magazine’s ethos of exploring the boundaries of science and spirituality. The rise of alternative medicine within *Tajne* could be interpreted both as part of longer-standing trend in Yugoslav publishing, and as a societal reaction to the institutional and scientific norms of the time. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Yugoslavia faced significant political and economic challenges, including the erosion of public trust in state institutions (Garfield 2001; Radulović L . 2007). Consequently, the growing popularity of therapies like acupuncture, radiesthesia, and herbal remedies may have reflected a turn toward personal autonomy and self-reliance in response to perceived inadequacies in institutionalized healthcare.

⁹ “Kako duhovi vide SIDU”. Issue 45, February 1992.

¹⁰ “Valjevac protiv SIDE”. Issue 5, June 1994.

¹¹ “Vukovi lekarski recepti”. Issue 3, September 1987.

¹² “Lanac olovne magije”. Issue 15, July 1989.

¹³ “Tišina silueta”. Issue 16, August 1989.

By promoting practices that were accessible and framed as empowering, *Tajne* could have not only capitalized on but also actively fostered this cultural trend. The increasing prominence of *publinotas* after 1991 further illuminates the interplay between economic pressures and the commodification of esotericism. This shift could be interpreted as a pragmatic move by the magazine to sustain itself financially in a period marked by inflation and diminishing resources. However, it also points to the broader commercialization of alternative medicine, turning what may have begun as a cultural and spiritual exploration into a burgeoning market. The advertisements and feature articles by practitioners directly targeting readers blurred the lines between editorial content and commerce, making the magazine both a mediator and a marketplace for esoteric knowledge. Additionally, the magazine's framing of AIDS-related content adds another layer to this analysis.

The articles reflect both the cultural anxieties of the time and the esoteric lens through which *Tajne* interpreted contemporary crises. For instance, the case of the reader claiming to have received a cure for AIDS in a dream not only illustrates the blending of spiritual and medical narratives, but might also reveal the search for solutions during a global health crisis. These articles, therefore, might serve as a barometer of societal fears and hopes, showing how esoteric discourses intersect with pressing real-world issues, as will also become evident in the following sections.

Futurology

The second category, which I have termed “futurology”, is also closely connected to the uncertainties of its time. It encompasses horoscopes, Tarot, all kinds of predictions, and even the “Stellar Technology”¹⁴ section, where the magazine presented cutting-edge technologies from abroad, such as computers and various communication devices. This category underwent several transformations over the years.

In its early issues, the magazine consistently featured a horoscope section. Under Luković's editorial direction, the content took a more playful tone, blending esotericism with pop culture. An example of this is the introduction of the “Horrorscope”¹⁵ section, which combined astrology with horror films and other elements of popular culture. This section, written by the rock musician and writer Aleksandar Žikić, included playful titles such as “Nightmare Forever”¹⁶, which typified this era of the magazine, offering readers a lighthearted approach

¹⁴ “Zvezdana tehnologija” in Serbian.

¹⁵ “Horoskop” in Serbian.

¹⁶ “Kosmar zauvek”. Issue 41, October 1991.

to futurology while introducing them to the most iconic films of the horror genre. Additionally, the magazine encouraged interaction by providing readers with exercises and instructions to practice esoteric techniques at home. For instance, one issue from January, 1992 included exercises on regression¹⁷. Another, from May 1991, taught readers how to make their own talismans, while an issue from March 1988, offered a mini-dossier and a poster teaching readers how to create their own astrological charts, among many other examples.

However, from the beginnings of 1992 onward, this category underwent a significant shift. While it retained its focus on predictions, it lost much of its earlier playful tone. The Horrorscope section was discontinued after Luković's departure and futurology content increasingly centered on political themes, a tendency that began in the final period under Luković's direction but became more frequent and explicit after his departure. This change mirrored the sociopolitical upheavals of the time, including the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991. Articles such as "Stars on Mira and Sloba: The great Secrets of the Milošević Family"¹⁸ and the astrological chart of Zoran Đinđić¹⁹, which appeared on the magazine's cover, marked this transition. Other examples included economic predictions, like the one titled "A look into the Future: Dinar by Dinar, the Mark"²⁰.

This pivot toward politically charged predictions highlights the role of futurology as a sociopolitical tool during times of instability. By framing political events within esoteric narratives, the magazine offered an alternative lens through which readers could interpret and possibly feel they could influence an unpredictable reality. These articles not only catered to widespread anxieties but might also have mediated a sense of hope and control amidst the turmoil.

Simultaneously, there was a growing emphasis on the predictions of local and international clairvoyants. This trend started in 1991, with a dossier published between the issues of March and June, in which an author presented predictions spanning the next eight centuries. In the same year, the magazine also included predictions by the "Mediala" art group founder and painter Miro Glavurtić²¹. Later in time, there was an article from the tarotist and esoteric editor Maja Mandić predicting which trials would Serbia face²², or one by Đorđe Miletić, titled "Karmic Cleansing of Serbia, or Are Strikes Awaiting Us?"²³. Other article,

¹⁷ "Eksperiment Tajni, ekskluzivni treninzi". Issue 44, January 1992.

¹⁸ "Zvezde o Miri i Slobi: Velike Tajne porodice Milošević." Issue 5, June 1994.

¹⁹ "Zoran Đinđić: Kenedi naših dana. Astro-intervju". Issue 8, September/October 1994.

²⁰ "Dinar po dinar – Marka". Issue 8, September/October 1994.

²¹ "Miro Glavurtić: Čeka nas konačni rat". Issue 37, May 1991.

²² "Pokojnik postaje luda, ili kroz kakva će iskušenja proći Srbija?". Issue 7, September 1994.

²³ "Karmičko čišćenje Srbije, ili: da li nas očekuju štrajkovi?" Issue 8, September/October 1994.

from February 1992, features the Hopi predictions and prophecies regarding the arrival of the “fifth world”²⁴, among many others.

Besides the ones that offered predictions for the immediate future of the country, the articles focused on a long-term perspective could have functioned as a form of temporal escapism, situating contemporary crises within a broader cosmic narrative. By offering readers a grand story that extended far beyond the immediate turmoil, the magazine’s narrative may have promoted both a sense of stability and a mythic continuity that transcended the everyday chaos, for which it also offered some answers.

