COLLECTIVE ARCHITECTURE STUDIO
Repair, Replay, Remake: Belgrade's Collective Housing

capitalist realism

There was a saying, I want to call it an "old saying" the way science fiction author Kim Stanley Robinson did recently in his *The Ministry of the Future*, that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. This notion, now part of Leftist folklore, attributed alternatively to Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žizek, was also important for Mark Fisher's framing of "capitalist realism." Fisher was concerned with the "widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it." What he calls "capitalist realism" is precisely the naturalization of this notion; that the politically mutable has become immutable. A few years after Fisher's (2009) writing on the topic, many cataclysmic climate events later, and given our collective experience of the global pandemic that has brought us to (a previously unimaginable) hard stop globally, the cliché seems to have grown teeth and started biting.

1989

Now consider the year 1989 beyond its common "capitalist realist" characterizations. This *annus mirabilis* of Eastern European peoples, was understood widely as the triumph of democracy, finally also, east of the Elbe. Philosopher Francis Fukuyama thought the events of 1989–also known as "the fall of the wall," or "the fall of communism"– had marked the "end of history" itself. From then on, there would simply be nothing to motivate history's forward movement, just perpetual present (global capitalism) and no alternatives to it. Another philosopher, Jürgen Habermas thought the historical events of 1989 had finally placed Eastern European countries back on track to becoming *proper* liberal democracies. In his view, the events of 1989 together constituted a form of "compensatory revolution." He was not the only one, of course, his position represented the widespread colloquial understanding of the historical implications of efforts by Eastern European people to rid themselves of their oppressive regimes.

More recently, Croatian philosopher Boris Buden, one of the most important commentators on the post-socialist transitions, proposed a different reading. Buden offered that this conception

of Eastern European revolutions of 1989 as "revolutions in reverse" infantilized the subjects of post-socialism everywhere. It also decisively and swiftly sent all of the then "freed" countries straight into *transitions* towards global capitalism without any assessment of what their socialisms had achieved, or what might happen if the link between centralized planning and important and functioning public infrastructure was severed. Imagining 1989 to have been in the service of Eastern Europe's catching up to the West also allowed the West not to question its own historical moment and trajectory.

architectural archives and retro-utopian work
This studio will begin by rethinking the archives of Yugoslavian socialism and architecture from the opposite posture, alongside Buden and with help from a number of local activists and historians. We will look to those archives—equipped with important historical hindsight and in light of dire future prospects—as a resource of tests and lessons of *vital* importance today. Our dive backward into the archive and forward into the future is constitutive of the logic of Retro-utopia as described by the curator Inke Arns and by Boris Buden, following her. Arns applied it optimistically to the 1990s art in the context of the Soviet Union and Slovenia. Buden extrapolates it to all cultural production in post-socialism. Mourning the loss of historical knowledge, Buden proposes that cultural knowledge, which appears in its wake, is an instrument of retro-utopia. Buden warns that retro-utopian products record not the truth of the past, but instead the truth of the retro-utopist's relationship to that past and her belief in a specific future. We will self-consciously embrace this possible outcome precisely for what it can also tell us about our own imaginations, and with a hope that a radical and self-conscious, retro-utopian activity might also open up new horizons of possibility.

The studio hypothesizes that by engaging in retelling the pertinent aspects of architectural and political heritage, and by offering urban and architectural alternatives from the position that values socialist heritage in the context of Belgrade (ex-Yugoslavia's capital), the fruits of its labor could have a critical function on both sides of the former Cold War divide. Furthermore, in the context of Belgrade where a recent collapse of an aged and mishandled concrete owning on the train station in Novi Sad, initiated a large city and country-wide protest against corruption, we will be exposed to a uniquely political response to things falling into disrepair.

common good and forms of coauthorship
Similarly to its previous iterations, Collective Architecture Studio '25 will foreground and explore two key registers on which the concept of the common, collective good played out in Yugoslavian, and specifically Belgrade, architecture: first, the production and conception of urban and architectural space for the common good (with an emphasis on the material and architectural effects of Yugoslavia's constitutional "right to housing"), and second, the conception of self-managed, group authorship and ownership that was implemented and performed through self-managed architectural enterprises. Important caveat to consider: group authorship in such structures did not mean no authorship. Collective Architecture Studio

'25 will thus actively study and self-experiment with forms of coauthorship. Everything we make (including our building proposals) will also function as critical broadcasts, catalyzing discussion and/or revelation among our projected audiences. Every student will participate in the constitution of our studio's own archives, work and broadcasts. We will read, plan, and play together. Commitment to the collective (in the studio organization and as a topic of investigation) and architectural follow-through are critical components of each individual student's, as well as the Collective Architecture Studio's, success.

