

# POSTMODERNISM IN BELGRADE ARCHITECTURE: BETWEEN CULTURAL MODERNITY AND SOCIETAL MODERNISATION

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*The paper explores the introduction and articulation of ideas and aesthetic practice of postmodernism in architecture of late socialism in Yugoslavia, with the focus on Belgrade architecture scene. Theoretical and methodological point of departure of this analysis is Jürgen Habermas's thesis of modernity as an incomplete, i.e., unfinished project, from his influential essay "Die Moderne: Ein unvollendetes Projekt" (1980). The thematic framework of the paper is shifted towards issues raised by Habermas which concern relations of cultural modernity and societal modernization, or rather towards consideration of architectural postmodernity in relation to the split between culture and society. The paper investigates architectural discourse which was profiled in Belgrade in 1980s, in a historical context of cultural modernity simultaneous with Habermas's text, but in different conditions of societal modernization of Yugoslav late socialism. In that, the principle methodological question concerns the interpretation of postmodern architecture as part of the new cultural production within the social restructuring of late and/or end of socialism as a system, that being analogous to Fredric Jameson's thesis of "Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (1984).*

**Key words:** incomplete project of modernity, cultural modernity, societal modernisation, postmodernism in architecture, conservatism.

## INTRODUCTION<sup>2</sup>

The domain of architecture had already become a privileged field where post-modernism as a new aesthetic production was most visible,<sup>1</sup> when, on September 11, 1980, Jürgen Habermas delivered a speech in the form of essay titled "Die Moderne: Ein unvollendetes Projekt" (Habermas, 1980), on the occasion of receiving the Theodor W. Adorno Award by the City of Frankfurt.<sup>2</sup> It is not an oddity, thus, that Habermas chose to open his speech with the reference to architecture on the occasion of the prize awarded for outstanding achievement in philosophy, music, theatre and film. The speech, translated into English, was delivered as a James Lecture of the New York Institute for the Humanities at New York University on March 5, 1981, and soon thereafter it was published in the U. S.

under the changed title "Modernity versus Postmodernity" (Habermas, 1981). Its now classic title in English "Modernity – An Incomplete Project" was in fact a third re-titling of the same text, when it was published as an opening essay in the book edited by Hal Foster.<sup>3</sup> The publication of this text in English marked an important point in the post-modernism debate as it became available to wide audiences of English-speaking academia, and the essay's thesis subsequently has become one of the most contentious issues in contemporary theory.

Taking as his cue the 1<sup>st</sup> International Architecture Exhibition in Venice,<sup>4</sup> and its critical reception in the German press, Habermas notes an echo of disappointment. In his opening statement, he points to reversal as the dominant current of the times, whereby architects formed "an avant-garde of reverse fronts", and "sacrificed the tradition of modernity", thus making room for a new historicism, and placing "on the agenda theories of post-enlightenment, postmodernity,

even of posthistory" (Habermas, 1981: 3). With these prefatory remarks, Habermas implies both his understanding of postmodern as anti-modern, and his own pro-modern/anti-postmodern position. These issues may appear distant in the post-industrial societies and debates of today, where Habermas's uttering from thirty years ago often serves not as a structuring theme, but as a metaphor. Even so, arguing that Habermas's essay still retains its critical edge, I shall take its close reading as this paper's *parti* for investigation of specific architectural discourse which was profiled in Yugoslavia in a historical context of cultural modernity simultaneous with Habermas's text, but in totally different conditions of societal modernization. This analytical pairing is consequent, not to an accidental temporal simultaneity, but to the reading of currency of Habermas's ideas and works in Yugoslavia of the period. Direct contacts and discussions with the Yugoslav philosophers and intellectuals of the *Praxis* circle, which started with Habermas's participation in the Korčula

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Summer School, and invitations to lectures in Zagreb and Belgrade as early as 1965, and in publication of his texts and reviews of his works in the *Praxis* journal, as well as fairly prompt translations of his books. Indicative of this is, *inter alia*, the publication of his book on public sphere (Habermas, 1969), which was translated into Serbo-Croat twenty years prior to the work's translation into English.<sup>5)</sup> The contacts continued well into the 1980s with publications of his works and his engagement in the editorial board of *Praxis International* journal. Subsequently, the 1980s saw relatively timely translations of his essays on modernity and postmodernity (Habermas, 1986a, 1986b, 1988).

