The Future Belongs to Us

Crisis – Time to Regroup, Self-Management – Means to Reorganize

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Abstract

As a principle of industrial and spatial organisation, self-management enabled Yugoslavia to shape its own socialism after the breakup with the Soviet Union and the rest of the Eastern Bloc – in 1986. It even represented the paradigmatic element of a proposal for an urban restructuring of New Belgrade submitted by Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre and architects Renaudie and Gilbaud. The Yugoslav experience of self-management is not the only one. The oldest precedent probably is the Paris Commune. Bottom-up self-management has unravelled the planet over, in factories of Eastern Europe, neighbourhoods in South American cities, and rural communities in North Africa and the Middle East, to mention some.

This essay will look at self-management as a critical socio-political paradigm inherently connected to spatial determinants and both a means and a goal of reorganising society in the contemporary moment and for the ever nearer future.

The narrative is positioned in a broader temporal context of mass misappropriation of space by mechanisms of power: be it state, corporate, state-corporate, or architectural; the context, that is, of "flat hierarchies" as the new office ping pong tables and bean bags and corporate campuses as the new public spaces, and in the narrower temporal context of a global pandemic forcing a redefinition of public and private, of work and labour relations.

Introduction

Should you take a walk through New Belgrade on a chilly day in late autumn or early winter, your path through the area, tucked between the rivers Danube and Sava, will inevitably cross many slender shadows – of stanchions holding up backboards, hoops, nets – spreading long in the haze of the soft, blurry light of the low winter sun (the kind you would find in your very own distant memories).

Throughout the architectural conundrum of concrete buildings of the 20th-century socialist heritage and the glitzy corporate developments of more recent years, much like some unassuming monuments of times and spaces past, the basketball courts of New Belgrade stand throughout the neighbourhoods – still bustling with life, cheerful, if a little tired, of hopeful survivors. If you, however, take this walk in the adamant heat of a different time of the year, it will be the sound of basketballs hitting the hot asphalt and teammates calling to each other that will follow you along your way.

The summer of 1961 was one such summer: on August 12, 1961, newspapers were filled with reports of scorching heat, dramatic heatstroke episodes, and shoes sinking into melting asphalt on the streets of Belgrade, Yugoslavia being 'the warmest country in Europe', and its capital 'warmer even than Cairo.' (Došen et al., 2012) In the cooler German capital, Berlin, a different kind of shock startled its citizens that same weekend: the city was being split into two, further deepening the Cold War divisions of the world, effectively materializing the Iron Curtain in the shape of a wall. A mere two weeks later, back in Belgrade, representatives of 28 countries—predominantly from the Third World—gathered to formalize the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), imagined as an alternative to both the capitalist and communist blocs, that is, the USA and the USSR.

This balancing between the two predominant political forces had in fact begun with the Yugoslav liberation struggles during World War II, under Yugoslav partisans and their *de facto* leader Tito, who would go on to lead Socialist Yugoslavia after the war. Tito was, also, one of the key figures in the creation and founding of the Non-Aligned Movement, having closely followed the developments during the 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia, which had the goal of promoting Asian-African cooperation, especially in opposing colonialism and neo-colonialism. The following year, Tito—seeking to create and partake in a new political space at a global scale and embodying what can correctly be described as Yugoslav 'affective affinities with guerrilla liberation movements from a theoretical stance emphasizing the inter-connectedness between political independence and anti-imperialism' (Stubbs, 2020)—invited the President of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, to his residence in the Brijuni Islands, to revisit the postulates of Bandung. This meeting would pave the way for the 1961 formative Conference of the Non-Aligned States. The Non-Aligned Movement, thus, wasn't born in Belgrade but it did take some of its first steps in the capital of Yugoslavia, symbolically: not only politically, but also geographically placed in-between the blocs and 'within' the Iron Curtain.

One of the publicly accessible moments of the NAM Conference was the opening of the Friendship Park, in which the leaders present each planted a tree. The park surrounds a sprawling H-shaped structure in the middle of New Belgrade, the former Federal Executive Council (Savezno izvršno veće, SIV) of Yugoslavia, also ceremoniously opened on the occasion of the Founding Conference of the NAM. The building was, mere weeks prior to Yugoslavia's expulsion from the Communist bloc, the first to begin construction on New Belgrade, imagined and designed as the new capital and administrative centre of Socialist Yugoslavia, the building itself serving as its centrepiece. Until that year, and under the influence of close Yugoslav-Soviet relations between 1945 and 1948, the social system in Yugoslavia was centralist, with state institutions controlling and administrating all aspects of social life, including economy, education, and culture. In 1948, after the conflict with Stalin, the Communist Party began to officially renounce the centralist, state, form of socialism. Two years later, in 1950, the country established workers' self-management (*samoupravljanje*) as the official principle of industrial organisation.

