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EARLY STAGE

PAPER

*BELGRADE, DISCONTINUITY, FILM*

## DDR STATEMENT

It is regularly declared that architects and filmmakers should work together more often, and well beyond obvious combinations, such as scenography. Indeed, thinking cities/buildings as an architect and thinking cities/buildings as a filmmaker might give different results in their respective understanding of space/objects. Furthermore, the relation between space/objects and the users/audience may determine the experience of the latter. Is their role active or passive? If people interact daily with the designed space/objects, how do they live these designs physically? Conversely, how are their perceptions influenced when they look at these designs from new perspectives?

Aside from existing through cities, film also (re)creates cities or changes their image. Knowing the importance of motion, architects already apply the promenade that helps them and their clients imagine or test narrative sequences around their (future) inventions. This process happens in the conceptual phases: drawings, scenarios, models, collages, 3D renderings or virtual reality. But to represent places once anchored in reality, film is undoubtedly the medium that encompasses the highest number of mechanisms: camera angles, movement, light, color, sound, editing and many more cinematic techniques. Nonetheless, these means have an impact on how reality is translated in spectators' minds and how it triggers their empathy or awareness.

Rather than simply using films as a tool to demonstrate the thesis, the idea of the present project is to reconstruct the found material from different audiovisual types of narratives and to offer alternative meanings.

## ABSTRACT

Belgrade on Screens: Visions of Continuous Discontinuities is a Design Driven Doctoral Research (DDDr) exploring Belgrade's urban destructions through (post-) Yugoslav moving images. It is composed of an archival investigation and an immersive video-collage of the collected material. The following text, structured in three sections, introduces some early reflections on this project. The first part presents its context and intentions as well as a theoretical framework leading to main concerns. The second part expresses the importance of the topic, including the purpose of its dual conceptual-practical approach, complementary to the Design Driven Research (DDr) statement. In the third part, methods and techniques to consider during the experimental creation are described, suggesting various outcomes.

## 1. RE/FRAMING MEMORIES

### INTRODUCTION

Aside from manifesting historical, cultural, geographical, social, and political dimensions of spaces, films display sensitive contents captured in phenomenological notions such as *atmosphere* or *mood*. Affecting the collective consciousness and memory, films constitute a tool to articulate and manipulate the *image* of a town and its inhabitants.

The key concept of this research is *discontinuity*, as a cut of regularity and as an interval of broken stability within a perpetual condition. *Discontinuity* appears as much in the architectural as in the cinematographic vocabulary since it indicates a disconnection in *space* and *time*, two fundamental components in both disciplines. Cities being shaped by *history*, *politics*, and *society*, discussions on (dis)continuities in these additional frames will apply as well. For instance, *discontinuity* could be seen as a "political time in which periods of comparatively modest institutional change are interrupted by more rapid and intense moments of transformation." (1) In that sense, architectural discontinuities refer to disruptions, losses, and traumas caused by wars, inner conflicts, or political decisions.

However, while film cutting essentially constructs *continuity*, filmmakers use "discontinuous editing" to emphasize emotional response by atypical shot-arrangements. Crossing facts and fiction, new imaginaries build up new realities and provoke divergent layers of memories. Accordingly, films have the power to (un)fix the recognition of any past.

In Belgrade's case, inherent breaks of patterns have been resulting from radical changes. Being repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt, the city sustained, by a combination of causes, *continuous discontinuities.* Considering particular types of demolition translated into filmic language, and reviewing pivotal moments of architectural disruptions, this study explores the screen adaptations of war devastations and other urban modifications in Belgrade's city core.

### HYPOTHESES

*Discontinuity* has been already argued by many theorists and historians as a political and aesthetic criticism of the past (Martin Heidegger, Jean-Louis Comolli, Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault). (2) That it appears worthwhile to investigate how the moving image reflects the discontinuities of a city and its citizens has found expression in a wide range of exchanges in architecture and film. There is an abundant body of knowledge about film and city (Julia Hallam, François Penz, Les Roberts, Mark Shiel), film and war (Elisabeth Bronfen, Leslie Midkiff DeBauche, David Luhrssen, Paul Virilio), and urbicide (Bogdan Bogdanović, Martin Coward, Jeffry M. Diefendorf, Stephen Graham).