## METHODOLOGY: AN ANALOGUE TYPOLOGY

For Yugoslavia, the year 1980 had special significance, as Josip Broz Tito (1892-1980), the lifelong president of the Republic, the leading figure of the Yugoslav resistance movement in the Second World War, and the leader of the Yugoslav Communist Party, died on May 4. This event is deemed to have set in motion a process of disintegration of Yugoslavia as a multinational state, the break-up of its self-management socialism as a political and economic system, and definitive suspension of the Yugoslav idea. This might be, if anything, still considered as an unfinished process and could be seen as analogous to Habermas's thesis of an incomplete project. The point I am trying to make here is that the whole region of the former Yugoslavia, or at least Serbia, is still within this *longue durée* process.

In the 1980s, the whole bundle of societal modernization processes, which were cumulative, mutually reinforcing, rapid and dynamic in the whole post-war period, had come to a grinding halt. After the constitutional revision of 1974, Yugoslavia had become one of the most essentially decentralized political systems in the world, an effective confederation with its eight constitutive administrative units – six republics and two autonomous provinces – which were granted considerable autonomy from the federal government. In 1980, following Tito's death, this highly emancipated and modern complex system of governance became largely unworkable, with the rising national/ethnic fragmentation, particularism of interests, and lack of consensus on major questions regarding the federal unity and responsibilities towards problems of regional inequalities. Also, while Yugoslav socialism recorded constant economic dynamism of both intensive and extensive growth, as from 1980 the

macroeconomic performance figures started to decline, and subsequently regress. A number of adverse economic factors coincided in mid to late 1970s – rise in the oil prices and the world economic recession, and U. S. interest rate increases affecting the country's debt mostly denominated in dollars – which made the prospects of economic structural adjustments unavoidable. Subsequently, the 1980s were the years of economic stagnation, which rendered the problems of restructuring even more complicated.<sup>6)</sup>

As much as the 1980s may be seen as history now, the seeds of the contemporary condition existed in this period of disillusionment with the past, and uncertainty about the future, which marked the time around Tito's death. Leading to his hypothesis on theory of the postmodern, Fredric Jameson reminds on the classical Marxian view, that “the seeds of the future already exist within the present and must be conceptually disengaged from it, both through analysis and through political praxis”, and goes on the, now classic, Jamesonian assessment of postmodernism as “a general modification of culture itself within the social restructuration of late capitalism as a system” (Jameson, 1984: 63). My argument probes this hypothesis in order to set the principle methodological question concerning the interpretation of postmodernist architecture as part of the new cultural production within the social restructuration of late and/or end of socialism as a system. This leads me to see categories from Habermas's typology of dominant conservatism of 1980, notwithstanding the reductionism of such a typological analysis, as seeds of those practices which can be traced to today's aesthetic production.

Habermas saw but negative prospects for the contemporary project of modernity imbued by the intentions of the Enlightenment. In the closing section of his Adorno prize text, he elaborates a typology of what he calls “extravagant programs which have tried to negate modernity” (Habermas, 1981: 11). He differentiates three types of conservatism: that of the *Young Conservatives*, who justify an anti-modernism while being themselves within the modern paradigm; that of the *Old Conservatives*, who advocate withdrawal to pre-modern positions; and that of the *Neoconservatives*, who embrace scientific and technological progress and capitalist growth, while asserting art's absolute autonomy, as well as that of science and morality (Habermas, 1981: 13-14). The three types, thus, correspond to anti-modern, pre-modern, and post-modern theoretical positions, respectively. Tested against architectural discourse, this typology

will be used as a structuring theme, which will be re-examined and re-read through other critical and theoretical positions. In that sense, Habermas's typology will provide a starting point for assessment of early postmoderns of Belgrade architecture scene, and it will be tested against the specificities of architectural discourse, providing alternative reading of typological outcomes.

## TIMELINE AND ANALYSIS: THE ANXIETY IN THE PRESENT

Dismissing the Enlightenment project of the modern as eaten up by scepticism, Croatian architect and theoretician Nikola Polak attempts to give a political reading of the postmodern for the local consumption in socialist Yugoslavia. In his enthusiastic pro-postmodern review of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Exhibition of Architecture at the Venice Biennial, he diagnoses that in Yugoslavia, as well as abroad, i.e., in the developed West, it was “the bureaucratic dictatorship”, which turned the modern culture, even if ideologically founded on the socialist mode of production, into its opposite (Polak, 1981: 10). He concludes his critique by stating that the modern lost the relationship to the society, clearly pointing to the gaping split between culture of high modernism and the lifeworld of the everyday, socialist or capitalist alike. In the Yugoslav context of declining societal modernization, postmodernity was perceived by its proponents as anticipatory of a sort of cultural (counter)revolution. Yet, even if it did displace the materialist conception of politics of space to idealistic terrain of the aesthetics, the nascent postmodernism produced certain alternate concepts of space, urbanity, everyday, citizen, and the like.