Parallel Construction: Self-Management and New Belgrade

Samoupravljanje as the main principle of industrial and social organisation was designed as a system of relations that were based on social, rather than state-owned means of production. In other words, *samoupravljanje* was a mode of production in which the means of production and the management thereof were returned to the subjects of labour, the workers themselves. Furthermore, besides control over the means of production, another crucial aspect of self-management as an official paradigm (though only attained later, and not to a full extent) was control over decision-making. In more proverbial terms, this meant *presence over representation*; workers' collectives were to become sovereign bodies within factories (enterprises), able to vote and debate crucial issues regarding the operation of the enterprise employing them and their own conditions of labour. Here, first among the contradictions of self-management in Yugoslavia, *samoupravljanje* presupposes the *withering away of the state* (in the Marxist sense), albeit the very state that proclaims it

This switch from a centralist to a self-managed model of socialism launched a series of events in Yugoslavia that significantly altered and determined the country's political and everyday life. In cinemas, Soviet propaganda films were replaced by American blockbusters and Soviet imagery became the subject of ridicule in Yugoslav media. Supporters of Stalin were sent to prison camps, and ideologues and political leaders of the country began to dismiss state socialism as 'Stalinist' and reductive for the progress and emancipation of the working class, going so far as to invite artists and architects to distance themselves from socialist realism in their work. *This* was the actual birth of 'the Yugoslav experiment', coinciding with the birth of New Belgrade: the reorientation of cultural and foreign politics towards the West and of internal policy towards a de-centralized system of self-managed socialism immediately affected the plans for the new capital.

In order to correctly track, via architectural and urbanism practice, the switch from a Soviet model to a self-managed socialism, one must observe the first urban plan to consider New Belgrade after World War II: the 1946 'Sketch of Regulation of Belgrade on Left Bank of Sava' by architect Nikola Dobrović. Based on the idea of a new city representing the administrative centre of political power of the newly founded federation, as well as the centre of the city of Belgrade, the plan considered the area as a place freed from history, a clean space without significant pre-formed urban structures, a *tabula rasa.* In the words of the architect: 'The plan for New Belgrade is created on a blank paper without layouts [of the existing condition] and to the 1:5000 scale.' (Blagojević, 2007, 58) In her analysis of Dobrović's 1946 plan, architect, historian, and theorist Ljiljana Blagojević emphasises its vision of New Belgrade as the centre of power for the new country, while at the same time pointing out the architect's Corbusier-inspired, self-conceived role as the demiurge of both Belgrade and New Belgrade. Two aspects of Blagojević's critique are particularly pertinent here. The first of them regards Nikola Dobrović's (mis)use of a quote from Karl Marx as the epigraph of the plan: 'Finally, no entity can be a value without being an object of use. If it is useless, then the labour contained in it is also useless, does not count as labour and, hence, does not form a value.' According to Blagojević, even though it can be considered an ideologically-driven sign of the times, it is also a thesis 'compatible with the text of the modern movement in architecture [and] shows that, in Dobrović's discourse of a modernist architect/ urban planner, this quote reads as a depoliticized modernist principle of value and beauty in usefulness.' Blagojević goes on to examine the programming of the plan, particularly its lack of consideration for the 'basic questions of the new city, its population, residential zones, and public city space' due to its sole focus on administrative buildings, such as ministries, the seat of government, and the Central Committee of the Communist Party,[1] offering 'an ideal plan for an administrative city which was, in essence, completely closed to the citizens.' (Blagojević, 2007, pp. 59-72)

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[1] Between the end of World War II and the 1948 break, Yugoslavia was one of the USSR's closest allies and closely mimicked its centralist system. The plans for New Belgrade embodied this in conceptualizing the city as the centre of political power in the country.

The political leaders of the country, still, wanted to explore their idea behind the founding of the new capital beyond the visions of a single architect. Despite many competitions created to achieve this within the all-Yugoslav political and architectural-urbanistic discourse of the period, however, none of the proposals were chosen, and no decision was made regarding a planning direction or architectural style. (Blagojević, 2007, 73)

Exactly this ambivalence of the Competition Council portrayed the *in-between-ness* in which architectural and cultural practice in Yugoslavia found itself at the time, one that would soon prove to be paradigmatic for the country as a whole. Architecture historian Vladimir Kulić writes:

The problem was not that the doctrine was Soviet; the most prominent architects who enjoyed the leading positions in the new society thanks to their participation in the liberation war were by and large left-leaning and loyal to the new regime. The problem was that most of them had converted to the various inflections of international modernism well before the war and could not be easily convinced to go back to historical ornament and the traditional modes of composition, as Socialist Realism required. (Kulić, 2014, 132)