Further specific research dealing with these topics arises over the concepts of *memory*, *place*, and *identity* in the context of the Balkans. In the past few years, this growing interest has been confirmed by an increasing quantity of colloquiums, essays, and artistic projects depicting comparable concerns.

But most of these pieces either focus on short portions of years, or treat the topic on a large scale, rarely from multiple disciplinary fields, or infrequently combining film genres. Thus, there seems to be no comparative-artistic approach exploring films and interruptions in the 20th century at the

Belgrade scale, through urbanism *and* film, across time *and* genre. Also, a more evident reaction to existing political debates is missing. By bringing transdisciplinary closer looks to the past, it becomes urgent to mirror them with the present.

This comparative and empirical research aims to open inter/multidisciplinary discussions. The theoretical study of previously acknowledged generic interconnections between *urbanism*, *war*, and *film* represents a thematic basis. Nonetheless, *discontinuity* being the central concept, it is crucial to focus on its theoretical meanings and interpretations within the above-mentioned disciplines. In philosophy and social sciences, connections between *memory* and *history* are exposed to *tension* and *discontinuity*. Therefore, *discontinuity* belongs to theories of *collective memory*, *phenomenology*, *perception, spatiality*, and *cinematic cartography* (Aleida Assmann, Gaston Bachelard, Edward Casey, Tom Conley, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Maurice Halbwachs, Julia Hallam, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Pierre Nora, Les Roberts). On the other hand, affective geovisualizations or emotional atlases introduce a premise on how individuals interpret events and locations, from reality to cyberspace. If three types of cinematic movement-images — perception, affection, action — constitute a fourth type: the *mental-image* (3), then immersive "montages of memories" (4) can intervene on physical and psychological reactions.

Hence, the assumption that history can be revised by temporal connections of discontinuous representations (5) motivates questions where architecture and film are equally involved.

By what means are architectural discontinuities manifested in Belgrade's film landscape? Inversely, how do cinematic effects manifest Belgrade's architectural discontinuities? How do audiovisual media impact cognitive awareness, produce new interpretations or generate any misconceptions? Albeit films visibly note an incomplete portrait of the city, never disclosing it entirely, hiding or inventing its degenerations, how can we represent these fragments visually? Finally, as we imagine (construct) a city based on its narratives, how can we describe (reconstruct) a city being destroyed (deconstructed)?

## 2. BETWEEN CINEMA AND CITY

### MEDIUM

Many schools of architecture coordinate courses encouraging architecture students to understand and communicate architecture by filming it, as a way to improve their designs. But perhaps architects *are* already filmmakers — and vice versa.
According to Gemma Barton, boundaries between architecture and filmmaking are quite vague. She detects *representations* and *narratives* as factors dependent on *reality*. "Architectural narratives" might come to existence in reality, whereas "film narratives" already exist in a certain constructed world — not necessarily in reality. Further on, Barton essentially describes how architects create a new reality for future use, whereas filmmakers use the current reality to create new perceptions. Suggesting "cross-disciplinary collaborations" between "interchangeable professionals", she predicts a "potential not just to transcend the limits of each discipline but to create a new one, where medium and creation are both one and the same." (6)

While filmmakers "borrow" omnipresent architecture(s), can architects "borrow" cinematographic elements? In other words: architects using film(s) as their new material may lead to crossdisciplinary habits, and "close the circle" (Fig. 1). One perfect example is "Welt Spiegel Kino" (2005) by Gustav Deutsch, eminent Austrian architect-filmmaker. His documentary suggests "micro-tales" as imagined fates of occasional passers-by in a town, with "hypertextual" found footage inspired by real socio-cultural contexts. (7)