Travel:
We will travel to Belgrade over Spring Break at the end of March. There, we will interface with historians of architecture and urbanism, and contemporary actors engaged precisely in trying to revive and understand the links between their socialist heritage and contemporary forms of commoning.

Rough Studio Timeline:
REPAIR
1) Rapid study of the architecture of Block 23 in New Belgrade, the circumstances of its making, "Belgrade school" in the architecture of housing, aspects of the region's transition to neoliberal capitalism, ending with 3 comprehensive proposals for the repair and maintenance of Block 23. [internal competition]
Some aspects of our work on repair will continue.

REPLAY
2) Research of the local theories of collective authorship and collective ownership, self-management models, and local artistic practices explicitly related to it, all in order to produce 1:1 (physical and digital) tools for working together. [testing and playing]

    We may carry parts of both phase 1 and 2 to Belgrade to present to architects and activists there in the gallery Kolektiv.

REMAKE
3) After engaging the city and its activists, architects and official, we will propose financing and architectural alternatives to the contemporary investor-based housing and in collaboration with our friends at "The Ministry of Space." [proposals, broadcasts, conversations]

Logistical Issues, Studio Culture, Evaluation Criteria:

1   WE WILL MAKE A LOT OF STUFF TOGETHER THIS SEMESTER!

2   We will often work in groups (of different configurations) this semester and your dedication to making that work out well for all is paramount.

3   Everything we make will function simultaneously as a proposal and have the potential to be understood as a critical broadcast.

4   We will especially explore the value of physical models for their ability to communicate performatively and include audiences beyond architects.

5   Though, and because our topics this semester are serious and demand care, as well as loads of political, architectural and social imagination, WE WILL NEED HUMOR in order to manage it all.

6   Readings and all other reference material will be on Dropbox.

7   Attendance in studio and for the duration of all formal ~~reviews~~ events is mandatory. Greater than two absences from studio without prior excuses could result in a failing grade for the studio. If Covid, if Venice: we figure it out together.

8   Your grade in the studio will be based on the *quality*, *craft* and *timeliness* of your intellectual, architectural and representational production. It will also take into account your contributions to class discussions and the group dynamic, your productivity, as well as your responsiveness to criticism, and all-around design and intellectual growth. But, it will also be a result of our collective agreement on how these evaluations will occur and by whom. As we come to our agreements on these topics, we will consider the grading framework that we have been using at MIT for studio production.

For information on the academic integrity at MIT, check the student handbook:
https://integrity.mit.edu/

Studio Timeline Draft

Week 1

2/4	T	Studio Previews
2/9	R	First day: Hello! We launch **Archival Probes** and Play.

Week 2

2/11	T	Internal Pecha Kucha, Jelica Jovanović (zoom @2pm), Labor division on Modeling of Block 23
2/13	R	Vlada Kulić (zoom@3pm) + Conversation about **Repair** and Labor division

Week 3

2/18	T	Monday Classes – No Studio
2/20	R	3 Draft Proposals of Repair by the Collective Studio

Week 4

2/25	T	Skill Share + New Artistic Practices lecture (Jelena Vesić, or Ana Janevski) TBC
2/27	R	Internal pin up

Week 5

3/4	T	Desk Crits
3/6	R	**Silent Review of Repair** + we launch **Replay: Collective Devices**

Week 6

3/11	T	Desk Crits
3/13	R	Collective tests of Collective Devices (mock-ups) + Dubravka Sekulić (zoom) TBC

Week 7

3/18	T	Desk Crits + Refining + Marija Marić (zoom) TBC
3/20	R	We play with our friends and then we pack up

Spring Break: 3/22 – 3/30 TRIP TO BELGRADE (where we do lots of things together)

Week 8

4/1	T	**Remake** Launch**:** Regrouping Discussion + Labor Division + Thinking Siting
4/3	R	Site Models due, and Round Table discussion about first ideas

