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THE GHOSTS OF THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE: THE CASE OF THE ARMY HEADQUARTERS IN BELGRADE, SERBIA

Srdan MILOŠEVIĆ

IMT Institute for Advanced Studies Lucca, Piazza San Ponziano 6, 55100 Lucca, Italy

E-mails: srdjan.milosevic@imtlucca.it, srdjan.milosevic.bg@gmail.com

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Abstract. When the construction of Dobrović’s Army Headquarters in Belgrade, Serbia was finally finished in 1965, at a location continuously designated for the Army, it was thought that it would serve its purpose in a secured future, the socialist one. And it was thought that it would house the leadership of the Army, which was seen as the rightful heir of the most glorious examples of military tradition from the Second World War. With his building Dobrović filled the void left by the WWII, but he also left a true mystery – how to interpret it. Long after the date of inception, in 1960, he offered two clues, the philosophical one – through the Bergson’s dynamic schemes and the void as the central dynamizing element of the composition and the symbolically appropriate one – through the story of the Sutjeska canyon. In this way he allowed everyone to find a reading suitable for them. But when the system changed, followed by a decrease in size of both the State and the Army, the question of the dual reading, which functioned so perfectly, suddenly became the cause of conflicts, conflicts of a more profound nature than ever before. Even in these changed circumstances the building performed its function, until the 1999 NATO aggression, when it was, although empty, bombed several times. The history repeated itself and this location once again experienced bombardment which left disturbing ruins, voids and shattered identities, in need of renegotiation. How to interpret a building from a socialist period in a society which is both post-socialist and post-conflict? How to find peace with the ghosts of the past, present and future, which permeate both the location and the building? How to approach different narratives surrounding the physical structure destroyed by war and considered as heritage even before those events, although officially listed only after the ruination and cessation of use. Those are the main subjects of this article.

Keywords: The Army Headquarters, Dobrović, Belgrade, post-conflict, complex *reading* of architecture, built heritage, dissonant heritage, ghosts, identification and identity.

Introduction

The author’s interest in the building of *The Army Headquarters*¹ in Belgrade, Serbia has been sparked by the intensification of the public debate at the beginning of 2013 about its possible future.

The building is located at the intersection of the Belgrade centre’s main and busiest streets – *Kneza Miloša (Prince Miloš’s Street)* and *Nemanjina (Nemanja’s Street)*. It was designed by the architect Nikola Dobrović², it was one of the targets during

the *NATO aggression*³ on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999 and since then it has been standing in the city centre in the same ruinous state. Prior to this unfortunate event its two parts had a military-administrative function, housing the Army Headquarters and the Federal Ministry of Defence. It should be em-

Urban Planning Institute of Belgrade; professor of the Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade, academician and honorary corresponding member of the RIBA (The Royal Institute of British Architects).

³ The term *NATO aggression* will be used in this article, instead of the terms NATO campaign; NATO bombing; Operation Allied Force or Operation Noble Anvil, for the events which occurred between March 24th and June 10th 1999 on the territory of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (in further text FR of Yugoslavia).

¹ The more detailed explanation of the name used here and later in the text will be given in the further discussion.

² Nikola Dobrović (1897–1967), Serbian and Yugoslav architect and urban planner; director of the Urban Planning Institute of the People’s Republic of Serbia and the first director of the

phasized that even before the bombardment it was considered as an important piece of architecture, although it was not listed as heritage until 2005.

Entering deeper into the discussion, many things, previously unknown, became clear, including layouts and the architectural program. Many standpoints in the debate became identifiable and it became increasingly harder to think about the structure, its symbolism and values critically. There was a constant danger of aligning with one of the sides debating its future and that was the trap that the author is trying to avoid in this article.

The building itself, its materiality and physical features are not the main focus of this article, as it has been shifted towards the narratives, here referred to as complexities and controversies, surrounding the building, towards questions of their formation and their use/abuse/misuse by various actors in various times. It is an attempt to look beyond the physical presence of the building itself by defining three of its most dominant *genius loci* features – its connection with high politics, significantly and often crucially involved in the decision-making process; its connection with war and destruction and its participation in the formation of the administrative centre of the state. The global architecture of the building and the spatial distribution within it are not of prime interest here and for that reason architectural plans and sections will not be used in this article.