The competitions' quest for a Yugoslav socialist 'new monumentality' was based in the resolving of a double negation: the rejection of both the International Style – i.e., the formalism of the Western European model of modernism – and the formalist eclecticism of the Soviet model. (Blagojević, 2007, 85) Even though this 'new monumentality' also presupposed the creation of a new and better communal life and the formation of new urban centres, the problematic of the new city was, in the very beginning of the planning of New Belgrade, entirely turned towards the conception of individual objects for government and party administration. Soon, the practice's tightrope balancing between the paradigms of modernism claimed by the West and socialist realism omnipresent in the East would come to pertain to the entirety of political, social, and cultural relations of and within Yugoslavia, as the country set itself further in a neither-nor positioning in the landscapes of the Cold War.

The reorientation of cultural and foreign politics towards the West and of internal policy towards a de-centralized system of self-managed socialism immediately affected the plans for New Belgrade. The new 1948 plan, again by Dobrović, introduced mass housing to the urban landscape, a clear differentiation of the new concept of a modern socialist city from the previous plans for the federal capital. (Blagojević, 2009, 126) As the expulsion from the Cominform affected the economic situation in Yugoslavia, the construction, set into motion with the work on the SIV (at the time still called Presidency of the Government) and a 'student town' was discontinued until the mid-fifties. Around that time, the concept for New Belgrade was reconfigured along with the ongoing reorganisation of political structures and continual elaborations of the self-managed system. In October of the same year, a new plan for New Belgrade was created that noticeably shifted the focus onto housing: the ministry buildings, for example, were erased from this and all subsequent plans. (Blagojević, 2007, pp. 126-133) A little later, the 1950 General Urban Plan of Belgrade, which included New Belgrade, was adapted to the administrative division of local government and the city into *rayons* and *residential areas* (or: *microrayons*), with 'rayon centres' such as administrative, cultural, trade, sport and physical culture centres, and the rayon park. With this plan, residential areas already began to represent the basic and smallest organisational units of the city, which would go on to pave the way for future application of *samoupravljanje* principles in spheres of life beyond the governmental and industrial.

The shift in focus to housing in the planning of New Belgrade, as well as the housing policies this shift embedded, were very much in accordance with the idea of social ownership and were anchored in the concept of an apartment being a common good – theoretically, in Yugoslavia, the right to an apartment was a universal right, 'a basic legal institution which enables a working person one of the important living conditions', as the First General Yugoslav Council on Apartment Construction and Housing concluded. (Blagojević, 2007, p. 134) The ideal of social justice and equal distribution that it entailed was, however, economically and technically out of reach at the time. This was another aspect contributing to the

prioritization of housing construction from 1949 with the 'student town' and from the mid-fifties, when the construction of New Belgrade was resumed—all the while closely following the development paradigms of self-managed socialism. Blagojević writes:

In the first stage of housing construction in New Belgrade, the basic organizational unit of residential zones was a 'residential microrayon;' beginning with the late fifties, the concept of planning and designing housing in New Belgrade focused on the 'residential community' as the basic planning unit of the city. Even though the idea of a residential community takes cue from the concept of Clarence A. Perry's 'neighborhood unit' and later sociological and urban elaborations of the concept, in socialist Yugoslavia, the introduction of residential communities is directly connected to the introduction of the self-managed system. The residential community is conceptualized as a community of citizens living in the same area (housing block or microrayon), organized within the municipality in order to manage common social concerns and improve the everyday life in the area. (Blagojević, 2007, pp. 135-6)

These residential communities were soon renamed '*platial* communities' (sh. месне заједнице/*mesne zajednice*), *platial* being an adjective derived from the noun *place*, analogous to *spatial*, from *space*. Despite not being a word in the English language, it is used in this text as an important linguistic distinction that should not be equated with *local*: in Yugoslavia, *platial* communities were one of the instances of *local* self-governance (sh. локална самоуправа/*lokalna samouprava*), along with, for example, housing councils and municipalities. In 1958, the law determined principles of organisation and development of platial communities as 'territorial units and instances of self-managed associations of citizens,' introducing them in the 1963 constitution. According to the *Encyclopedia of Self-Management*, the SFRY Constitution of 1963 defines a platial community as a 'basic self-managed community of working people and citizens in a settlement, part of a settlement or several connected settlements with the goal of achieving certain common interests and a solidary satisfaction of common needs.' The 1974 constitution expands on this definition, establishing the platial community as an obligatory, constitutive element of the socio-political system, i.e., the source from which the self-managed socio-political system grows. (Vratuša et al., 1979, p. 813) The year 1963 was also when the first Platial Community Centre was designed and began to be built in Yugoslavia for the 'Fontana' Platial Community in New Belgrade.