Week 9

4/8	T	How will the Collective manifest in the final body of work?
4/10	R	Desk Crits

Week 10

4/15	T	Studio Self Review + Discussion about Production Standards
4/17	R	Proposals in progress

Week 11

4/22	T	Architecture Fine grain / Redlining with guests
4/24	R	Proposals in progress

Week 12

4/29	T	Proposals in progress
5/1	R	Regrouping

Week 13

5/6	T	Ana in Venice	Collective Production of the Final Event
5/8	R	Ana in Venice	Collective Production of the Final Event

Week 14

5/12	**M**	**Final Event in the Long Lounge (TBC)**

Archival Probes

Meetings in which we decide collectively what form a deliverable will take will be common this semester. But let's first dive into the archive through several specific topics, that will allow others to attach to them, and will help us navigate the black hole of the Cold War epistemic divide. We will think of these few initial topics as directions for our archival probes. They will help us begin re-constituting the archive of historical and architectural knowledge that will eventually support our design decisions (and broadcasts). Fragments of old utopias, entire segments of disciplinary discourse, as well as practical knowledge, will be eventually reconfigured and revived, with help of your own observations, positions, design ideas and labor.

The topics you want to research first (in pairs of two or singles at this stage):
    History of New Belgrade,
    Self-Management (in general or via an architecture company such as Energoprojekt),
    Belgrade on the Water,
    New Artistic Practices in YU and the art scene at the Student Cultural Center in Belgrade,
    IMS-Prefabricated System Žeželj,
    The Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade (original and renovation),
    Architectural production by the team of architects who worked on Block 23:
    Aleksandar Stjepanović, Božidar Janković, Branislav Karadžić,
    Cerak-Vinogradi Housing in Belgrade, Darko and Milenija Marušić
    Contemporary Thinking about the Commons X Ex YU / or on Elinor Ostrom
    On Theories of Preservation

The first medium/format for collecting and sharing this knowledge will be pecha-kucha. But please begin thinking about possible systems for organizing our collective archive. Libraries, as you know, have their Dewey decimal and Library of Congress systems for this purpose, museums and archives have their own systems, INS and IRS have their own, CSI and the police their own, surely the great Mashup artists in music have theirs as well. We each have some way of organizing files on our machines. Our **Collective Architecture Studio** needs to develop standards, and systems for organizing new knowledge, and equally importantly, for retrieving that knowledge in a useful format. For now, your probes can "pick up" artifacts and images as they are in the documents you find. This is an "extreme learning" exercise, and pecha-kucha will enable you to test narration and the power of images quickly.

<u>Deliverable:</u> Pecha-kucha presentation on the topics you are researching + "Notes"
<u>Due:</u> 2/11

<u>Read these texts by 2/11:</u>
Boris Buden, "Children of Post-Socialism," *RetroUtopia, Repeat, Utopia*.
Vladimir Kulić, "Architecture and Federalism in Socialist Yugoslavia," *Toward A Concrete Utopia*.
Maroje Mrduljaš, "Architecture for a Self-Managing Socialism," *Toward A Concrete Utopia*.
Ana Miljački, "Once Upon a Time in Yugoslavia," *The Avery Review.*
Andrew Merrifield, "Magical Marxism," *Environment and Planning D*, 2009.

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REPAIR | Repairing Block 23

Steven Jackson's now-classic essay "Rethinking Repair," written in the before-times – way back in 2014 – proposes that we "take erosion, breakdown, and decay, rather than novelty, growth, and progress, as our starting points" in considering relations between society and technology. Jackson proposes that repair-thinking, or what he calls "broken world thinking" be considered a distinct epistemology. Fixers, he says, "know and see different things – indeed, different worlds – than the better-known figures of 'designer' or 'user.'" Breakdown, he offers, has "world-disclosing properties." The fixers world-around have always known this. In this first part of the semester we will move the center of the discipline closer to erosion and breakdown. We will work with "as-builts," insist on the continuum of invention and maintenance. Consider building systems, concrete as a material, collective investment in upkeep.

If the center of the discipline of architecture were to locate over Block 23 in New Belgrade, what tools will we bring with us?

