

4.154 S23

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T, R, 1-5pm

COLLECTIVE ARCHITECTURE STUDIO 3: *Repair and Replay of 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 Žižek, 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 three years into 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 Europe on the right path, back on track to becoming *proper* liberal democracies. In his view, the events of 1989 were 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 planned 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 historical (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.

common good and forms of coauthorship

Similarly to its previous iterations, Collective Architecture Studio 3 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 historical caveat: group authorship in such structures did not automatically mean no authorship. Collective Architecture Studio 3 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]

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

- 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 medical excuse supported by a doctor's note or verifiable personal emergency could result in a failing grade for the studio. If covid: 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	2/7	T	First day: Hello! We launch Archival Probes and Play.
	2/9	R	Archival Probes Directing Conversations
Week 2	2/14	T	Internal Pecha Kucha, Jelica Jovanović (zoom @2pm), Labor division on Modeling of Block 23
	2/16	R	Vlada Kulić (zoom) + Conversation about Repair and Labor division
Week 3	2/21	T	Monday Classes - No Studio
	2/23	R	3 Draft Proposals of Repair by the Collective Studio
Week 4	2/28	T	Ana in LA (Work in teams with Ekin)
	3/2	R	Internal pin up
Week 5	3/7	T	Ana at Cornell - Collective Works (or we discuss Friday instead TBD)
	3/9	R	Silent Review of Repair + we launch Replay 1: Collective Devices
Week 6	3/14	T	Desk Crits + Readings + Ivan Rupnik (in person)
	3/16	R	Collective tests of Collective Devices (mock-ups) + Dubravka Sekulić (zoom)
Week 7	3/21	T	Desk Crits + Refining + Marija Marić (zoom)
	3/23	R	We play with our friends and then we pack up
Spring Break: 3/24 - 4/2			TRIP TO BELGRADE (where we do lots of things together)
Week 8	4/4	T	Replay 2 Launch: Regrouping Discussion + Labor Division + Thinking Siting
	4/6	R	Site Models due, and Round Table discussion about first ideas
Week 9	4/11	T	How will the Collective manifest in the final body of work?
	4/13	R	Desk Crits
Week 10	4/18	T	Studio Self Review + Discussion about Production Standards
	4/20	R	Proposals in progress
Week 11	4/25	T	Architecture Fine grain review with guests
	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 or 16		Final Event