The Yugoslav experience of self-management was not the only instance of experimenting with principles of workers' control in recent history.[2] Still, Yugoslavia remains the only example in history in which self-management was introduced 'from above,' as an official policy of the state, and the one instance that kept drawing the attention of French Marxist sociologist and urban theorist Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre had a lasting relationship with Yugoslav thinkers, and even participated in several iterations of the philosophical summer school organised on the Croatian island of Korčula by the Praxis group.[3] One of the moments from the school was described in Lefebvre's 1964 article for the *France Observateur,* which reads like one of his more casual writings:

We get the impression of some joyful socialism, differentiated from the rigid socialism and the imposing capitalist prosperity alike. But, isn't it a consequence of being in the South, and of an ancestral friendliness?

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2 For an excellent overview of many non-Yugoslav experiences of self-management, see Ness, I., & Azzellini, D. (2011). *Ours to master and to own: workers' control from the commune to the present*. Haymarket Books., and Azzellini, D. (2015). *An alternative labour history: worker control and workplace democracy*. Zed Books.

3 Yugoslav philosophers and sociologists behind *Praxis* (Branko Bošnjak, Danko Grlić, Milan Kangrga, Rudi Supek, Gajo Petrović, Predrag Vranicki, Danilo Pejović and Ivan Kuvačić) were also prominent supporters of the student initiatives in 1968, and the journal itself was emblematic of Yugoslav contradictions: though its editors were fired from university and party positions after the events of 1968, and attacked as 'CIA agents and destroyers of socialism' for their works on the journal by high-ranking Croatian government officials, the journal was state-sponsored and published by the Croatian Philosophical Society for around ten years, starting in 1964. Špelić, D., & Klasić, H. (n.d.). 1968 u Jugoslaviji. *Povijest četvrtkom*. other, Zagreb, Croatia; Hrvatski Radio.

Space and Power: A Modern Perspective

Even though Lefebvre had just eight years earlier spoken of the shortcomings of Yugoslav self-management, (Ronneberger, 2009, p. 98) it still represented the conceptual and theoretical basis of the proposal for the urban restructuring of New Belgrade that he co-authored with French architects Pierre Guilbaud and Serge Renaudie in 1986. The theoretical basis of the proposal, detailed in the introduction of the submission, is one of Lefebvre's many writings on self-management (*autogestion*).[4] Anchored in his previous writings on space—especially *The Right to The City* (1968), but also *The Production of Space* (1974)—this detailed essay is considered to be one of the most concrete instances in which his theory of the production of space is made viable to architectural design.

In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre established, besides the three levels of space (global, urban, private), a trialectic *system* of (dimensions of) space: perceived—conceived—lived, in which perceived (physical) space represents the structures and infrastructures where everyday life (routine) unfolds, as well as how inhabitants use those structures; conceived (mental) space presupposes the ideas (representations) of space stemming from different positions of power, be it capital, state, bureaucracy, or architectural and urbanistic projects; and lived (social) space implies social interactions and actions mostly at the scale of the everyday, informed by social values, traditions, desires, dreams, and memories of inhabitants and users. Importantly, for Lefebvre the lived or social space encompasses the previous two while at the same time being a 'function' of them. (Bertuzzo, 2009, pp. 30-31)

In turn, with the concept of 'new citizenship' elaborated in the competition proposal, Lefebvre reiterates and expands on aspects of the *right to the city* he had conceptualized in the late sixties. This text envisions the right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit, to the œuvre, to participation and appropriation, and the right to urban life, to be continuously transformed and renewed (Stanek, 2011, p. 234). Furthermore, Lefebvre establishes an understanding of urban life and urban society that to a great extent connects with his concurrent writings on *autogestion*. This connection goes well beyond and much deeper than his direct call for *autogestion* and an urbanism oriented towards social needs (Lefebvre 1996, p. 147) as part of an economic, political, and cultural revolution in the final chapter of *The Right to the City*. Just before that call, Lefebvre writes:

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[4]   According to an email message from Serge Renaudie to Łukasz Stanek dated 2008, Lefebvre was the author of the theoretical introduction whereas the main architectural and urban ideas were Renaudie's. (Stanek, 2011, p. 234).