Engaging the conservationist Jelica Jovanović, and her work with the Belgrade Institute for the Preservation of Monuments, we will do just that, center our collective work upon understanding the architecture of a housing block (produced from 1968-1974) and the forces that shaped it historically and are shaping it now. Some of the breakdown here is very real. It takes the form of aged concrete, cracks, neglected fields, and playgrounds, some of it is organizational and systemic, and some things that look like breakdown are signs of a vibrant urban life. The collapse of the concrete awning of the train station in Novi Sad in November of 2024, as a likely result of an inappropriately sanctioned renovation of the same brutalist building from 1964, and the casualties of that event, have become a symbol of a regime that does not take care of its inhabitants, let alone its historical and political heritage.

We will be intervening in the actual processes of preservation taking place right now, and for that we will output our basic 2D and 3D work for others to take over and use. We will speculate (in the spirit of "magical marxism") on ways that different positions on preservation might play out here, and we will design and produce artefacts that we will present in Belgrade precisely as a way of engaging in the existing local conversation about these issues.

Deliverables: Realism: Continuing the Catalogue of Block 23 buildings and their architectural elements
Speculation: 3 proposals for Block 23 preservation in the form of competition boards / story boards that "speak", 1"= vivid (on 5 x A1 boards each)
Broadcasting: possibly…cuddly objects (conversation props :), toys and games, new recipes for prefab concrete parts, for short DIY videos or campaign clips

Due: 3/9   Silent Review (TBC with Collective Studio)

Schedule:

2/11	T	Internal Pecha Kucha, Jelica Jovanović (zoom @2pm), Labor division
2/13	R	Vlada Kulić (zoom) + Conversation about **Repair** + and about our

Deliverables

2/18	T	Monday Classes – No Studio
2/20	R	3 Draft Proposals of Repair by the Collective Studio
2/25	T	Desk Crits and skill share
2/27	R	Internal pin up
3/4	T	Desk Crits
3/6	R	**Silent Review of Repair** + we launch **Replay 1: Collective Devices**

Read this week:

Steven Jackson, "Rethinking Repair" and other texts as needed.
Watch the Lacaton Vassal movie, "The Imaginaries of Transformation":
https://vimeo.com/298982645

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REPLAY | Commoning Devices

Everything we got from the first set of Archival probes can help inform our commoning devices. Like with our repair exercise we will take on archival material (art and history both) and redescribe and transform them to our own ends. This is a fast design/make exercise. You will have just enough time –2 weeks– to mockup and discard a few things, and finally collectively construct 3-5, 1:1 objects. Organize as you feel like to produce devices that can and will be used in studio for purposes of our own internal "commoning," and that you can imagine used beyond our studio as well. These devices can take various forms: collective clothing and uniform; architecture, organization of protocols in studio that might help us work better, or make decisions better; playful furniture; books; games; language; utensils, an archiving system…etc.

Since we will self-consciously lean on the archive of artistic and aesthetic interventions in relation to the concept and the reality of self-management, our experts on Richter's work and Yugo New Art Practices, as well as on self-management and commoning, will need to help everyone with their knowledge of this body of work. In order to do this project well, the archive (google slides) we began making may need to expand and deepen. You might need to include in it historical and contemporary fashion design (if that is where you are leaning), as well as devices, games, and architecture that you find compelling in relation to the task of commoning. The goal of these objects is to train our own collective for a more joyful and/or effective collaboration and collective work.

Keep in mind and test these three key strategies for organizing group outcomes: open debate and consensus-making, exquisite corps, labor division.

Deliverables: The Above devices, at least 3 actualized, and some others ideated.
Due: 3/16 Mockups + New Archive Entries (i.e. the basis of your design tests)
                 3/23 1:1 Commoning Devices

Schedule:
3/9   R   Launch: Commoning Devices
3/14   T   Ana coming back from Zurich, Add to Slides + Collective Brainstorms
3/16   R   Common Table (Speed) Crits of Mockups + Dubravka Sekulić (zoom)
3/21   T   Tests, Adjustments, Making + Marija Marić (zoom)
3/23   R   We invite guests to test our devices with us (talk about the trip and go!)