Interestingly, the latter years of the magazine also saw a metatextual shift in the way futurology was presented. For the first time, in 1994, advertisements for Tarot and horoscope services by phone began to appear. Although Tarot and similar practices had been featured in advertisements since the magazine’s inception, this sudden proliferation of such services suggests a possible shift in audience demand. As Radulović and Braux suggest, the increasing popularity of predictive services during this period may reflect a broader societal search for answers amid profound political, economic, and social instability (Braux 2017; Radulović 2007).



Figure 2. Advertisements for telephonic tarot and horoscope services. March 1994.

At the same time, the interactive element that characterized earlier issues (encouraging readers to learn and practice various esoteric techniques) gradually disappeared. This shift, coupled with the growing prevalence of advertisements, portrays the commodification of futurology. Predictions, once framed as a form

²⁴ “Hopi indijanci prorekli dolazak petog sveta”. Issue 45, February 1992.

of entertainment and community creation, increasingly became more clearly marketable services. This trend reflects both the economic pressures the magazine faced and the broader commercialization of esotericism during this period.

Interactions with the Readers

Another equally important category is “Interactions with the Readers,” under which I included: letters from readers, the “Personal Contact” section, “My Paranormal Experience”, and “Mona Answers You”. These sections allowed readers to share their own experiences, creating a personal connection with the magazine. This fostered a sense of community among the readership and possibly contributed to audience loyalty.

The Personal Contact section was a particular feature of the magazine that allowed readers to reach out to one another, often based on shared esoteric interests. The following ads, from October, 1989 serve as an illustrative example:

“I am interested in black magic. I kindly ask anyone who can help me with their experience or literature to contact me. English materials are also welcome.”

“I am 23 years old. I have a mild disability (spastic paraparesis). I have housing secured and have completed high school. Young people from all over Yugoslavia are welcome to contact me for friendship, but also for a potential marriage.”

“I invite those who have read Carlos Castaneda’s books and want to immerse themselves in the life of a warrior. Serious collaboration and exchange of experiences in research are welcome.”

Or this one, from September 1990:

“A Belgrader – Aquarius – Scorpio – Tiger, would like to meet girls from Belgrade born in 1964, 1966, or 1967, under the signs of Aries, Taurus, Libra, or Sagittarius. They say I’m sweet. Check for yourself!”

The aim of this section, as we can see, was to become a space where individuals could connect on a personal level, specially finding either esoteric practice or reading groups, as well as potential friendships or romantic partners. Readers frequently posted advertisements highlighting their interest in occult practices, the paranormal, or other esoteric topics, to find like-minded individuals. It was a form of social networking, unique to the cultural and social context of *Tajne*’s readership, which enabled the formation of both platonic and romantic relationships centered on shared worldviews.

But beyond its important role in connecting people and creating community, this section also reflected the region’s economic changes. Initially, the service was free: readers would send requests to appear in the ads, while those interested in replying would mail a letter to the editorial office, which forwarded it

to the original advertiser. However, by late 1990, this service became fee-based due to budgetary constraints and the overwhelming volume of letters received, which also illustrates the popularity of the magazine as a socialization platform.

Also, throughout *Tajne*'s run, but especially between 1989 and 1991, the magazine frequently referenced and advertised various events and organizations across Yugoslavia that aligned with the magazine's alternative and esoteric themes. These events provided further opportunities for readers to engage with others who shared their interests, creating networks of community outside the magazine's pages. For example, in the fifth issue of 1988, *Tajne* featured the existence of radiesthesia clubs in Yugoslavia²⁵, or another number from the same year also mentioned references to UFO observation groups in Belgrade and Zagreb²⁶. These clubs and organizations provided real-world spaces where individuals could find fellowship and share experiences, thus reinforcing the sense of solidarity and belonging fostered by the magazine.

Moreover, the magazine regularly announced cultural and spiritual events, such as an exhibition of Occult Art in Belgrade²⁷, the first alternative medicine conference in Yugoslavia²⁸, and various gatherings related to the magazine's topics of interest in

Ljubljana²⁹, including an "Enlightenment Intensive" session organized by the Ecclesia Gnostica Alba, founded by Živorad Mihajlović Slavinski. These announcements also demonstrate that the magazine's role could have gone further than just a merely passive publisher of content, but also an active participant in the broader alternative scene, and a mirror in which we can now, decades later, peek into the interests and happenings of this milieu.

One particularly interesting advertisement appeared in the "Small Ads" (Mali oglasi) section of issue 36 (1991), where a call was made for financiers to support a gay club. This also points not only to the inclusive and progressive nature of the magazine, but also how it might have facilitated the creation of spaces where other types of "alternative" lifestyles and communities could gather.

Finally, the magazine also featured the "Mona Answers You" section (Mona Vam Odgovara), where readers could submit personal dilemmas or questions, and 'Mona' would reply with advice. While it is unclear whether Mona was a real individual or a fictional construct, the section catered to readers' personal concerns, reflecting once again the magazine's efforts to engage with its audience on an intimate level. The inclusion of this feature suggests that the editors

²⁵ Issue 5, January 1988.

²⁶ Issue 2, April 1987.

²⁷ Issue 19, November 1989.

²⁸ "Jugoslav Kolokvium alternativnih znanosti". Issue 8, September 1988.

²⁹ This article made it to the cover of the magazine, as "Ljubljana Zdaj! Sve duhovne grupe Slovenije". Issue 26, June 1990.

addressed the value of portraying individual struggles, potentially reinforcing the magazine's broader appeal to those seeking esoteric knowledge as well as some form of emotional and psychological support.

The presence of all these sections also reflects the magazine's recognition of the growing importance of public participation in editorial content. Rather than merely being passive consumers, readers became active contributors to the magazine's narrative. The magazine evolved from being a publication into a space where individuals could engage in a dialogue, finding validation or connection with others, and where they could share and debate their own beliefs and experiences³⁰. This mirrors the findings of Bill Reader and Kevin Moist who argue that letters to the editor in alternative magazines serve as key indicators of community values (Reader and Moist 2008). In the case of *Tajne*, these sections not only allowed readers to express their views but also reinforced a sense of shared identity and belonging.