This comes very close to Lefebvre's writings about *autogestion* just some years earlier, in *Theoretical Problems*, where he describes it as a means of struggle and a means of reorganisation of society, i.e., the goal of that very struggle. (Lefebvre, 2010, p. 149) If for Lefebvre the right to the city–both a cry and a demand–wasn't a right to the basic needs, but rather a specific urban quality, encompassing access to the resources of the city for all of the population, and the possibility of experimenting with and realising alternative ways of life, (Schmid, 2012, p. 49) it was very closely connected to his conceptualizations of *autogestion* at the time, even though the latter was, in the texts of 1966 and 1968, still almost exclusively pertinent to socio-economic principles. Indeed, Lefebvre would soon, in *The Urban Revolution* (1970), reiterate the revolutionary potentiality of this intertwinement of the struggle for the right to the city and the principle of *autogestion*, describing a political strategy based around generalized self-management [*autogestion generalisée*], and examining the conditions of its possible translation into the sphere of urban space, from that of the industrial. In 1986, with the Proposal for New Belgrade, he would go on to further expand on such a potentiality. In it, via *autogestion* – which, for him, also represented the possibility of the self-production of an individual within the community, but beyond the state (Stanek, 2011, p. 240) – he extends both the concepts of right to the city and production of space through juxtaposition with the concept of *citizen-citadin* [*citoyen-citadin*], and towards not only a restructuring of the urban tissue of New Belgrade, but also of society as a whole.

In the opening remarks of the submission, Lefebvre describes the potentiality of Belgrade, and Yugoslavia, in his concrete positing of the problematic of a 'New Urban':

The right to the city comes as a complement to the rights of the *citizen*: who is not only a member of a 'political community' whose conception remains indecisive and conflictual, but of a more precise grouping which poses multiple questions: the modern city, the urban. This right leads to active participation of the *citizen-citadin* in the control of the territory, and in its management, whose modalities remain to be specified. It leads also to the participation of the *citizen-citadin* in the social life linked to the urban; it proposes to forbid the dislocation of that urban culture, to prohibit the dispersion, not by piling the 'inhabitants' and 'users' one on top of another, but by *inventing*, in the domains and levels of the architectural, urbanistic, and territorial. (Lefebvre et al., 1986/2009, p. 2)

Lefebvre, thus, assigns the potentiality *citizen-citadin* in Yugoslavia had to claim their right to the city precisely to the concept of *samoupravljanje:* 'Because of self-management, a place is sketched between the citizen and the citadin, and Yugoslavia is today perhaps one of the rare countries to be able to concretely pose the problematic of a *New Urban,*' he writes in the same text. (Lefebvre et al., [1986] 2009, p. 2) While the English term 'citizen,' corresponding to the French '*citoyen,*' pertains to belonging or admission to a conceived community (a representation: nationality, ethnicity, religion, etc.), the term *citadin*, on the contrary, describes every inhabitant with the capability and the right to use (as opposed to: consume) and produce space, therefore continually directly affecting it. *Citadins* are not 'given' a right to the city, but constantly engage in a struggle to achieve it and keep it. *Citadins* should be capable – through a perpetual struggle mirroring the process of the production of space – to debunk and change the paradigms that reproduce space to the liking of varied instances of power.

The competition proposal by Lefebvre, Renaudie, and Guilbaud posits the question of a 'New Urban,' the renaissance of the city, primarily through the establishment of such a 'New Citizenship' as a fully realised '*citaddinité,*' 'a dynamic possibility offered to individuals who inscribe themselves into the movement of collectivity, of "*vivre-ensemble*" [living together]: the City'" (Lefebvre et al., 1986/2009, p. 16) and the refusal of the 'New Monumentality,' characteristic of the development of New Belgrade over approximately twenty years prior to the competition. During that time, the area had developed as a dominantly residential part of the city, with 'superblocks' designed to house five to ten thousand inhabitants each, along with basic services, such as schools, health centres, etc. The proposal of by, Renaudie and Guilbaud focused strongly

on urban complexity and was based on the principles that they had identified as missing in mid-eighties New Belgrade: *diversity* ('of production and products,' 'of management rules and practices', 'of methods of regroupment [*sic*] and individualization', 'of circulations, communication networks and their management, production, realization and use'), *imbrication* (overlapping 'of flux and networks', 'dimensions and forces', 'of ages', 'of appropriations – public/private, collectivity/individuality, community/intimacy', 'of territories – in terms of laws, size, time', 'of different managements'), and *respect for specificities* (preservation of individual identities within a community).

Just as important as their interventions in the urban plan of New Belgrade was the team's call for the right to the city that presupposes a transformation (reconfiguration) of society. The project didn't present any fixed forms in urban space, but rather modes of organisation based on *autogestion*, or *samoupravljanje*, as it, for Lefebvre, represented a force opposite to alienation, a 'de-alienation', through which control over one's own life is to be reclaimed, 'in such a way that it becomes œuvre.' (Lefebvre, 2010, 150)

In the competition proposal, Lefebvre, Renaudie, and Gilbaud envision an imbrication of appropriations: a diversification of relations between individual and collectivity, intimacy, and community. This is to lead to diversified forms of *autogestion* and of production, which further diversify the very principle of generalized self-management, enriching it with new social and political structures, towards a *truly* self-managed system, enabling new modes of (re-)appropriation of the space of the city, daily life, and the social.