The discussion, initiated by governmental institutions and officials and heated by the media, was transferred from the professional (architectural and theoretical) arena into the public sphere. By analysing the discussion it became possible to conclude that complexities and controversies surrounding every aspect of the Army Headquarter are preventing the possibility of reaching consensus in any of the vital questions, regarding its future. These complexities and controversies are numerous and it is possible to divide them into those preceding the moment in which the buildings were erected, those that appeared in the construction process and during its use and those that appeared at the time of and after the NATO aggression. This article is an attempt to make an explanatory list, by no means a final one, of the complexities and controversies surrounding the Army Headquarters, in hope that it could be used as a tool for a critical assessment of the object and its past, present and possible future/s. This article will also point to the political influence behind the creation of the general public opinion, which shifts it into the most desirable direction (for the governmental officials, of course) – towards the investor's model of reconstruction, i.e. demolition and construction of a

new building. It will also point to the reactions of the professional public and their willingness to stand up in the defence of something perceived worth safeguarding for the generations to come.

Methodology

Being outside of the country at the time when the discussion about the future of this building became the focus of the public attention has been both a limitation and an advantage. Limiting was the possibility to access and verify data and sources, both from persons and/or from written publication, confining it to some online editions of quotidian and periodic press, and internet presentations of diverse institutions and interested groups and individuals. Advantageous was the possibility of forming a more clear and critical image of the entire debate, its actors and their arguments. Occasional visits to Belgrade, undertaken in 2013 and 2014, brought an opportunity to collect other material written and published on this topic. It also brought a possibility to follow on-site changes of the physical structure itself, until the most recent development – demolition of the entrance to Building B. The material collected in this way and sources quoted in it served as a basis for extracting factual and interpretative data about the location, the building itself, the architect and the narratives originating prior to the most recent debate. Those sources will be heavily cited in the following discussion, although, whenever it was possible, primary sources were used. This was deemed necessary in order to broadly explain the settings and contexts. The information obtained in this way and especially those from secondary sources had to be taken “*cum grano salis*”, because their writers' ultimate affiliations and alignments were unknown to the author of this article. Translations of the material from the sources in Serbian and quoted here were done by the author.

For the purposes of this article the outcomes of two internet undertakings will be used. First are the results of the *public voice* regarding the future of the Army Headquarters, an online public opinion poll⁴ presented here in two cross-sections, from October 2013 and October 2014. It contained only one question “What do you think should be done with the Army Headquarters building?” followed with three possible answers: demolition and the construction of a new object; reconstruction to the original state; compromise between renewal and redevelopment. The poll started

⁴ Beobuild, an internet portal dedicated to the construction projects and urban news from Belgrade (BEOBUILD 2014)

on March 15th 2013 and lasted until November 1st 2014. By October 27th 2014 7017 participants took part⁵. The second are the results of the online petition⁶ against the demolition of the Army Headquarters organized by the Editorial Board of the Facebook page “Srpski arhitekti/Serbian architects”. The petition is public, but the majority of the signees are professionals in the field of architecture⁷.

Being surprised with the October 2013 poll results, in the same month the author performed a small-scale poll among its Facebook friends using exactly the same question and offered answers. In this way 36 complete answers from the total of 50 invited Facebook friends were collected. The structure of invited participants was diverse in terms of professional and political orientation, age and gender. The obtained results were used as a comparison with the results of the online poll.

The article is divided in the following sections: Introduction, Methodology, 10 chapters dealing with specific narratives surrounding the building and Conclusions. Throughout the article a significant number of footnotes have been used to explain the global context in which the building and its narratives were/are situated.

For personal names and source referencing, transliteration from Serbian to English will be used.