However, by 1992, most of these sections, with the exception of Mona Vam Odogvara, disappeared, likely due to economic constraints that made it harder for readers to afford engagement, and the significant reduction of employees in the magazine. This decline not only portrays a shift in the magazine's editorial focus, but also, albeit indirectly, reflects the broader socio-economic and political changes of the time.

Entertainment

Under Petar Luković's direction from 1989 onward, *Tajne* began to incorporate more pop culture content alongside its esoteric focus. Interviews with entertainment figures became a recurring feature, offering readers insights into the lives of prominent personalities. For example, the magazine featured an article written by Lepa Brena³¹, one of Yugoslavia's most iconic pop-folk singers, which brought a touch of contemporary stardom to the magazine's pages. Similarly, interviews with the rock musician Momčilo "Bajaga" Bajagić³² or Bebi Dol³³, both star figures from the music scene, highlighted the magazine's

³⁰ For a firsthand account illustrating this phenomenon, see Cult of Ghoul's blog post about *Tajne*. The author, Dejan Ognjanović, recounts his personal experience of engaging with the magazine during his youth and the significance it had for him. The post not only illustrates its role as a point of connection between readers, but also showcases the meaning it could have for an individual. Available at: <https://cultofghoul.blogspot.com/2012/11/ghoullove-horror-tajne.html> (accessed December 3, 2024).

³¹ Issue 15, July 1989.

³² Issue 43, December 1991.

³³ Issue 33, January 1991.

engagement with broader cultural trends. Other characters interviewed by the magazine were the world explorer and traveler Željko Malnar³⁴, or the poet Vesna Krmpotić³⁵.

The film section, often focused on horror movies, became another highlight. Early articles offered behind-the-scenes glimpses. For example, the issue of September 1989, included a rare photo of the actor playing Hellraiser without the characteristic makeup. That article, named “A Bloody Trail”³⁶ offered a general analysis of the genre’s themes, while others, like coverage of Gorillas in the Mist³⁷, from the same issue, connected films to mystical or spiritual ideas. Pop culture content frequently complemented *Tajne*’s esoteric focus, such as the previously mentioned ‘horrorscope’ section. Additionally, movies were often referenced to explain or illustrate various phenomena, enriching the magazine’s discussions on astrology, mysticism, and the unexplained.

The inclusion of these pop culture elements marked a shift in *Tajne*’s content. While the occulture topics remained central, Luković’s era introduced a broader focus on contemporary trends, expanding the magazine’s audience. This diversification was complemented by contests offering prizes such as books, travel packages, and custom talismans, which added another interactive element for readers.

Ufology and Conspiracy Theories

Ufology was one of the defining themes of *Tajne* in its early years, particularly between 1987 and 1989. Articles such as “UFO Sightings in Yugoslavia”³⁸ reported on alleged encounters in cities like Belgrade, Zagreb, and Kragujevac, reflecting both the fascination and fear surrounding extraterrestrial phenomena during this era. This article also highlighted the formation of UFO-watching societies and provided contact information for groups in cities across Yugoslavia, showcasing, as we stated before, the magazine’s role in connecting enthusiasts with shared interests. Other articles related to UFO phenomena also played with the idea of an extraterrestrial origin of humans, such as the one called “Aliens From Space on Easter Island”, or “Our Ancestors Came From Mars”³⁹, both from September 1988.

³⁴ Issue 24, April 1989.

³⁵ Issue 42, November 1991.

³⁶ “Na krvavom tragu”. Issue 17, September 1989.

³⁷ Issue 17, September 1989.

³⁸ Issue 2, April 1987.

³⁹ “Došljaci iz svemira na Uskršnjim ostvrima” and “Naši preci su došli sa Marsa”, respectively. Issue 8.

By the early 1990s, the prominence of Ufology began to wane. Although articles on alien encounters, such as “Aliens in Gulf Breeze” (March 1990), continued to appear, they were increasingly framed within broader conspiracy narratives. For example, UFO sightings were often linked to government cover-ups or historical conspiracies, signaling a shift toward themes of political secrecy and suppression.

The magazine’s exploration of conspiracy theories followed a similar trajectory. Initially, these narratives often focused on speculative history, blending historical events with esoteric themes, and sometimes incorporating elements of cryptozoology. Articles such as “Mammoths in Atlantis”⁴⁰ or “Nessie’s Younger Brother”⁴¹ exemplify this more lighthearted approach. However, by the early 1990s, the tone became darker and more politically charged. Pieces like “Atlanteans of the Third Reich”⁴² got deeper into global historical conspiracy theories, while articles such as “CIA Against Aliens”⁴³ began to connect extraterrestrial narratives to geopolitical intrigues. Other paradigmatic examples could be the ones titled “Lenin, Satan’s cousin”⁴⁴, or “President Carter’s Plate”⁴⁵, from 1994.

These changes can be interpreted as a reflection of *Tajne*’s responsiveness to the cultural moment. While Ufology and conspiracy theories remained central to the magazine’s identity, their presentation evolved in response to either a change in reader interests and/or a shift in editorial direction, also evidenced in other sections of the magazine.

Parapsychology

Parapsychology was a foundational theme in *Tajne*, which makes sense if we remember their slogan and their goal of exploring topics that blur the boundary between scientific inquiry and mystical belief. Within this category, we included phenomena such as extrasensory perception (ESP), telekinesis, and psychokinesis, which were represented as latent human abilities that could be developed through practice. Articles often offered a quasi-scientific approach, using language borrowed from psychology and science, and framing these phenomena as possibly scientifically valid, yet still connected to the realm of the supernatural. While usually grounded in parapsychological research, the discussions were always tied to a larger spiritual context, and with testimonies suggesting that the development of psychic abilities could lead to personal transformation.

⁴⁰ “Atlantida i mamuti”. Issue 3, September 1987.

⁴¹ “Mlađi brat Nesija”. Issue 18, October 1989.

⁴² Atlantidani trećeg Rajha”. Issue 40, August 1991.

⁴³ “CIA protiv vanzemaljaca”. Issue 42, November 1991.

⁴⁴ “Lenjin, Sotonin rođak”. Issue 11, November 1994.

⁴⁵ Tanjir predsednika Kartera”, Issue 12, December 1994.