This opposition of alienation and appropriation is embedded in the same modes of struggle as that of domination (of centralised power) and *autogestion* (self-management). Among those modes is also the struggle for (the right to) the city, which encompasses, but isn't limited to a struggle against exclusion, marginalization, and exploitation: a struggle for access to resources, decision-making, potentialities, and possibilities for new and different *uses* of urban space. Thus, ultimately, a struggle towards *autogestion territoriale*, or territorial self-management, which is the actual core of the team's concept for the 1986 New Belgrade competition and represents a bottom-up force opposite to that of top-down, alienating practices in urban space. This alienation, as Lefebvre had written about in *The Urban Revolution*, goes beyond the mere sale of land (physical space, so to say):

The deployment of the world of commodities now affects not only objects but their containers, it is no longer limited to content, to objects in space. More recently, space itself has begun to be bought and sold. Not the earth, the soil, but *social space,* produced as such, with this purpose, this finality (so to speak). Space is no longer only an indifferent medium, the sum of places where surplus value is created, realized, and distributed. It becomes the product of social labor, the very general object of production, and consequently of the formation of surplus value. This is how production becomes social within the very framework of neocapitalism. (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 154)

Fifty years after *The Urban Revolution*, this is extraordinarily pertinent, in urban spaces and otherwise, though by no means a new, or surprising, development. In the years after the competition in which Lefebvre et al. took part, Yugoslavia began to dissolve, culminating in a series of fratricidal wars the scale of which hadn't been seen on European soil since WWII. What followed in urban spaces across the successor states was a series of dubious privatizations and sales by and to criminal powers that be, officially and otherwise, while, appropriately, taking shy first steps within the world of neoliberal capitalism. Elsewhere, and particularly in the West, such fluctuations were already full steam ahead, and private, corporate interests, already securely embedded in structures of political power, have been shaping the world in every sense of the word, more often than not relying on the justification of (in particular, technological) progress.

Back in New Belgrade, which Lefebvre in the eighties saw as a potential launching point of a self-managed new urban, the 30 years since the breakup of Yugoslavia have led to a chimeric creation of scattered,

privately-owned glass structures and Orthodox churches layered atop formerly social housing constructed in a now non-existing country. Just across the river, laws and regulations have been altered and major portions of land, and jurisdiction over them, sold to Middle Eastern oil and other corporate magnates, to build luxury developments disrupting not only the architectural tissue of the city and its infrastructural configurations, but also leaving people homeless, either by blatant forced evictions, or by gradual rises in living costs. Most recently, a 23.5 metre tall monument to a medieval Serbian ruler was unveiled in front of the building of the former main train station, dislocated from the city centre to give way to said luxury developments. The price of its construction has been deemed a state secret.

As (private) interests of power acquire and shape urban spaces, they are often also entitled to regulate not only their form and structure, but also activities and modes of use and consumption that unfold within them, rendering the term 'public space' an oxymoron at best, and 'social space' a fantasy. The phrases, however, remain as selling points and methods to conceal the true nature of (privatized) urban spaces and processes behind them. These mechanisms of power (in all its many shapes) are more quickly and aggressively than ever approaching, accessing, and taking over spaces – not only economic or political spaces, but also all the spaces of the everyday: urban, social, and beyond. It is now crucial to, within the framework of that very everyday, look for concepts of resistance and reorganization of society. One such concept, embedded in the everyday, and loaded with potential for reappropriation is spatial self-management, *autogestion territorial, prostorno samoupravljanje*.

To locate and retrieve the successes and shortcomings of it and various other forms of self-management, and to recognise their truest iterations, as well as what made them such, it is crucial to unravel the many iterations and numerous layers of historical examples of self-management, well beyond those present in laws and regulations of times past – to take steps, from the global, via urban, to the private, the everyday, and away from the influences of the instances of power, whichever form they might take.

If an axis was to be followed from the centres of power proclaiming *samoupravljanje*, via the spaces of industrial labour and production where it was birthed in the SFRY, and further across its employment in political protest and resistance (in the form of demonstrations, occupations, sit-ins, and alternative art and countercultural practices alike),[5] truly lived *samoupravljanje* is encountered to an ever-broader extent. At the same time, so is gradually weaker interest and intensity of centralized control and regulation from the instances of power. Such an unravelling, of course, did not escape Henri Lefebvre in his dealings with the territory of New Belgrade and the everyday lives of its inhabitants.