On a timeline of postmodernism in Serbia, the year 1980 is the point of intersection, and the turning point for three distinctive architectural discourses which formed in the post-war period as critical of general architecture production of socialist modernism. For the purposes of analysis, I would suggest that they are examined in analogue to the typology offered by Habermas, notwithstanding the limitations inherent to typological analysis. Coming from different starting points, these three heterogeneous lines form, over a long period of their respective critical activities from mid-1960s onwards, a fairly consistent architectural discourse which sets in motion the postmodernist architecture. I would argue that these three lines of thought and practice most visibly demonstrate the period's quest for a separation of cultural modernity from the rhythms of modernisation of society, unrelenting

in the early stages and of diminishing intensity or even stagnant, in the later period. The architects whose work will be analysed here are representatives of three post-war generations graduating from the Faculty of Architecture University of Belgrade in 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and beginning of 1980s. They are: Bogdan Bogdanović (1922-2010) graduated in 1950, Ranko Radović (1935-2005) graduated in 1962, and the group of architects MEČ, whose founders Dejan Ećimović (1948-2002) graduated in 1974, Mustafa Musić (1949) and Marjan Čehovin (1950) in 1975, and members Slobodan Maldini (1956) and Stevan Žutić (1954), graduated in 1980 and 1981, respectively. To come to the point, I consider the introduction of postmodernist ideas and postmodernism in Belgrade architecture to be a multigenerational, heterogeneous, long, and discontinuous process.

In 1980-81, Bogdan Bogdanović finalized what turned out to be his three last monumental works: Second World War memorials in Vukovar, Čačak, and Trstenik (Popina), or, as he himself calls them, the Mausoleum triad<sup>7)</sup> (Fig. 1). The three mausoleums are of a roughly same size, they share the same harmonic triadic geometric canon (3:6:9:12/15/18), and all three are constructed of the same Jablanica gabbro stone. The distinctiveness of their respective stereometric structures, however, stems from the words which describe each of them separately, i. e., three corresponding semantic sets. Words *gate* – *small gate within a big one* – *three identical gates* – *three gates joined into megaron* are relating to the Mausoleum in Čačak. *Pyramid* –

*prism pierced by cylinder: four oculi lined up along cylinder axis* relate to Popina Mausoleum, and *first cone – second cone – third cone – fourth cone – fifth cone* to the one in Vukovar. In the explanatory correspondence related to the exhibition of his work in the Gallery "Spektar" in Zagreb (1982), Bogdanović writes: "Once I finalized the three above mentioned constructions, with which I have most certainly and unconditionally ended my career as an architect – master builder, I have proudly established a fact that my first and somewhat Ledoux-ian Monument to the Jewish Victims of Fascism (Belgrade, 1952) – itself largely held to the same geometric canon" (Bužančić and Bogdanović, 1983: 17). On this very point of constancy in his architectural thinking and work, he insists again in the concluding remarks, when he says: "I was chiselled (myself, as well as all my blocks) from a single solid flawless chunk (of stone), and I have not changed the least in thirty years" (Bužančić and Bogdanović, 1983: 17).

Bogdanović's opus of nineteen realized works of memorial architecture, or sites and monuments dedicated to the antifascist struggle of Yugoslav peoples in the Second World War, stands apart as a major spatial, architectural, artistic and artisan, as well as a profound humanist undertaking of an idiosyncratic character. In his writings and drawings, Bogdanović reached back into the repository of the premodern, or rather into deep layers of the urban history such as harmony, logos, symbol, myth, oneiric, cult, ritual, and cosmology (Bogdanović, 1963, 1976). It is from this breviary that he derived a

distinctive formal language of his memorials, combined with an understanding of the specificity of landscape and place, mastery of materials and workmanship, and ornamental richness second to none. This makes Bogdanović's creative disposition unique within the whole body of work of socialist modernism of the period between 1950-80.