The issue from January 1988 (No. 5) devoted a special dossier dedicated to parapsychology, with a final article titled “Check your own parapsychological abilities!” which directly invited readers to explore their own potential psychic powers.

In addition to theoretical discussions, the magazine featured personal accounts and case studies, including both local Yugoslav and international examples of paranormal phenomena. These stories were often presented in a way that blurred the line between factual accounts and speculations or fiction, and even allowed readers to engage directly with the content through submissions in sections like “My Paranormal Experience” (Moje paranormalno iskustvo), which lasted for more than 20 numbers.

In September 1989, the article “I remember I died”⁴⁶ explored the concept of near-death experiences, describing them as a phenomenon discussed in both parapsychological and medical circles, yet still controversial and subject to skepticism. These articles presented parapsychology as not only an intellectual pursuit but also a deeply personal and transformative experience for the readers. One of the more intriguing articles, “The Dead Call: What Is the Feeling When You Hear the Voice of a Dead Man on the Phone?”⁴⁷ from July 1989, highlighted paranormal occurrences related to communication with the deceased. This article, exploring the possibility of deceased individuals using the PTT (telecommunication) network, also exemplified this blend of scientific curiosity and mystical speculation.

Nevertheless, it is important to note, as Braux highlights, that perceptions of parapsychology varied across contexts (Braux 2017). In the Eastern Bloc, including the USSR, parapsychology was at times incorporated into psychology curricula and treated as a legitimate field of inquiry, even if its institutional status was not always consistent. In the West, although often marginalized, parapsychology also had periods of institutional presence, including university courses and laboratory-based research during the Cold War (LoMeo2016).

Another notable feature is that the magazine’s approach, as we said before, sometimes addressed the skepticism surrounding such phenomena. In November 1991, the article “Parapsychological Phenomena”⁴⁸ discussed various types of psychic occurrences, while “The Parapsychological Life of Pets”⁴⁹ even explored the possibility of animals exhibiting psychic abilities, expanding the scope of parapsychology further than human experiences. All of these articles offered the reader not only case studies, but also practical guidance on understanding and developing their own parapsychological potential. Another exam-

⁴⁶ “Sećam se da sam umro”, Issue 17.

⁴⁷ “Mrtvaci Telefoniraju: Kakav je osećaj kad preko telefona čujete glas mrtvog čoveka?”. Issue 15, July 1989.

⁴⁸ “Parapsihološki fenomeni”, Issue 42.

⁴⁹ “Parapsihološki život ljubimaca” Issue 42, November 1991.

ple of this encouragement for readers to practice, rather than simply trust what they read, was the inclusion of a poster with Zener Cards⁵⁰ for people to test their psychic abilities.

Nevertheless, in its latest years this section also suffered the changes related to both the sociopolitical changes and the shift in editorial direction. The August 1994 issue featured a cover article titled “Parapsychologist Mina Minić: Tito’s Generals Were Programmed”⁵¹ which intertwined parapsychology with these heavy declarations about the nation’s recent political past. This type of article can also be interpreted as indicating how the portrayal of parapsychology in *Tajne* evolved from a primarily individual, spiritual exploration to a more politically charged discourse. The magazine’s framing of parapsychology can also be thought as a reflection of the broader cultural environment of that time. Just as Adeline Braux observed in the post-Soviet space, alternative spiritualities such as parapsychology gained prominence as people sought meaning and control over a rapidly changing world (Braux 2017).

Moreover, the magazine’s approach to parapsychology seemed to have served as part of a broader effort to legitimize or at least disseminate occult knowledge and ideas in the public sphere. By blending scientific language with esoteric spiritual practices, *Tajne* played a crucial role in presenting parapsychology not just as pseudoscience, but as a legitimate, albeit unconventional, pursuit of knowledge. This approach might have helped to bridge the gap between mainstream scientific discourse and occult practices, making these topics more palatable to a skeptical public while still catering to the growing demand for alternative spiritual frameworks.

Živorad Mihajlović Slavinski’s columns

Živorad Mihajlović Slavinski, one of the pioneers in the Yugoslav esoteric scene, was a key contributor to *Tajne* during its most dynamic years, particularly between 1989 and 1991. His work is characterized by a practical approach to spirituality, blending Western esotericism, parapsychology, and psychological techniques. Slavinski was initially invited for an interview by Petar Luković, the then-editor of *Tajne*. Recognizing the appeal of Slavinski’s ideas, Luković offered him a regular column, which became a cornerstone of the magazine’s

⁵⁰ Issue number 5, November 1988.

⁵¹ “Titovi generali programirani”. Nevertheless, it would be naive to disregard the agency of the readers assuming everyone accepted these interpretations. There is the possibility, also, that these kinds of controversies also made the cover to pique curiosity or generate the rage of some sectors of the public, a very common tabloid technique, contemporarily known as “baiting”. For a better reference about the political use of these articles, see footnote 66.

identity during this period⁵². The fact that his name made it to two of the covers allows us to think that Slavinski's reputation might have lent some legitimacy or popularity to *Tajne*, and that his presence might have attracted readers specifically interested in his methods. At the same time, Slavinski also used *Tajne* as a platform to promote his books and workshops. Advertisements for his works appeared quite frequently, not only in the ads of his published books but also in the articles, such as the one in the September 1989 issue, in which he explains some of the rituals and principles of the Ecclesia Gnostica Alba⁵³, or the one about Scientology⁵⁴, which includes not only a picture and an explanation about how it worked within EGA, but also a small ad with information on where and how to contact him. This dual role as a contributor and promoter exemplifies once again how *Tajne* functioned as both a cultural space and a marketplace for esoteric ideas.

The themes of his articles encompassed a wide range of topics, including alternative psychology, esoteric practices, and even the connections between art and spirituality.

In his article "Words as Balm"⁵⁵, Slavinski introduced readers to neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) techniques, highlighting their potential for fostering mental healing and personal transformation. Another article, "The Beauty of Spiritual Crisis"⁵⁶, examined how crises could act as catalysts for spiritual growth. In this piece, Slavinski cited influential figures like Carlos Castaneda, Mircea Eliade, and Timothy Leary to offer readers a framework for reinterpreting personal struggles as opportunities for self-discovery and spiritual growth.