As someone who had, at the time the Competition for the New Belgrade Urban Structure Improvement took place in 1986, been writing on and researching self-management for at least twenty years, Lefebvre was well aware of the contradictions and inconsistencies of Yugoslav *samoupravljanje*. Indeed, in a 1978 interview with Catherine Régulier, he says: 'I am talking about the failure of centralized planning in the Soviet Union as well as the failures of *autogestion* in Yugoslavia […] The movement comes from below or it does not come at all. The example of Yugoslavia leads us [as well to that] conclusion. A state that proclaims *autogestion* from above paralyzes it by this mere fact and converts it into its opposite.' (Ronneberger, 2009, p. 98) Still, in the competition proposal, he bases the potentiality of the urban revolution and New Belgrade in the very concept of self-management. This, of course, was not due to some naïveté. It was, perhaps, in order to (re) establish a utopian vision of self-management, as Łukasz Stanek writes in *Henri Lefebvre on Space* (2011, p. 234); and, perhaps, because Lefebvre – who had closely followed the changes in Yugoslavia since at least the early sixties – recognised that, even though often employed as a top-down tool by instances of power, *samoupravljanje* still, at some scale, existed as a truly lived (everyday) practice.

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[5]   See Pajović, U. (2018). The Utopia Belongs to Us. Towards Self-Management: On Resistance, Remembering, and a Hope for Revolution. *Kajet*, (2), 142–151.

With the Yugoslav Constitution of 1974, which introduced self-management at all levels of society, the country's population was divided into three groups: the 'working class' (the carriers of power in socialism, in accordance with Marxist theory), the 'working people' (employees in state-owned companies and institutions), and everyone else, labelled 'citizens' (/građani). (Erić, 2009, p. 140) To be able to actively take part in the self-management system, writes historian Zoran Erić, 'the citizen[-građanin] could act only on the level of their local territorial unit, while the other "sociopolitical" organizations were reserved for working people only.' (Erić, 2009, p. 140)

There are several factors explaining why this smallest territorial level of self-management is where we actually encounter the most immediate implementation of the theoretical implications of *samoupravljanje*. Firstly, the affected inhabitants and their interests were present, rather than represented; secondly, all strata of Yugoslav society were implied and involved in this level of self-management; and, thirdly, and similarly to cultural institutions (as opposed to, for example, economic activities), there was arguably less interest from the ruling apparatus to assert its control over them. The 'local territorial units' in the narrowest sense were *platial* communities. According to the law, these were associations of people (working class, working people, and *citizen-građanins* alike) living in the same area, who made decisions regarding the organisation of the settlement, housing, communal utilities, child and social care, culture, physical culture, consumer protection, environmental protection, defence, etc. (Vratuša et al., 1979, p. 813) Conceived as the basic constitutive units of a self-managed society, they reflected the reality of self-management in working organisations in Yugoslavia, in which the lower levels saw real workers' self-management, while, on the upper level, among the administrative cadres and the political elites in the League of Communists, there was far less democracy. (Erić, 2009, p. 140) Similarly, as self-managed entities defined by the state, platial communities also met with problems symptomatic of Yugoslav self-management in general. These included increased bureaucratization of the practice, the positioning of the workers' organisations, internal distribution, and deviation from limits on the role of the League of Communists (Erić, 2009, p. 142).

In his 1966 'Theoretical Problems of *Autogestion*', Lefebvre writes that *autogestion* appears 'in the *weak points* of existing society.' (Lefebre, 2010, p. 144) In this sense: the *citizen-građanin* in Yugoslavia was the non-member of the party, the unemployed,[6] the student, the minority, the individual whose space, time, and city are predominantly those of struggle and of the everyday. Furthermore, the *citizen-građanin* employed self-management within that everyday, as a means of that struggle and, in its true instances, towards an entirely self-managed society. On the other hand, the *citizen-građanin*'s ability to take part in decision-making in platial communities was high compared to other levels of society in Yugoslavia. Trapped in the ouroboric paradox of top-down self-management, the *citizen-građanin*, in a way, didn't face the same kind of challenges as the *citizen-citadin*. In other words, when the right to self-management is proclaimed from the centre of power, it might lose a crucial aspect: it might disappear from the horizon of struggle, thus leaving self-management at the brink of devolving into mere fragmented self-organisation, thus endangering the perseverance of the concept and the struggle altogether. Exactly this happened in Yugoslavia, making it possible for *samoupravljanje* to be transformed, by instances of power, into its almost opposite; for nationalistic tendencies to replace and extinguish class struggle and questions of labour; and, ultimately, for the very concept of *samoupravljanje* to be unable to survive the dissolution of the country in virtually any form.

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[6]   Uncommonly for a socialist country, and especially after the introduction of market socialism, levels of unemployment in Yugoslavia went, at times, up to 20% gross.

Today, Tomorrow: Global Crisis - Time to Regroup, Self-Management - Means to Reorganize

As I am writing this text, the world has been in a global pandemic for almost two years, having thus far resulted in over five million deaths. A tragedy of immense scale, it additionally embedded a worldwide halt to 'business as usual' primarily in the form of massive reduction of movement. Such a stillness, on the other hand, inherently had to lead to a state of retrospection and questioning of the (dis)contents of the system within which most of contemporary society has been operating for decades – especially the cruelties of late neoliberal capitalism and the many forms of inequality it requires to self-perpetuate.