Diverging from more recent criticism of Bogdanović as "[t]he man whose work most consistently fits into the ideology of Socialist Aestheticism" (Perović, 2003: 164),<sup>8)</sup> and by taking Habermas's typology as its point of departure, this analysis suggests a different reading. Could it not be more fitting to see Bogdanović as one of the *Old Conservatives* who "do not allow themselves to be contaminated by cultural modernism (and) [...] observe the modern world view and its merely procedural rationality, with sadness and recommend a withdrawal to a position *anterior* to modernity" (Habermas, 1981: 13)? As such, his work can be theorized today as pointing to postmodernism, and Bogdanović as one of the first postmodernists. The complexity of the work, and its multiple readings bring to the fore a view by Fredric Jameson, when he sees the first postmodernists not as only negating (high) modernism, or withdrawing from it, but as being in the "process of generating something altogether different" (Jameson, 1994: 131). In the case of Bogdanović, I would contend that the difference is in the autonomy of his work, which is, subject to laws of cultural modernity, freeing itself from the everyday lifeworld into domain of genuine aesthetic experience (Cf. Habermas, 1998: 423).

The *Young Conservatives* and *Neoconservatives* of Belgrade architecture of late socialism both lamented over cultural development, but what distinguished them from each other is the attitude to societal modernization, that of modern-anti-modernism, and that of disinterested aloofness of a critically acclaimed "exclusive, magically intoned intellectual current" (Lončarić, 1982: 28), respectively.

Position of Ranko Radović, as the researcher, urbanist, architect and theoretician of the modern and postmodern, could be seen as that of the *Young Conservatives* category. Of them, Habermas says, that they "recapitulate the basic experience of aesthetic modernity", and "[o]n the basis of modernistic attitudes, they justify an irreconcilable anti-modernism" (Habermas, 1981: 13). In France, he adds, this line leads from Bataille via Foucault to Derrida (Ibid.). I would contend that Radović threads this very line of French intellectual provenance. As a French doctorand, he defended his thesis

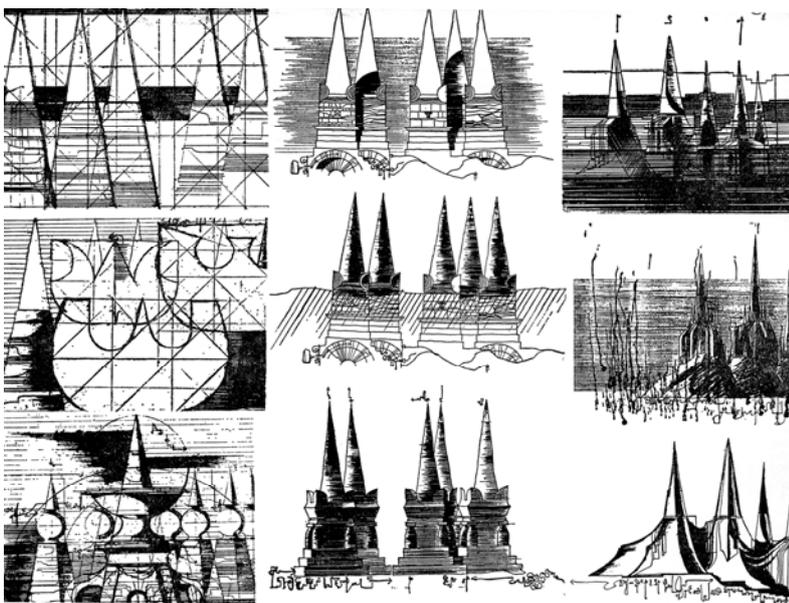


Figure 1. Bogdan Bogdanović, Dudik Mausoleum in Vukovar, drawing studies, ca. 1982.  
Source: *Arhitektura urbanizam*, no. 90-91 (1983)

titled *The Evolution and Continuity of Ideas and Forms in Modern Architecture*, at the Sorbonne in 1980.<sup>9</sup> In many of his texts and lectures, he habitually referred to French authors, indicating specifically that he appropriated Michael Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* as a methodology of researching (discontinuities) of architectural history (Radović, 1982: 8), and Roland Barthes's *The Pleasure of the Text* as an analogue to *jouissance* of architectural construction (Radović, 1985: 12).