Slavinski's contributions also covered vast terrain into esoteric practices. In "Psychonauts in the World of Dreams"⁵⁷, he explored the biography and practices of Kenneth Grant, complementing the article with a photograph of Grant alongside his own daughter, taken during Slavinski's visit to London. This article, along with others such as "Excalibur"⁵⁸ discussed modern adaptations of ancient esoteric techniques, many of which were tied to Slavinski's own methods. In "Forever Love"⁵⁹, he published excerpts of the Algolian language channeled in his church, providing context by explaining the process of "speaking

⁵² In fact, Slavinski's book *Staze i bogaze jastva* (Mihajlović Slavinski 1993), "Paths and Ravines of Consciousness" is a compilation of all the articles he wrote for the magazine.

⁵³ "Slatki Miris Večnosti". Issue 17, September 1989.

⁵⁴ "Opojni zov istine. Issue 19, November 1989.

⁵⁵ "Reči kao melem," Issue 20, December 1989

⁵⁶ "Lepota Spiritualne Krize," Issue 23, March 1990.

⁵⁷ "Psihonauti u svetu snova," Issue 21, 1991.

⁵⁸ Issue 39, 1991.

⁵⁹ "Zauvek Ljubav", Issue 26, 1990.

in tongues” across various traditions worldwide. His wife, actress Jadranka Stilin, also featured in the article, promoting the Church’s techniques with a photograph of herself and an epigraph where she described how this practice “opened a new world for her.” Additionally, in “From Mud to Gold”⁶⁰, Slavinski introduced readers to the fundamentals of alchemy, while “The Invisible Eye of Consciousness”⁶¹ examined the interplay between artistic expression and occult practice.

Another topic that stands out in this analysis is Scientology. In the previously mentioned article “The Intoxicating Call of Truth”, Slavinski dedicates a piece to Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology, recounting some of his history and describing Scientology’s principles in an informative, even positive tone when it comes to its practices. For instance, he describes Dianetics as “an extremely effective and exact psycho-emotional process, far superior to any official psychotherapeutic method. It safely and predictably eliminates neurotic complaints and creates an emotionally stable and mature personality, which remains an unfulfilled dream of modern psychiatry” (p. 17). However, he also highlights the disparity between the promises of Scientology and its actual outcomes, pointing out that, in the stricter sense, Scientology often fails to deliver on its lofty expectations.

Despite these critiques, the article maintains a certain admiration for Scientology’s techniques and original principles. Slavinski refers to Hubbard as a charismatic leader with an epic vision: “As a guru, military leader, and messiah, Hubbard saw the insurmountable conflict between good and evil and rushed into it as if it were a crusade and a world struggle. He saw people as tragic beings, former gods, who, upon falling into this deceptive cosmos, forgot their divine nature and became non-humans” (p. 19). At the same time, Slavinski critiques the authoritarian structure of Scientology under Hubbard’s leadership, describing the strict discipline aboard the Sea Org fleet as resembling a “floating gulag”, where members endured harsh punishments for minor infractions.

It is notable that Slavinski, who had a personal relationship with Scientology and was a member for a brief period, published this article in 1989, over a decade after ending his involvement with the institution on negative terms in 1978. This suggests, at the very least, a complicated relationship with the topic. In the same article, Slavinski also mentions the prominent Scientology dissident Charles Berner, his mentor and the creator of the Enlightenment Intensive system. Berner left Scientology in 1964, arguing that it “emphasized power too much, whereas the basic human need is love, and the highest goal is the Truth about one’s being” (p. 19). Slavinski’s acknowledgment of Berner further reinforces his ambivalent stance toward Hubbard and his organization.

⁶⁰ “Od blata do zlata,” Issue 25, May 1991.

⁶¹ “Nevidljivo Oko Svesti,” Issue 27, 1990.

Adding further complexity to this relationship is an article published in April 1991, where Slavinski discusses the philosophy of “Idenics”⁶² a technique derived from Scientology. About it, Slavinski writes: “Idenics accepts the teaching of classical spiritual systems that the Atman or True Being neither does anything to others, nor has anyone done anything to it. Its essence is nothingness devoid of any identities. But the True Being creates them; identities are its means of communication with the physical universe and the social world, its intermediaries for experiences and activities” (p. 14). Slavinski appears to appreciate the gnostic depth of this system, noting that “Idenics makes it possible to perceive the true sources of human existence” (p. 17), an acknowledgment that contrasts with his earlier critique of Scientology’s authoritarian tendencies under Hubbard.

Interestingly, Slavinski’s article about Hubbard is accompanied by an image of two members of the Ecclesia Gnostica Alba (EGA) performing the famous “auditing” practice developed by Scientology. The inclusion of this photograph, alongside Slavinski’s balanced approach to the subject, further illustrates his nuanced relationship with Scientology. While he clearly valued its psychological and spiritual tools, he remained critical of its organizational structure and leadership.

This nuanced treatment of Scientology reflects Slavinski’s ambivalent relationship with it—a blend of admiration for its therapeutic and philosophical tools and criticism of its exploitative and controlling aspects. As N. Radulović observes, Slavinski would deliberately distance himself from Scientology later in his career, with references to it becoming increasingly vague or outright negative (Radulović N. 2020). Nonetheless, his treatment of the topic in these articles suggests that he continued to engage with its ideas, seeking to integrate its valuable elements into a broader, more humanistic spiritual framework.

By 1992, Slavinski’s presence in *Tajne* diminished, coinciding with significant changes in the magazine’s editorial direction. Under the new director, the number of regular contributors dropped drastically, from 25 to just 9, likely a result of budget cuts amidst the economic turmoil of the early 1990s. This financial strain culminated in the magazine’s temporary suspension in 1993 due to a lack of funds. Interestingly, Slavinski’s connection to *Tajne* persisted indirectly through his son, Filip Mihajlović, who appeared as a contributor in 1994, although there were no articles under his name. In addition, his books continued to be promoted in the magazine in the last two years, under the advertisements of Vladimir Madić and Maja Mandić’s publishing house *Esotheria*, who, in addition to promoting their books with full-page advertisements, also started to publish some articles in the magazine.