Most obviously, these include, across the globe, the prioritization of geopolitics and/or bureaucracy over public health, a deepening wealth gap and increase of the 'extremely poor' population, and an almost-universal precarity of working classes as well as passport-politics in the form of movement regulations and vaccination schemes, effectively making visible international hierarchies. In spatial terms, the changed conditions of responsibility regarding public gatherings and modes of protest in public space, as well as varying restrictions on movement, have simultaneously paved way for and highlighted the tactics of brinkmanship by gentrification in urban environments and brutal extractivism elsewhere by instances of power – state, corporate, or, increasingly often, state *and* corporate.

With their increasing affluence and influence, technology companies have often been at the helm of such developments. It is a universal phenomenon that tech campuses, with their sudden influxes of socially isolated, high-earning employees directly disrupt urban and suburban spaces alike, primarily through gentrification and un-diversification. Designed primarily with the goals of productivity and technological progress in mind, these campuses offer (by way of in-house cafeterias, play spaces, nap pods, and similar bizarre takes on leisure and free time) an all-but-one solution to the everyday needs of its workers. The 'one' that is missing is housing, inevitably leading to a rent price spike due to the increased purchasing power of those seeking to move in, and thus effectively dislocating established community structures without there ever being a space and time for the two groups to communicate. Simultaneously to the mental, physical, and social, a similar kind of invasion is happening in parallel in the digital space, in which the distribution of knowledge and information as well as the right to agency, participation, and decision-making is increasingly in the hands of technology corporations.

Lefebvre died in 1991, the same year a series of wars began that would complete the dissolution of Yugoslavia and its self-managed system. In the thirty years since, technology has become a vital aspect of everyday life, even more so since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. That this sudden and all-encompassing boost in the presence of technological systems in our lives coincides with a reconsideration of political and social systems in place is crucial, and it is here that special attention needs to be drawn to the failure—especially symptomatic to leftist thought—not to reject technological development and automation *a priori* due to their immediate (and logical) association with Big Tech.

In 2021, Lefebvre's system of dimensions of space is still as pertinent as it was decades ago when it comes to theoretical considerations of city and countryside alike. Here, I propose another layer of everyday life to be acknowledged and added to this trialectic – that of the digital space. In a Lefebvrian sense, digital space would – much like social space encompasses, produces, and is a product of mental and physical space – encompass, produce, and be a product of all three. It would, however, also entail additional ways of detaching from each of them, and be able to further or 'double down' on any given one. Herein lies its gravest danger, and its biggest potential. As physical space 'doubled down', it is a simulation. Not, in the way in which mental space iterates plans, laws, renderings, drawings, nor in the way in which social space creates fantasies and dreams. No, 'digital-physical' space is a carbon copy, an infrastructural necessity of physical

space *per se* to also support—host—that which is beyond the physical, to extend by repetition: the profile on a social media platform, the digital shoes for an avatar sold at $3000 a pair, the inbox, and also the forum. As mental space 'doubled down', it is bureaucratic and corporate. Put simply, it is the weaponization and monetization of data for the purpose of control or profit, or, most often, both. Simultaneously, it is an infrastructure for the imagination that stems from the social-digital. The latter is an unadulterated reappropriation of space, agency, and control: it is organisation, democratic and non-discriminatory, forthright and fast, privacy-conscious and bottom-up. It is the terrain for social and global governance and for grassroots change. In other words, it is a perpetual struggle mirroring the process of the production of space to debunk and change the paradigms that reproduce space to the liking of varied instances of power.

It is, by far, also the most unfamiliar of the three. However, this, too, is shifting within the current global crisis, as formats akin to principles of self-management have been growing in digital space, thus reproducing the social-digital. Some of them, like *vTaiwan*, a platform for propositioning, direct voting, and debating, have even become part of official, crowdsourced policy making. As we witness this nascent force in the digital space, it is important not just to expand the understanding of the latter in both Lefebvrian terms and otherwise, but also to remember to explore, select, and apply historical (infra)structures of political, industrial and urban self-management to the contemporary context, constantly readdressing its failures and successes, asking how to reappropriate spaces, including digital spaces, and technology as means of organisation within the framework of global, bottom-up governance.

Lenin's famous suggestion was that socialism equalled Soviets plus electrification. Lefebvre updated this idea in 1964 to grassroots organisations plus modern electronic devices, and territories along with sites of production. (Lefebvre et al., 2010, p. 152) In 2021, is it, then: worldwide grassroots communities plus smart personal devices times historical experiences of self-management?

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