

# Evasion Of Temporality

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Temporality is tied to political transition – and abrupt transitions of politics give birth to many emerging and even disappearing forms in space. Most of them are known worldwide as shantytowns, temporary zones, disaster settlements, camps, temporal borders and spatial arrangements, check-points, customs areas or tents, and sometimes even new forms of *cities*. All of them are normally seen as B versions of high architecture or high urbanism, as exceptions to the stable and obedient arrangement of space. And normally, the acceptance of a temporary solution is an acceptance of lower standards. At the same time, it is strongly believed that these temporary solutions are an appropriate method in order to reach the next level: the promise of stability. This scenario depends on prioritizing limited time over available space. The temporary solution, in fact, depends on accepting a deadline of its own expiration.

The Serbian case has proven to be a telling one. The current impasse in the public realm can be seen as the result of repeated resistance to a deadline. Denial has proven larger than the acceptance of temporality. Milošević's transitional power never once fossilized into architectural monuments or ceremonial urban schemes – his spatial politics were not urban but territorial and were mainly concerned with carving out, expanding, and cleansing to create a new national space. As a result, this abstinence has given birth to the emerging populist architecture – a bastard child of glitzy-corporate and folk-nationalist architecture called *Turbo Architecture*.

How Did the Culture of Optimistic Urbanism – Which Built New Cities – Become the Culture of Evasive Politics And Illegality?

Milošević's deep entanglement with the overall crisis of the Balkans gradually put the public sphere of the cities into a deadlock. Interest in the city fell well behind the interest in the rural landscape and territory under the ethnic conflicts. Additionally, it is estimated that nearly half a million young professionals and students left Serbia alone in the 1990s, which contributed to a certain *evacuation* of the public discourse into an academic diaspora in Western Europe and North America. What was left behind was a myriad of anachronisms

in the urban realm, a rollover of urban laws and regulations from the Socialist Yugoslavia under Tito. In order to balance out this instability caused by the professional emigration, eased on planning regulations and accepted ethnic refugees de facto as settlers on the public land in the cities. The former Socialist regulations were temporarily disabled as a solution for the sudden housing crisis, and the planning powers were kept at bay. While this was intended to be a temporal solution, the weakening of city planning practically opened up the doors to an informal economy. Once inside, the need of the informal city to solidify its presence led to a series of evasions of temporality: that is, temporal urban forms were hardened into complexes, and construction tactics would capture more illegal space within this new private realm.

As a counterpoint to the nation undergoing urban turbulence, *the man without passion*, as Slobodan Milošević was called throughout the Balkan crisis by international journalists, did not choose to build Belgrade as a manifestation of his power. The evasive aspect in this strategy was quite simple: the less Milošević built, the wider the gap opened for uncontrolled construction and for more political support. In spite of the political and economic isolation during the last decade and a half, as well as the lost wars with Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia – and the lost wars with world over Kosovo – Belgrade has witnessed an explosion of construction. The estimates are that as many as 150,000 houses and buildings were built in Belgrade in the last decade, and between 800,000 and 1,000,000 in all of Serbia.

Four building typologies have emerged out of this passionless system. The first type is the corporate-meets-folk *Turbo Architecture*. Second is the vertical expansion of temporary structures that have been called *Mushroom Houses*. The third type are the blown-out additions – the so-called *housing upgrades* – that have been registered as a radical preservation of post-war Modernism. On a more suburban scale, the last type is the *pixelated* landscape, marked by the new Christian Orthodox presence in the north and Islamic architecture in the southwest. That is, the newly constructed objects in the suburban landscape took on the visual effect of the pixel, with all of its inherent divisions and demarcations of the greater picture. This new pixelated low-rise mix consists of single-standing shrines and churches, built as contemporary copies of Medieval Serbian architecture as well as mosques and minarets combined with urban villas, all similar in scale, which lends them the look of a mosaic.

## *Turbo Architecture*

Milošević's deceptive absence and lack of clear vision resulted in an alibi for an army of self-appointed saviors of lost values from the Serbian past. Middle-aged architects, the frustrated generation that came second in line after Tito's first and most privileged generation to build the Communist city of New Belgrade, saw this as their chance to act. As Milošević bowed to popular participation in policy making, which had been Tito's main taboo, so did the architects



Fig. 1: *Turbo Folk*: Staged photograph of Arkan and his paramilitary unit called The Tigers. Arkan is holding the unit's mascot.



Fig. 2: Staged photograph of Ceca, the chief Serbian *Turbo Folk* diva and Arkan's widow. Ceca remains the most popular mainstream pop singer in the Western Balkans.



Fig. 3: Street view of Television Pink studios in Belgrade. TV Pink grew as the media most responsible for producing and distributing *Turbo Folk* culture in Serbia and the Balkans.