⁶² “Filozofija Idenika, Silazak sa ringišpila života” Issue 35, April 1991.

Metatextual analysis

Since we are discussing books and publishing houses, we also can affirm that their advertisements, among other metatextual elements of the magazine, also offer valuable information about the broader context of that time in Yugoslavia.

One of the first examples are, as previously mentioned, the numerous advertisements from various publishers throughout the issues, which reflect the dramatic growth of esoteric publishing in Yugoslavia during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Unlike the 1970s era, when esoteric books were prohibitively expensive and often had to be ordered from abroad, the late 1980s and early 1990s saw the emergence of local publishers⁶³. Among them, Atlantida, Poni Press, Esoteria, and Akvarius, to name a few, were the publishers that made even more esoteric works available in Serbo-Croatian, marking a significant cultural shift. Local esoteric writers like Slavinski, who previously had to self-publish and distribute flyers in letterboxes to promote their books due to the lack of an interested publisher, could now find a platform where their work could be published and reach a wider audience. Whether this accessibility to esoteric literature in the local language contributed to the growth of interest in spirituality and alternative philosophies in the region during that time period, or whether the growth of this interest fueled the creation of more publishers, is not easy to determine – nor is it likely the only factor at play. What can be affirmed, however, is that the late 1980s and 1990s witnessed a significant cultural change regarding the availability of these types of practices and discourses, as well as society's general attitude towards them (Radulović L. 2007, Radulović N. 2020), to the point that it could even be considered a “hype”. In this context, the magazine became a key platform for advertising these materials, ranging from translations of Western classics by Aleister Crowley and Rudolf Steiner to works by regional authors. Beyond the books, the magazine also featured ads for esoteric products such as talismans –which were gifted– bioenergetic machines, and astrology consultations. These offerings reflect the commercialization of spirituality and its integration into everyday life during this period.

Even on a more tangible level, the magazine also reflects changes at the economic level, evident in these four indicators: prices, staff cuts, the suspension of magazine publication for an entire year, and notably, the quality of the paper.

In its early years, the magazine was produced on high quality paper, glossy pages and a colorful layout, with about 90 pages per issue. However, from 1992

⁶³ Private publishing became increasingly possible in Yugoslavia starting the 1980s, enabling these small houses to produce esoteric and alternative works. Major state publishers also occasionally released such titles, as in the present case of BIGZ and *Tajne*, reflecting a loosening of state control. Before this, in the 1970s, most distribution relied on self-publishing or ordering from abroad.

onwards, this changed drastically: the paper became rougher and of lower quality, the number of color pages was considerably reduced and the number of regular contributors (employees) dropped from 25 to just 9, possibly due to budget cuts. Hyperinflation, one of the worst in recorded history, also directly affected the magazine's prices. Initially affordable at between 1,000 and 2,000 dinars in 1987–1988, the cost skyrocketed to a staggering 70,000 dinars by the end of 1989. In 1990, prices dropped to a range of 12–15 dinars⁶⁴, reflecting not only the collapse of the economy, but also the decline in production quality. Finally, in 1991 the magazine was selling for around 100 dinars, but in 1992 it doubled from 150 to 300 dinars in just two months. Thus, as mentioned above, in 1993 the magazine ceased publication due to lack of funds. *Tajne*'s return in 1994 was accompanied by an editorial letter reflecting the difficulties of the time⁶⁵. The editor, Ilija Rapajić, said about it:

“During the period when *Tajne* was not published, creating and selling magazines became almost an impossible task. We were all preoccupied with existential problems, and as you have experienced, there were many of them. Could it have been different? Time will tell. However, the conditions for production did not allow for any experimentation. *Tajne* has been a high-quality publication from its very first issue, with a unique image that we wanted to preserve at all costs because we spent years building it.”

Discussion

As Yugoslavia faced increasing fragmentation and socio-political instability, spiritual practices began to shift towards more individualized approaches. A notable example of this evolution is Živorad Mihajlović Slavinski's work, which exemplifies the shifting landscape of Yugoslav esotericism during these times of change. His contributions to *Tajne* reflect the eclectic nature of his spiritual practices, drawing from a wide range of influences, from alternative psychology and Scientology to Gnostic rituals. These diverse topics mirror the broader occulture phenomenon of the era. Early in his career, especially with the creation of the Ecclesia Gnostica Alba, Slavinski positioned himself as a proponent of a more collective, ritualistic spirituality. However, as the region's political and economic landscape grew increasingly unstable, his focus shifted toward individual empowerment and more pragmatic methods, such as Excalibur. This change highlighted his adaptation to the growing demand for per-

⁶⁴ The reason for this extraordinary drop lies in the economic reforms implemented by then-Prime Minister Ante Marković, who fixed the dinar to the German mark at a rate of 1:7 after a period of severe inflation.

⁶⁵ Issue 1, March 1994.

sonal healing and self-directed strategies; a transformation he would formalize in 1996 with the dissolution of the Ecclesia Gnostica Alba and the creation of Spiritual Technology. This evolution reflects a broader trend in occulture during the period, where spiritual practices became more individualized, emphasizing personal transformation and healing over collective spiritual movements. Slavinski's career trajectory illustrates not only changes within *Tajne* but also a larger transformation in esotericism, responding to political and cultural tensions while offering new frameworks for individuals to negotiate their position in a rapidly changing world.

We can also argue, as the previous sections show, that *Tajne* was not merely a passive conduit for esoteric knowledge but an active participant in the dissemination of alternative spirituality. As Mark Morrisson notes, occult periodicals function as bridges between private, esoteric practices and the public sphere (Morrisson 2008). *Tajne* mirrored this role, introducing esoteric themes such as parapsychology, ufology, and alternative medicine, which were rarely covered in mainstream publications. Furthermore, its inclusion of reader participation sections reflected the magazine's role in facilitating the creation of a community of like-minded individuals. This participatory aspect was perhaps one of the magazine's most important contributions to the occult milieu of that time, besides its dissemination of ideas through written articles.