Speaking of his own design concepts, Radović posited architecture as art concerned with environmental, historical and socio-cultural contexts.<sup>10</sup> Writing specifically about postmodern architecture, Habermas notes that questions of ecology and preservation of heritage often serve as points of departure for the rupture of form-function unity of modern architecture, and claims that such efforts, occasionally called "vitalist", retain something of the impulse of the Modern Movement, even if on a defensive (Habermas, 1998: 425). Radović was himself a man of "vitalist" efforts, who was deeply involved in research, writing, criticism, polemics, and lecturing on the modern and its contemporary revaluation, as well in reassessment of modern forms through his architectural design. The design of his most critically acclaimed architectural work, the Memorial House in Tjentište (1965-71), embodies this "vitalist" reconsideration of the modern. The composition of stereometric forms of steep pitched roofs, constructed in concrete, is modern in its form and structure, yet at the same time it lends itself to multiple reading. Recognising the multiple-coding in Radović's architecture, Charles Jencks places him into the most-up-to-date 1950-2000 Evolutionary Tree under "Metaphorical Metaphysical" tradition line, and under "Romantic Revival" movement (Dženkins, 2007: 50-51). In the context of this line, evolving from Le Corbusier's Chapel in Ronchamp, Radović is grouped with Ken Yeang, Nicholas Grimshaw, and Hiroshi Hara, representative of a vitalist, environmentally conscious revision of modern architecture. As for the case of Tjentište Memorial House, I would argue that its positioning under Critical Regionalism trend within the evolutionary tree might prove more theoretically productive. The ascetic materiality of concrete and the privileging of its tactile quality of the Memorial House architecture, brings to mind a reference to Radović's life-long fascination with, to use Arata Isozaki's term, Japan-ness in architecture. Furthermore, the House evokes vernacular timber architecture of the region, but, also, Marc-Antoine Laugier's concept of the "primitive

hut",<sup>11</sup> of which Radović wrote and lectured incessantly. These features, invoking "Occidental/Oriental interpretation" (Frampton, 1985: 315), suggest the anti-modern/anti-postmodern aesthetic of Critical Regionalism. As seen by Fredric Jameson in "negation of the negation", Critical Regionalism is negating some essential traits of modernism and, at the same time, negating the postmodern negations of modernism (Jameson, 1994: 190). Belonging to a "marginal practice" (Frampton, 1985: 327) of the semi-peripheral, Second World of real socialism, Radović's Critical Regionalism also corresponds to Jameson's proposition that, as an aesthetic, far from being a belated form of modernism, "Critical Regionalism could be characterized as a kind of postmodernism of the [...] semiperiphery if not the Third World", as opposed to stylistic postmodernism of the First World of developed capitalism (Jameson, 1994: 194-195).

Radović's creative sensibility was perhaps best manifested in his drawings, vignettes, free drawing, as well as architectural study drawings (Fig. 2). In the exhibition of drawings, titled "Architecture as an artistic language" (*Arhitektura kao likovni jezik*), held at the Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade in 1981, he conceives of architecture and urbanism as a field of antinomies, and suggests his method of research by drawing as mediating the aporias within this complex field. In that, he states his conviction that "architecture is and it has to continue to be art, but an art which is deeply diffused by reality, life, human aspirations and ideals", and undertakes "research of the artistic in architecture and of its language" (Radović, 1981: not paginated).<sup>12</sup> When seen in conjunction with his fascination with themes of

visionary architecture through history, and especially that of the Russian revolutionary architecture of which he wrote and lectured with great aplomb ever since the mid-1960s, his research through drawing attains a different, and more complex scope. What might then apply to his work is a pro-modern/pro-postmodern characterization of an emancipatory nature, and analogous to actualization of ideas and concepts of the avant-garde constructivism in contemporary architecture.

Reiterating Jameson's discussion on the ideological positions in the postmodernism debate, one could argue that Radović was not cancelling the modern in his work, but that he was in the process of generating a difference in extending the modernist concept of architectural praxis to a postmodernist concept of architecture as a discursive field. This is most obvious in the multiplicity of the media in which he developed and conveyed his ideas, concepts, beliefs, and practices, such as urban and architectural design, free drawing, essay, architecture criticism, journalism, book writing, and electronic media. But, it is primarily through verbal discourse, either in his masterly delivered lectures on history and theory of architecture from Mannerism and Baroque to contemporary postmodernism, held at both state and open universities, or in pioneering TV series of inspired educational programs on architecture, that he systematically constructed himself as a subject and the worlds of which he spoke.