If "cinema is truth twenty-four times a second" (8), to illustrate a thesis discussing film's complexities without directly showing the films would give an incomplete image when one of the aims is to give films a second reading/life. Film stills are — as their name indicates and as you can see later — *still*, whereas moving images express *motion*. Namely, by using the medium that is also the subject matter, we can shape spaces with existing films and (re)create (new) mental images/realities. These constellations demonstrate how films change somebody's perception and modify facts or existent places (e.g. Kuleshov effect). Acquired from the archives, movies will — aside from being restored/revived — be placed in a new context, which will give them new meanings and experiences of the past. Finally, at a time when new technologies and alternative methods allow us to rediscover our cities (e.g. smartphone applications geolocating movies) this research may generate references for other scientific fields (e.g. urban digitization, digital mapping) or question legacies of virtual audiovisual data.
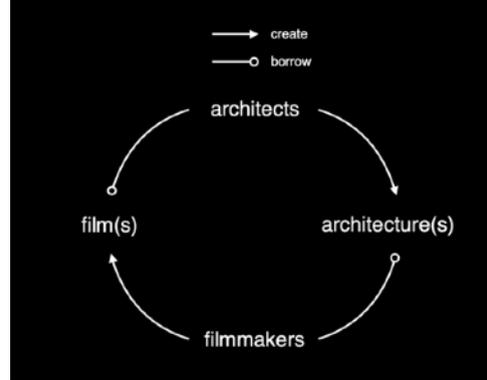


Fig. 1

## PLACE

Although Belgrade is filmed for the first time in 1897 by André Carré — operator and representative of the Lumière brothers — the oldest saved movie showing Belgrade dates from 1904. (9) During the 1920s, cinema is supported by the state. By the 1930s, some firms start producing films, and a film critic declares that "Belgrade is Film." (10) In 1946, the Yugoslav government creates the State Committee of Cinematography, leading to the foundation of its largest film production company: Avala Film. Equipped with this filmmaking studio and a central film laboratory, Belgrade becomes a significant center for cinema management in the region and a place of high production capacities due to collaborations with local or international enterprises. Consequently, Belgrade plays in an important number of films, as a descriptive background or as one of the protagonists.

Yet, the city has been bombed in the course of five historical circumstances. As the siege of six states in the last hundred years, its status shifted from the capital of the self-governed non-aligned center between East and West, to the capital of the only European state under sanctions by the United Nations. Today, this unstable history presents Belgrade as the center of a dissolved country, seeking its communal memory.

As a damaged legacy of previous regimes is erased or left to decay, the city is still exposed to ambiguous or improvised modifications by political systems with tendencies to abolish or deny former regulations. By a lack of persistence in maintaining one unique guideline toward strategic urban planning, Belgrade has a long tradition of discontinuity. With a development shaped in non-transparent frameworks, public discourses constantly raise the deepness of these discontinuities.

Physical destruction is the most occurring form of urbicide, but it can appear in more "subtle" ways. Conflicts can be assigned to internal battles within a country that is no longer at war, but divided by its inner frictions, prolonging its tradition of discontinuity under other forms of deterioration (e.g. controversial monument to Stefan Nemanja, unveiled January 2021). Internal political conflicts continue to divide a population in a frozen transition. As a result, public and private media channels provide incompatible interpretations of same images. Therefore, linking this memory-collection to ongoing debates is the opportunity for a critique of reappearing dynamics.

## 3. RE/CUTTING DIS/CONTINUITIES



1. Terazije Sq.
2. Knez Mihaila St.
3. Republic Sq.
4. Nikola Pašić Sq.
5. National Assembly

100 m

Fig. 2

## METHODOLOGIES

Analyzed in a written thesis, the first phase implies the acquisition of footage showing urbicides or sudden changes within the city-core, marking decisive moments in the 20th century. To track the *continuity of discontinuities*, the timeline is expressly extended throughout this linear configuration.

Nonetheless, essentially one symbolical area is the selected chronotope for discontinuity: *Terazije Square* with its direct surroundings, all articulated in a continuous dialogue of sequences in reality due to their physical proximity, but divided and fragmented in the film editing (Fig. 2). To confront cinema to mass media, the genre spectrum is extended to documentaries, popular series, and TV-reports that produced additional portrayals of urban developments or myths, bringing tensions between *story* and *history*.

It will also demonstrate how fiction is being used to retell past events or, inversely, how documentaries are being used in fiction. During the artistic process, the idea is to combine different *visions*, displaying an archeological dialogue between fictional and factual *texts*.

After clarified copyrights, selected clips will be treated in a video editing software program with thematical, geographical, and chronological intersections. This includes a detailed and precise structure, as the montage has to determine and demonstrate most of discontinuities (de/compositions). Taking for instance Palace Albanija, a segment can show how one same building sends different messages (Fig. 3-4).