The success and popularity of *Tajne*, alongside the creation of other similar magazines like *Arka* or the long-lived *Treće Oko*, indicate a public craving for such content. The simultaneous rise of esoteric magazines in the late 1980s signals a growing interest in alternative spiritualities and unconventional knowledge. This growing demand reflects a societal shift towards self-exploration, spirituality, and a broader understanding of the self beyond traditional religious frameworks. As L. Radulović (2007) observes, and Braux (2017) confirms, these types of spiritual search are not uncommon—although not the only reason—during times when people cannot find stability or a sense of trust in their political, social or religious institutions, as was the case in the post-socialist era.

Tajne within the framework of Occulture

Occulture, as defined by Christopher Partridge, encapsulates a spectrum of beliefs that exist outside institutionalized religion, including Eastern spirituality, the paranormal, and New Age philosophies. *Tajne* exemplifies Partridge's framework by offering readers access to diverse spiritual and esoteric practices while simultaneously framing some of these topics in a quasi-scientific context, helping legitimize them (Partridge 2004). This reflects a broader trend where alternative knowledge systems became more accessible and acceptable to the

general public during the period of Yugoslavia's social, political, and economic turmoil. According to L. Radulović, the popularity and success of these practices was also partly due to the existence of a government that not only tolerated them, but actively encouraged them⁶⁶ (Radulović L. 2007). In this context *Tajne* served as a space for spiritual exploration but also as a site where these practices were publicly examined and debated, contributing to the growing popularization and normalization of esotericism.

The shift in content from esoteric topics to more mainstream, entertainment-focused articles under the editorial leadership of Petar Luković (1991-1994) signals a shift in the public's engagement with spirituality. While esotericism remained central, Luković's introduction of pop culture elements, such as horror movie reviews, expanded the magazine's scope. This diversification not only made the magazine more appealing to a broader audience but also highlighted the intersection between esoteric knowledge and popular culture, further cementing *Tajne*'s role as a unique cultural space that bridged alternative knowledge with mainstream interests.

Despite being published by one of Yugoslavia's largest publishing houses, *Tajne* retained characteristics of alternative media. According to Aristizábal Jaramillo and Arias Moncada (2018), alternative media serve as platforms for marginalized voices and cultures. *Tajne* was a prime example of such a space, promoting spiritual practices that were often sidelined by mainstream discourse. Its content catered to those seeking alternative spiritualities, self-help tools, and knowledge systems that fell outside traditional religious institutions. However, as the magazine faced financial pressures, it increasingly incorporated more commercialized content, such as paid advertisements for tarot readings and other esoteric services. This shift points to the magazine's navigation of economic constraints and the broader commercialization of spirituality during Yugoslavia's socio-political decline.

The magazine's increasing reliance on advertisements and the introduction of paid content in its later years also reflect the broader economic shifts that impacted not just *Tajne* but Yugoslav society at large. With the hyperinflation and the economic instability of the early 1990s, *Tajne* adapted by introducing advertorial content and placing a greater emphasis on paid spiritual services. These changes not only reflect the economic pressures faced by the magazine but also the growing commercialization of esoteric knowledge. As discussed by Morrisson (2008), occult periodicals often become marketplaces for alternative knowledge, reflecting the intersection between cultural products and economic realities.

⁶⁶ For a detailed analysis of the political use of fortunetellers and their prophecies, see chapter 5 of her cited book.

Moreover, the transition in content toward more political and future-oriented themes after 1991 (such as predictions about the future of Yugoslavia, or even the alleged cures for AIDS) demonstrates how *Tajne* functioned as a medium for responding to the collective anxieties of its readership.

Occulture, as a conceptual framework, is deeply connected to the broader socio-cultural shifts that reframe traditional religious paradigms in contemporary societies. As Partridge (2004) argues, the practices encompassed under this term often have increasingly moved away from institutionalized religion and its formal structures, embracing more eclectic, personal, and alternative forms of spirituality. This transformation is particularly evident in the content of *Tajne*, which reflected and actively contributed to this displacement of what is traditionally understood as “the religious”.

In the context of late 1980s and early 1990s Yugoslavia, the fall of socialism and its “civil religion” (Buchenau 2005; Flere 2005) together with the fragmented political and economic landscape, created fertile ground for spiritual alternatives to flourish. With the decline of trust in traditional institutions (Radulović L. 2007) including the state and established religions, people turned to alternative frameworks to make sense of their lives and the shifting world around them.

Tajne thus embodies a cultural space where this displacement occurred in real time. While Yugoslavia was experiencing the collapse of its socialist framework and the rise of nationalist tensions, the magazine became a site for exploring and negotiating new religious and spiritual boundaries. It blurred the lines between religion and secular knowledge, offering readers tools for personal and spiritual empowerment that did not require adherence to traditional religious institutions. In doing so, it contributed to the reimagining of spirituality in a way that transcended its conventional institutional forms.

This displacement is not necessarily a rejection of traditional religion but a redefinition of what constitutes spiritual knowledge. As we see on the pages of *Tajne*, the magazine treated esoteric subjects as legitimate fields of inquiry, often framing them through quasi-scientific language or philosophical discussions that gave them a sense of intellectual seriousness. This legitimization process is part of what Partridge (2004) identifies as a broader trend where alternative spiritual practices (whether rooted in Eastern philosophies, the occult, or New Age ideas) are reframed as valid, even necessary, explorations of the self and the universe. *Tajne*'s editorial decisions to mix paranormal content with practical advice on astrology, tarot, and other esoteric practices demonstrate the displacement of the religious from sacred, institutionalized spaces into more fluid, personal, and often playful forms of spirituality, offering a counter-narrative to the institutional and state-controlled ideologies of religion and politics.

The more personal and individualized spiritualities promoted in *Tajne* reflect what Partridge terms “mystical religion,” a form of spirituality detached from

communal religious practices (Partridge 2004). This spirituality is often characterized by a fluid and eclectic combination of ideas drawn from diverse sources: Eastern meditation techniques, Western occultism, parapsychology, and the emerging New Age movement. It mirrors the growing trend of spiritual seekers turning away from fixed dogmas and embracing belief systems tailored to individual experiences and needs.