Finally, and risking a gross typological simplification, *Neoconservatives* category could be tested against the activities of the group of architects MEČ (acronym of the founders' surnames Musić, Ećimović, Čehovin), which was formed on January 1,

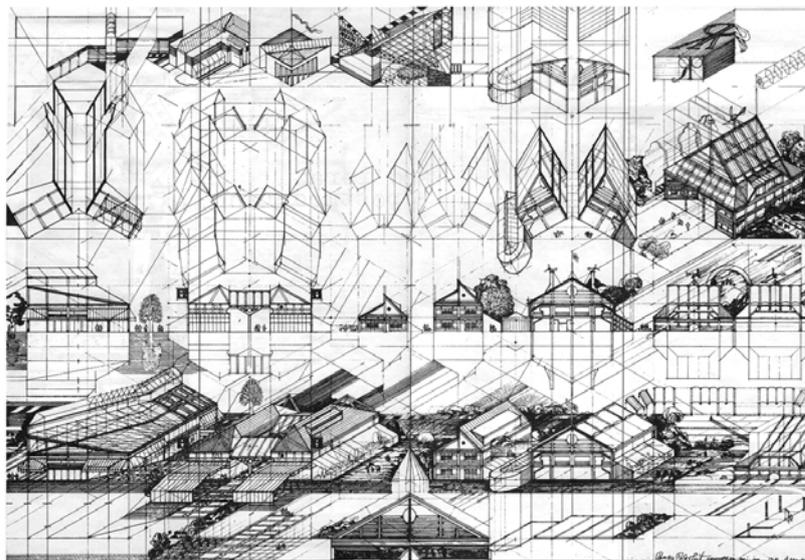


Figure 2. Ranko Radović, *Earth Architecture*, drawing, 1981. Source: *Komunikacija*, no. 3 (1981)

1980, following the individual members' exhibitions in the preceding few years.<sup>13</sup> Even though the pronunciation *match* of the acronym implies a boxing fight akin to that of the avant-garde, in the conditions of late socialism the nerves seem deadened and the edge blunted. Announcing a duel, MEČ in fact avoids confrontation on the modernist terrain of architectural competitions, and retreats into the white cube gallery. Using the medium of exhibition as the transmitter of ideas and concepts with the principal aim to "construct a theoretical-methodological apparatus", MEČ consciously opted for divergence of form and function (Ećimović, 1983: 26).

What seems to me to be the most interesting question for the purposes of this analysis is the attitude MEČ took in relation to the societal modernization processes. "The neoconservative doctrine blurs the relationship between the welcomed process of societal modernization on the one hand, and the lamented cultural development on the other", states Habermas (1981: 7). In the conditions of stagnating industry and diminished chances to enter into professional architectural practice, MEČ takes an aloof attitude towards their contemporaries engaged in competition activity, barely acknowledging their work on programs in sink with the modernization processes as an anachronism and anomaly of the Modern. They distance themselves from the conditions of the societal modernisation, by refusing to engage into established practices, and they form a mental liaison with the imaginary avant-garde, extracting its rhetoric if not its purpose. In reprocessing the avant-garde vocabulary for their own means, and their own time, they actually diffuse the explosive socio-political program, thus reusing it solely as a *poesis*.

When Dejan Ećimović, one of the group's founders and its theoretical spokesperson, reaches out to Marx in order to defend the group's aesthetic trans-historicity, i.e., its eclecticism, he but conforms to the dominant cultural Marxist paradigm, while diverting the aesthetic scrutiny from the socio-political and economic logic inherent in Marx's thought. Symptomatically, the supporting reference in this argumentation is not to be found in the original text by Marx, but in the interpretation by a local Marxist aesthetician (Ećimović, 1983: 26-7).<sup>14</sup> The theoretical outcome further defuses the Marxian argument to the aesthetic, anthropological-ontological positions, and reduces the classical concept of "exchange value" to communication-reception process. In a more direct architectural statement, and with no pretensions to the theoretical, let alone Marxian argument, Mustafa Musić, also founder of MEČ, puts the emphasis on his concern for needs of an individual within/over the collective. Habermas points to such a tendency to limit the aesthetic experience to privacy as a *Neoconservatives'* trait. Referring to one of his most prominent early works "Slavija – Through My Window" (1980), Musić uses terms such as "past as a field for rhetorical operations ... personal mental image of the space ... pluralism ... superstructure of spatial identity ... genius loci" (Musić, 1981).

In his texts, Musić introduces often conflicting notions blurring the emancipatory and phenomenological theoretical positions, narrative of the social function of architecture – dialectical relation to societal community, humanization of urban space – and that of pure immanence of architecture. But it is in his projects, where irony first shows its face, and quite successfully so (Fig. 3). Rather than being in cahoots with the great Moderns,

Musić plays with them, using different postmodernist techniques from direct citation to metonymy and juxtaposition. In Slavija, he intelligently quotes Adolf Loos by inserting the great architect's most contentious project for Chicago Tribune Tower from 1922, into the most contentious location of Belgrade urbanism since the 1920s, i.e. the empty lot colloquially named by Belgraders as "Mitić's hole". In addition, he plays a complex metonymical game, by substituting a historic socialist topos of the Hall of Piece, with the naming of its reconstructed modern apparition of popular culture, Slavija Cinema, which is, in the final loop, substituted by Musić's own design vision, itself imbued with the elusive spirit of Belgrade early modernism.<sup>15</sup> This seemingly complex operation, however, is carried out effortlessly, with the liberating superficiality, taking us beyond the harsh realities of societal modernisation of late socialism and into pure imagination.