Untangling the inextricable – name

Translating anything from one language to another in general and personal names and nouns in particular is a painstaking and praiseworthy job. This job is even harder when the meaning and the scope of the name are not quite clear in the original language itself. Following the Latin proverb “*Nomen est omen*”, the proper and correct naming of Dobrović’s work would be an extremely interesting topic not just to begin with, but for all further consideration.

During its lifespan and even in its present state, the building was/is known under many names. As it continuously served for a military purpose, all name changes are the result of organizational changes of the state institution for which it was made in the first place and its needs of the moment⁸. In the moment of its

inception in 1953, it was intended to house *DSZPNO* (Državni Sekretarijat Za Poslove Narodne Odbrane – State Secretariat for the Management of People’s Defence), later renamed *DSNO* (Državni Sekretarijat za Narodnu Odbranu – State Secretariat for the People’s Defence), and even later, but still in the socialist Yugoslavia, renamed to *SSNO* (Savezni Sekretarijat za Narodnu Odbranu – Federal Secretariat for the People’s Defence). Throughout the time of socialism in Yugoslavia, the two buildings of the complex were simply referred to as *Building A* and *Building B*. Only with the end of socialist time⁹, when the size of both the country and its army decreased, to two buildings were assigned different roles and different names. Building A became known as *Generalštab Vojske Jugoslavije* (*The Yugoslav Army General Staff Building*), while the Building B housed *Savezno ministarstvo odbrane* (*The Federal Ministry of Defence*). However, in their attempt to appropriate the space, and especially such secretive, distant and for the majority of the people un-reachable and non-visitable space, the wide public used the term *Generalštab* (*The General Staff Building*) for the whole complex. The name was short and easy to remember, but it created an additional confusion in this field, because the building on the adjacent parcel was also known under the same name. As a way of making a distinction between the two, that building started being referred to as *Stari Generalštab* (*The Old General Staff Building*) or *Baumgartenov Generalštab* (*The Baumgarten’s General Staff Building*) according to the name of its architect¹⁰. Under this cumulative name of *Generalštab* (*The General Staff Building*) these buildings left a strong and lasting mental impression in the mind of most of the outside viewers. Under that name the buildings met the NATO bombs, although during those days in 1999 the media were trying to make a distinction of the names, according to their function at the time, not always successfully¹¹ and thus deepening the confusion. When the National Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, in 2005, listed these buildings as monuments of culture a strange phrasing was used, as if the existing confusion about the name and to what it refers to was not serious enough. The phrase used was again a cumulative name *Zgrade Generalštaba Vojske Srbije i Crne Gore i Ministarstva odbrane* (*The Buildings of the Army of*

⁵ E-mail communication with the owner of the www.beobuild.rs website (answer received on November 3rd 2014). Number of participants in October 2013 is unknown.

⁶ 1622 signatures on October 20th 2013, and 2400 signatures on October 28th 2014. (Peticija 2014)

⁷ E-mail communication with the creator of the petition (answer to email inquiry received on November 5th 2014).

⁸ Hereinafter the names will be given first in Serbian and then in English, allowing the reader to follow the name change. All the abbreviations will be explained in the text, and the full names

in Serbian are written with capitalized first letters of the words (not the correct Serbian orthography) to emphasize the creation of the abbreviations.

⁹ Roughly taken, in 1991/1992.

¹⁰ Please refer to the footnote 20.

¹¹ Personal recollections.

Serbia and Montenegro General Staff and the Ministry of Defence), and it was problematic from several aspects. For the discussion here, the most interesting one is the use of the name of the country-of-the-moment¹² to name one part of the complex. This part has never housed the Army of Serbia and Montenegro's General Staff offices, as it was constituted in 2003 on a location to which The Yugoslav Army General Staff offices were moved even before March 1999. Whether this was a political decision to mark a clear distinction between the previous period of Yugoslavia, interpreted as negative and unwanted and the new state organization, defined as positive and preferable, might be a subject for another discussion.