Furthermore, some tapes have already been digitized by the Yugoslav Film Archive, but preordered digitization or personal execution is to be anticipated. Film excerpts will be categorized by the frequency of reappearing streets and buildings. Feature films having been defined in previous studies by the researcher, these movies can be the first step of the archival re/collection. The next task will be to find these places within other genres and test if and how they correspond to each other.

Relevant film portions will be classified by genre, nature and budget of the production, box office, reception, rating, as these criteria determine their significance in popular culture. Was a movie funded by the government, blacklisted because of its political implicit statements, or acclaimed at festivals? How many times has it been replayed on television?
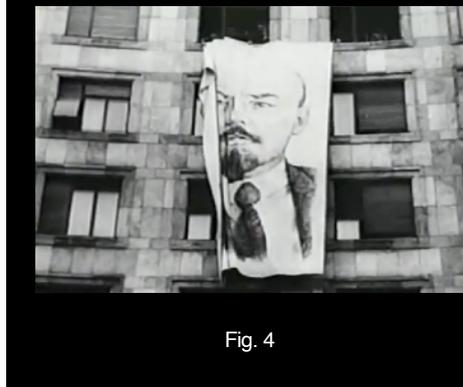


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

This quantitative part of the research (data collection) will provide statistical and cartographic overviews. The qualitative part (descriptive criticism, comparative observations) will be based on cinematic effects (camera angles, framing, editing, focus, etc.) adding other cities with discontinuous experiences (e.g. Berlin, Prague, Budapest, Athens).

## OUTCOMES

After unfolding these interruptions, the second part materializes in a multi-screen installation. (11) The aim is to express accumulated visual information by adding a spatial context that contributes to a physical experience of *discontinuity*.
As discussed, the main reason for this method is the typology of primary materials and the topic in itself. Similarly, an adequate way of virtually evoking a place is through motion in a three-dimensional reality. This visual anthropology offers immersive introspection in a fragmented collage of divided screens, with several possible layouts. By walking through the composition, engaged viewers become pedestrians — "flâneurs" (Walter Benjamin) — actively initiating narrative sequences — "promenades architecturales" (Le Corbusier). Through formal aspects (shape, material, style) of structural and expressive discontinuities, tensions of contradictory urbanism or buildings that Robert Venturi suggests (12) will become even more obvious.

Because impressions of a city are "partial, fragmentary, mixed with other concerns" (13), mapping tools and elaborated sonic compositions can target new layers of discontinuities, inspired by audio-extracts of the selected videos (soundtrack, movie quote, urban noise).

Language being as powerful as images, acoustics and its content demand attention. Voice-over would lead to a commented video-essay (Chris Marker, Harun Farocki, Thom Andersen). However, to inspire individual impressions, the composition can work well without verbal content, but with a specific soundtrack (e.g. "Koyaanisqatsi", Godfrey Reggio, 2000 / music: Philip Glass). Indeed, cutting out and re-editing selected parts, the goal is to disclose/create new meanings. Thus, instead of calling it a "video-collage" or "film-installation", it is perhaps more accurate to identify it as "video-dé/collage" or "film-de/construction".

Ultimately, it is important to leave some space to intuition during the making-of — not only because the amount/nature of collected material remains unpredictable at the moment, but also because experimental operations tend to appear only during creation.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The text presented here is a draft of a practice-based design-driven doctoral research that explores Belgrade's urban identities with an audiovisual experience by using film archives. The project has been formulated through an unfolded set of the three most constant questions that are expected to be asked during doctoral research: *what* / *why* / *how*. Firstly, from a subject's contextualization and its main concept(s) to the issues to resolve. Secondly, from the relevance of the means to the relevance of the topic.

Finally, from the methodology to the expected results. After uncovering these preliminary strategies, it appears that multiple designs may complete the thesis, depending on found footage and the factors to be emphasized. As these factors will be figured out throughout the design process, it is still too early to envisage the arrangement of the "final product" — if we expect it to be "fixed" and "consumed".

### ENDNOTES / BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Figure 1. Architects/filmmakers/architectures/films. M. Niković, 2021.
Figure 2. Chosen areas shown with Google Maps. M. Niković, 2021.
Figure 3. Film still: Cipelice na Asfaltu (dir. Vučinić, Boško. 1956)
Figure 4. Film still: Love Affair, or the Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator (dir. Makavejev, Dušan. 1967)