While proclaiming themselves as well as being proclaimed by pro-postmodernist critics as an alternative, with little to show in terms of realisations, MEČ as a group failed at forming a coherent architectural oeuvre. Where they succeeded most admirably in forsaking the dogma of high modernism, is in establishing a sort of trans-conceptual field of architectural reflection and theorizing of different facets of the emerging postmodernist discourse of modern classicism, radical eclecticism, historicism, as well as the budding concerns with ecology and environment. If anything, MEČ acted as a catalyst of cultural modernity. The multiplicity of their current interests, ranged from contemporary to historicist, ironic to symbolic and mythical, typological to morphological, and abstract to regionalist and ecological. Their balancing act on both ends of the theoretical spectrum, emancipatory and phenomenological, produced a difference which might be called a trans-topicality of architectural discourse of postmodernism they aimed to propel and participate in.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE POSSIBILITY OF AN ENCLAVE

Perhaps, as a conclusion, something is to be said of the work of the architect Miloš Bobić (1946-2007), as the editor-in-chief of bulletin *Komunikacija* (Belgrade) in the period 1981-86. His editorial may well be considered a modernity project which held to Enlightenment promise of emancipation, while firmly situated in the cultural dominant of postmodern. *Komunikacija*, or, Notes on Urbanism, Architecture, and Design, as it reads in the impressum, was a free publication distributed

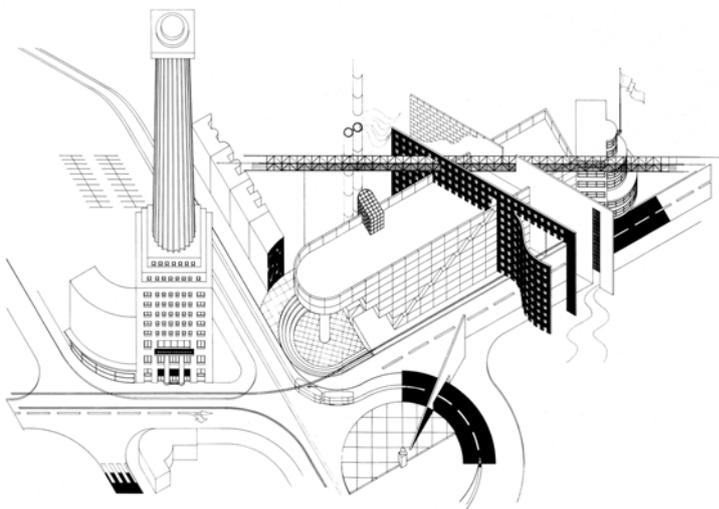


Figure 3. Mustafa Musić, Slavija – Through My Window, drawing, 1980. Courtesy Mustafa Musić



Figure 4. Cover of *Komunikacija*, no. 50 (1986)

to wide professional and academic public all over Yugoslavia, as an internal edition of architectural design and town-planning firm “Belgrade Project – Centre for Urban Development Planning (CEP)”. Cheaply double side printed in the “Geokarta” state printing works, on a single A1 paper and folded into an A4 format, *Komunikacija* was a multifaceted publication, in its graphic and folding pattern, but also in its editorial content. With an unmistakable intuition, Bobić brought in the bulletin the array of different yet complementary ideas, concepts, textualities, and projects from both modernist and postmodernist camps, as well as those of different generations, from students to doyens.