An important aspect of this eclecticism is the promotion of fluidity in belief systems, where diverse spiritual practices, beliefs, and systems of knowledge coexist and inform each other. This fluidity resonated with many individuals in the late 1980s and early 1990s, who, amidst political and social instability, sought new ways of engaging with spiritual life. For instance, *Tajne*'s coverage of parapsychology and UFOlogy treated these topics as areas of legitimate exploration, blurring the line between the religious and scientific. Articles on communicating with the dead, reading tarot cards, or receiving guidance from extraterrestrials contributed to a broader dialogue about finding personal meaning and understanding and even community in an increasingly uncertain world.

In this way, *Tajne* played a significant role in representing and legitimizing the displacement of the religious phenomenon, not just by fostering alternative spiritualities but by articulating these shifts in language and formats accessible to a broader audience. This process was not limited to *Tajne* but was part of a larger cultural phenomenon that Partridge identifies as the occult revival, where spiritual seekers and curious individuals alike were drawn to systems of belief that offered direct, unmediated experiences of the divine or the mystical (Partridge 2004). *Tajne* facilitated this shift, not by rejecting religion, but by expanding what it meant to be spiritual, offering a space where alternative forms of religiosity could be explored, legitimized, and celebrated.

The magazine provided readers with a unique lens through which to understand spirituality in the modern world; one that went beyond institutionalized religion and embraced a more inclusive, diverse, and fluid approach to the sacred. This shift has important implications for the study of religion, suggesting that the religious phenomenon itself is evolving, moving away from traditional boundaries and structures to encompass new forms of spiritual engagement and exploration.

At last, through its coverage of these topics, one could also argue that *Tajne* contributed to the re-enchantment of the modern world, offering readers a counterpoint to the rationalization and disenchantment associated with late socialism. The magazine's exploration of psychic phenomena, among others, was not only an intellectual exercise but also an invitation to engage with a mystical understanding of reality; one that transcended conventional scientific boundaries and offered new possibilities for personal and collective transformation.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed *Tajne* magazine as a significant cultural artifact that both reflected and shaped the socio-political and spiritual transformations in late Yugoslavia. By exploring esoteric practices, alternative spiritualities, and encouraging reader participation, its analysis offers valuable insights into the displacement of religious phenomena beyond institutional boundaries in a post-socialist context.

Using Partridge's framework of occulture, this study highlights how *Tajne* served as a mediator of esoteric knowledge, bridging private spiritual practices with a public, engaged readership. The magazine's incorporation of diverse traditions (from Eastern meditation to Western occultism) likely resonated with readers in search of non-institutional or more personalized forms of spirituality. In doing so, *Tajne* mirrored and strengthened a strand of spiritual experimentation already present among some segments of Yugoslav society. In this sense, the magazine both reflected and helped expand a growing cultural space for individualized spiritual practices, which became particularly visible in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Through participatory content, such as reader letters and sections like "My Paranormal Experience", *Tajne* created a spiritual community that transcended geographical and political boundaries. This imagined community of like-minded individuals was particularly significant amidst the national fragmentation of the era, offering shared values and beliefs during a time of profound uncertainty.

The magazine's evolution under Petar Luković in the early 1990s demonstrated its adaptability to changing social and economic conditions. By blending esotericism with pop culture, entertainment, and political predictions, *Tajne* broadened its appeal while maintaining its focus on spiritual exploration. However, this transition (and especially the following one) also reflected the growing commercialization of esotericism, as the magazine faced financial pressures during this period of economic instability.

More than just a magazine, *Tajne* stands as a cultural text that portrays how spirituality, once confined to institutional settings, was reimagined and individualized in late 20th-century in this region. It illustrates the displacement of religious phenomena and the rise of occulture in post-socialist Yugoslavia. Moreover, the magazine's adjustments in content, pricing, and production quality provide tangible reflections of the broader economic and political challenges of the time.

Ultimately, *Tajne* offers a valuable perspective on the cultural and spiritual shifts of its era. By integrating esotericism, popular culture, and community engagement, *Tajne* shaped readers' spiritual practices and perceptions while capturing the hopes, fears, and aspirations of its audience. As both a product and a

participant in these transformations, *Tajne* stands as a testament to the dialectic relationship between cultural artifacts and social change, providing tools for confronting uncertainty and reimagining a collective future.

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*Okultura i mediji pre i tokom raspada Jugoslavije:
slučaj časopisa Tajne (1987–1994)*

Ova studija ispituje jugoslovenski časopis *Tajne*, objavljen između 1987. i 1994. godine, kao ključni primer uspona „okulture“ u godinama koje su pretile raspadu Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije. Delujući pod sloganom „Časopis za granične regione nauka“, publikacija, više nego skladište ezoteričnih tekstova, služila je kao dinamičan alternativni medijski prostor koji je integrisao duhovne i okultne ideje u širi kulturni diskurs. Oslanjajući se na okvir okulture Kristofera Partridža, tvrdimo da je časopis *Tajne* premostio privatne ezoterijske prakse i širu čitalačku publiku validirajući marginalne teme poput parapsihologije, alternativne medicine i ufologije, smeštajući ih na preseku naučnog istraživanja i okultnog verovanja.

Kao kulturni artefakt, časopis je prevazišao pasivnu informativnu ulogu, delujući kao sredstvo za izgradnju posebne zajednice. Učešće čitalaca negovalo je mrežu koja je pružala osećaj pripadnosti ljudima širom zemlje. Studija prati uredničku evoluciju časopisa, posebno pod urednikom Petrom Lukovićem (1991–1994), koji je kombinovao ezoterični sadržaj sa pop kulturom i zabavom kako bi proširio privlačnost.

Takođe identifikujemo pomak tokom produbljivanja jugoslovenske krize, gde je ekonomska nestabilnost doprinela komercijalizaciji duhovnosti, što se vidi u reklamnim člancima i plaćenim uslugama proricanja. Paralelno sa pogoršanjem političkih uslova, sadržaj se pomerio od optimističnog samoistraživanja ka politički obojenim teorijama zavere i futurologiji. U krajnjoj liniji, ovaj rad pozicionira *Tajne* kao kulturni barometar koji odražava „ponovno začaravanje“ sektora jugoslovenskog društva, nudeći i prostor za socijalizaciju i fleksibilan duhovni okvir kroz koji čitaoci mogu da tumače neizvesnu društveno-političku stvarnost.

Ključne reči: okultura, alternativni mediji, popularna kultura, Ezoterija, Jugoslavija

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