



SILVA KALČIĆ

ZAGREB CALLING: EMERGENCE OF A POST-SOCIALIST CITY

KAKO ZAGREB IZRANJA IZ SNA: STVARANJE POSTSOCIJALISTIČKOG GRADA

TOMISLAV PLETENAC



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Tomislav Pletenac wrote a book on the post-socialist, post-transitional and finally, post-earthquake Zagreb from the position of an ethnologist and cultural anthropologist exploring state/political strategies within Foucault's concept of bio-power (1994). He is interested in how they directly impact the formation of the city. The book is an overview of the current state of Zagreb's architectural heritage, issues of interpolation and contrasting interpolations, the phenomenon of "abolition" of urbanism as a legacy of the 19th century. The author's intention is to critically evaluate the book's subject, but also to raise awareness and educate the public, especially professionals, thus expanding the public's perceptive horizon and critical awareness in the current era of extreme physical distancing and social isolation.

The author systematically combined research, analytical and scientific-synthetic procedures. Classification as an analytical and interpretive strategy organizes structures by defining individual units, and determining whether there are relations between them. Interpretation, on the other hand, investigates how the relations established between defined entities function and whether they constitute a consistent, non-contradictory system.

Spatial performances of the city of Zagreb as a kind of discourse with various socio-cultural meaning, a networking of economic, social and political issues of various cultural and urban policies, are discussed in this book. One example is the Museum of Contemporary Art (MSU, Igor Frančić, 2009), built in the new modernist Zagreb. It was a kind of exception in the field of cultural policy concentrated in the center of the capital, with national political power. Although parkour was already included in the project of the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Barcelona (MACBA, Richard Meier) in 1995 and this subculture is an important part of the museum's branding, in MSU Zagreb it is banned by a large inscription, the first sign noticed by museum visitor (skaters still gather in front of another, the Mimara Museum). MSU is a kind of open-air museum of post-socialism, a si-

lent testament to social ambivalence. It is also, already, a kind of a ruin of post-socialism (like some transitional shopping malls, Kaptol Center and West Gate), and its program is self-directed, becoming an end in itself in the context of modernist mass housing on the southern outskirts of the city. MSU is not a place where participatory social life would take place, regardless of a collection or exhibition in place. The ascent to the entrance of such a building is like a cleared space of a fortification – with a strategical purpose, and National University Library (Velimir Neidhardt, Davor Mance, Zvonimir Krznarić and Marijan Hrzić, 1995) is similar previous example: it can be reached by a large staircase, and then, by entering the building visitor finds himself in a huge space where they feel insignificant in front of its imposing form, but invisible content. Pletenac takes some other buildings as well, as an example of the intertwining of physical space with social context, such as the Esplanade Hotel, and by its form it "strongly wants to get rid of Balkan mud, dreaming about Paris, London or Berlin."

The Croatian Homeland Monument was recently built on the "Monumental Transversal" – Pletenac introduces that term quoting Derrida's warning in his book *The Fever of Archives*: repetition already contains a trace of destruction. Namely, the repetition of monuments is produced by the discomfort of oblivion. Behind the idea of so many monuments, there is the same fear of the war that brought cultural trauma in the 1990s, it is an effort to inscribe the victim in public discourse as if, when there were no fear, the victims would be forgotten. Aleida Assmann compares the function of cultural memory in social relationships with the relationship of individual memory and awareness (consciousness), defining divided societies as the ones with divided memory.

"Earthquake instead of conclusion" is the last chapter of the book. The title dawned on the author immediately after the earthquake in Zagreb on March 22, 2020, while he was standing with his neighbors in front of the building on an early Sunday morning, in fear

of the second quake. From the events that followed, the author drew a conclusion that society does not really exist. Museums in Zagreb's center were almost all damaged in the earthquake and evicted, as well as schools, which should change the dynamics of the city, and with it the sense of belonging and community. The process is explained by Lacanian psychoanalysis by the disintegration of the seam, or "point de capiton", and Renata Salecl notes that in post-socialist countries there is a lack of a new hub point or "master of the signifier". Since traditional structures of society have been dissolved in socialism, in post-socialism religious and nationalist discourses are installed in their place.

According to the political will Zagreb should recover without the assistance of the rest of the state and the EU, which is a clear consequence of the logic of deterritorialization of the capital of Croatia, but also of metropolization, which includes gentrification and mass internal migration. For Zagreb to be able to "exist" again, it is not that important what will be re-built, but what new maps will open, concludes the author of the book. In the *State Production of Space* (Lefebvre), architecture plays the role of a technical setting of the ideological image in space.

The title of the book in Croatian is a reference to a song (released in 1981 on the LP record) by "Azra", about dawns in Zagreb, when trams start their morning rides and nights out end. It seems that the society of spectacle, which Guy Debord called the "peak of man's inner separation from himself" in the 1960s, has entered a new phase, the one in which it takes on its material manifestation. It is also an opportunity to seek answers to the already asked question – is there a relationship between natural disasters and the disclosure of social and political anomalies, on the example of the City of Zagreb? Pletenac's book, in which he leads us through the personal topography of urban space, is going to be for Zagreb, as was *Manhattan Transfer* by Dos Passos in 1925 in New York: an actual and live overview of the state of the city.