The essay “Modern and Postmodern Architecture”, by Jürgen Habermas, marks the publication of the last, 50th issue of *Komunikacija* in Bobić’s editorial (Fig. 4). Printed over the whole side of A1 format, it takes the central position as the editor’s farewell note. What might have been a possible reading of this text in Yugoslavian architectural context by the time of its translation in 1986? A photograph printed as an illustration to the text might offer some clues for interpretation. It

shows a façade of a house, which clearly has not been designed by an architect, but is a veritable bricolage. It is a poor-men’s house, with the façade wall patched up by chipboard panelling, as well as with reproductions of artworks, mostly Christian orthodox religious painting, icons and frescos of saints, Madonna and Christ, combined with pieces of Western art, high and kitsch, at points set into the wall turned sideways or upside down. Photographic collage, or a work of an anonymous *bricoleur*? There is no caption to the picture to provide an answer. Assuming that Bobić left nothing to chance in his last editorial of the publication he so carefully tended for six years, I would suggest that this very illustration points to his critical reading of Habermas as overly one sided. It is also, I would think, not a moralising but a an ironic commentary on “high” architecture, modernist or postmodernist alike, or “high” theory of Habermas himself, and as such it fits perfectly into discourse of postmodernity. As noted by K. Michael Hays, “though the structure of Habermas’s thought may give us a way to think the critical, emancipatory strategies located within postmodernism as well as modernism, he himself seems blind to that possibility” (Hays, 1998, 413).

With the benefit of the hindsight, this analysis attempts just that, to find traces of critical thought within Belgrade postmodernism of 1980, while taking Habermas’s text as a guiding light, not as an axiom. Following Fredric Jameson’s arguments for an “enclave theory” (Jameson, 1998), I would argue that autonomous practice of Bogdan Bogdanović, discursive practice of Ranko Radović, and trans-topical practice of MEĆ, formed enclaves where alternate ideas of space were made possible. And, last but not least, it is the enclave of *Komunikacija*, or rather the archipelago of editorial practice of Miloš Bobić, which accommodated pluralist coexistence and interrelationship of positions in the architectural discourse of postmodernism.

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- 4) Venice Biennial, The 1st International Architecture Exhibition: The Presence of the Past (Including the now famous "Strada Novissima" exhibition at the *Corderie dell'Arsenale*, Director of the Architecture Section: Paolo Portoghesi).
- 5) The first edition in German: Habermas, J. (1962). *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*. Neuwied am Rhein und Berlin: Herman Luchterhand. Translation into English: Habermas, J. (1989). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge: Polity.
- 6) Assessment is based on a recent overview of the political and economic situation preceding the Yugoslav conflict by Gibbs (2009).
- 7) Memorial Place and Warrior Mausoleum in Čačak (Serbia), 1970-80; Memorial Park Dudik in Vukovar (Croatia), 1978-80; and Warrior Mausoleum at Popina, near Trstenik (Serbia) 1979-81.
- 8) Summed up, this criticism by Miloš R. Perović, reads: "his most important works, the famous tetralogy [...] look like transcultural, timeless archaeological collages [...] as if numerous photocopies were made of a giant archaeological atlas, with parts cut out [...] and combined into new wholes in a surrealistically automatic way [...] remain merely aesthetic products in service of the totalitarian communist regime, and the ideology of Socialist Aestheticism [...] celebrat(ing) the communist authority and its victory." (Perović, 2003: 170, 176, 177). This view, acting seemingly as a criticism of the artist's role within the socialist/communist ideology, represents itself but an ideological stance par excellence.
- 9) Radović, R. (1980). *L'évolution et la continuité des idées et des formes dans l'architecture moderne*, Thèse de doctorat de 3ème cycle. Dirigé par Professeur Bernard Dorival, Université de Paris-Sorbonne, Paris IV, UER d'Art et d'Archéologie.
- 10) On Radović's architectural work, see: Dinulović (2005).
- 11) On Laugier's concept, see: Kuletin Čulafić (2010)
- 12) Position of this paper's author on relation of artistic and architectural discourses owes much to ideas initiated by Radović (Cf. Blagojević, 2009, 2010)
- 13) For more information on MEČ and their activities and projects, see memers' web sites: <http://maldini.wetpaint.com/page/MEC>, <http://www.mustafamusic.net/>, <http://www.stevanzutic.net/>, all accessed 9th April 2011.
- 14) Ećimović quotes: Petrović, S. (1982) *Marksistička kritika estetike: prilog Marksovoj ontologiji stvaranja*. Beograd: Prosveta, 143, 131.
- 15) Cf. Blagojević (2003).

1) "It is in the realm of architecture, however, that modifications in aesthetic production are most dramatically visible, and that their theoretical problems have been most centrally raised and articulated;" Jameson (1984), 1991: 2

2) *Der Theodor-W.-Adorno-Preis der Stadt Frankfurt am Main*, established in 1977, is conferred every three years on September 11, Adorno's birthday. Habermas was the second recipient.

3) Habermas, J. (1983). Modernity – An Incomplete Project, in: Foster, Hal (Ed.). *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on*