Read these texts:
Ana Vilenica, "Who has 'The Right to Common'?"
Michel Serres, "Theory of the Quasy Object"
Branislav Jakovljević, *Alienation Effects* – just skim through it
Dubravka Sekulić, "The Ambiguities of Informality"- before her zoom on the 16th (but her Glotzt Nicht so Romantisch! In our Readings might be super useful before our trip)

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REMAKE | Unsolicited Housing Alternatives for Belgrade

Having now visited Belgrade and its architectural and urban historians and activists, we join their ranks with proposals that will stand as alternatives to the currently dominant mode, make that: only, mode of speculative housing development in the city. Following studio's commitment to retro-utopian reliance on historical knowledge we will begin by considering the ramifications, and the legacy of the "right to housing" which was put forward by the first Yugoslav Forum on Housing and Construction in 1956: "The right to housing is a basic legal institution, providing one of the most important means of life to the working classes." In a self-managed society housing was a social responsibility, and land too was socially (not state) "owned." However, since the 1990s campaign to privatize all housing in Yugoslavia, then Serbia, there has been no clear provision in the context for any form of affordable or social housing. Various economic forces—even before the mass privatization of housing delivered via work organizations to their workers— sponsored forms of "wild," illegal construction, to which the state consistently turned a blind eye. New construction on the unregulated outskirts of Belgrade, as well as the construction of extensions and adaptations of the modernist and other housing stock were symptomatic of the great need as well as of the only economically viable model for construction, or for procuring housing. But in the last decade, legalizing illegal construction has scaled up from individual and minor "developers," to large, shady "public-private partnerships." As the transition to "liberal capitalism" progressed, land too was "privatized." The government Agency for Privatization, having turned many self-managed enterprises into private, often foreign, property over the 14 years of its existence, seized to exist in 2016, signaling thus the "end" of the transition to full-fledged capitalism.

It is in this context, of housing shortage and liberal capitalism that a large-scale public-private operation titled: Belgrade Waterfront has fueled direct opposition and sustained protest by a new generation of architects and urbanists, and by the general population. It has also catalyzed smaller neighborhoods to organize in defense of their "right to the city," or at least, their local amenities, and the future of their neighborhoods. Those with expertise in city building could spot the scale of the scam that Belgrade Waterfront represented from a far; promised to bring 3.4 billion euro to the city, it was deemed of national importance by the government which rushed to clear all the legal, physical and human obstacles in its way, including the city's main train station. Once the construction began, the investment was scaled back to 140 million euro, with great input in infrastructure expected from the state. Learning from contemporary grass roots movements committed to collective housing in the 2020s Belgrade we will offer a set of alternatives that revive, or fast forward some key lessons of socialist housing. Their mandate will be to serve as discursive props, as critical commentary and as **real options**, both in the context of Belgrade and beyond.

We will first consider a series of different possible locations for housing interventions, as well as different scenarios that might support housing alternatives into existence sidestepping developers, and finding civic-public, or other forms of bottom up, collective formats for

financing, for living and for owning housing. Our final offer will be one single, comprehensive project that will include architectural thinking at many levels simultaneously: the building system, inhabitation, maintenance, economic framework, and the necessary interventions in the mediatic complex.

Things we need to accomplish:

Architectural and Urban solution for our Unsolicited Housing Proposal/s
Presented both in drawings and large manipulable…relatable models
A financial diagram that imagines cooperative ownership
Structural and material definition of the project
Visualization and tests of living in it, in model and images
A comprehensive story that may involve past and future narratives, restarting of jobs, what if this model became more widespread, etc?
Some understanding of the way the coop model might challenge the patriarchal, hetero family structure, but might also provide multi-generational family support.

April 13, 2023 > May 12, 2023

Work Flow / Deliverables by week:

Week 9
    4/13   T   Postcards from the Future – discussion
        Speed modeling of massing and of interfaces (for this we need some ideas about the exterior, some ideas about the cooperative, some ideas about collective interactions, or the nature of interactions within the collective)
Week 10
    4/18   T   4-5 massing proposals with phasing ideas
        Graphic standards for drawings and postcards
        Catalogue of items you are interested in bringing forward from New Belgrade, and from other/kindred housing projects
        Studio Self Review + Discussion about Production Standards

    4/20   R   Identifying precisely what we will develop in detail and in what medium – topic desk crits

Week 11
    4/25   T   Architecture Fine grain review with guests (who do we want for this review?)

    4/27   R   Proposals in progress

Week 12
    5/2   T   Proposals in progress

    5/4   R   Regrouping

Week 13
    5/9   T   Collective Production of the Final Event

    5/11   R   Collective Production of the Final Event

Week 14

    5/12   F   Final Event in the Long Lounge