Following this name confusion in the Serbian language, the same continues in English as well. Some commentators, writing about the building, translate the term *Generalštab* into the phrase *The Yugoslav Army Headquarters* or in a simplified form *The Army Headquarters* (Jovanović-Weiss 2000). DOCOMOMO¹³, listing buildings as "Heritage in danger" used the phrase *Complex of Military Headquarters* (DOCOMOMO 2013a), while others use the Serbian name *Generalštab* in their writings (Kulić 2010). Although the most accurate translation to English would be *The Yugoslav Army General Staff Building* (for Building A) and *The Federal Ministry of Defence Building* (for Building B), for the purpose of this article a shorter and more cumulative name will be used for both buildings: *The Army Headquarters*.

Untangling the inextricable – location

A good source on the history of the location, its formations, developments, destructions and re-developments, but also its symbolic and representative meanings over the span of nearly three centuries and up to the period preceding 1999 is the book by the architect Bojan Kovačević (2001). A broader draw from Kovačević's book in the form of free reinterpretation, in combination with the author's personal knowledge of national history may be justified as an attempt to point toward the connections between the location on which the Army Headquarters was later built with high politics, destruction during the armed conflict and public image creation.

The history of the location starts with the second¹⁴ Austrian takeover of Belgrade and with their wish to strengthen its role as a stronghold in their further advancement toward east and south. In order to assure this, the mono-confessional (Roman Catholic) and the mono-ethnic (German) situation had to be established inside the fortress. Inhabitants who did not fit into this preferable image had to be moved outside the outer walls to newly established settlements, designed, according to the fashion of the moment, in an orthogonal grid. For the Christian Orthodox population this settlement under the name "Serbian settlement" or "Lower Sava Settlement"¹⁵ was formed in 1723–1724. Composed of 23 regular rectangular blocks in a semi-rigid grid parallel and perpendicular to the Sava River it followed the morphology of the terrain. In one of the central blocks, transformed into a square, was a small, wooden church. This settlement was short-lived and soon after the Ottoman-Turkish conquest in 1739, followed by imposed demolition, revenge and plague, few of the remaining inhabitants moved to the settlement inside the fortress walls. Some of the houses were still in a liveable condition and soon were occupied by the Roma population and throughout the XVIII century it was one of the favelas surrounding Belgrade. In May 1804¹⁶ as part of the insurgents' attempt to invade the fortress, it was completely destroyed and all traces were erased. Following the grant of the administrative autonomy in 1830¹⁷, the Serbian ruler, prince Miloš Obrenović, started to contemplate on the formation of the new capital¹⁸ – *New Belgrade* which had to be outside of the range of the Ottoman-Turkish artillery, still stationed in the Belgrade fortress, and yet close to the fortress as it was the home of the official Ottoman-Turkish commander of Serbia and representatives of foreign countries.

This was the key moment when the changes to the location and its functional and symbolic role started to

¹² Successive changes of state organization: 1943–1945 Democratic Federative Yugoslavia; 1945–1963 Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia; 1963–1991/2 Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; 1992–2003 Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; 2003–2006 State Union of Serbia and Montenegro.

¹³ DOCOMOMO – International Committee for documentation and conservation of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the Modern movement.

¹⁴ Belgrade fell under the Ottoman-Turkish rule in 1521. Austrians managed to take it over in three occasions: 1689–1690, 1717–1739 and 1787–1791. Only the second Austrian period in Belgrade was long enough to be marked by massive construction works on both the fortress and the surrounding settlements. Following the Belgrade Treaty in 1739, all those works had to be demolished.

¹⁵ For additional names of this settlement according to diverse sources see (Kovačević 2001).

¹⁶ In the First Serbian Uprising 1804–1813, Belgrade was liberated in late 1806 and had the role of the Serbian capital until 1813.

¹⁷ After the Second Serbian Uprising in 1815, constant negotiation between Serbian leadership and Ottoman-Turkish government led to a series of imperial decrees, starting in 1830 when administrative autonomy was granted to Serbia and ending in 1867 when the last Ottoman-Turkish troops left the territory of Serbia. Serbia gained full independence at the 1878 Congress of Berlin.

¹⁸ At that time and until 1841 the capital of the semi-independent Serbia was Kragujevac, a town about 130 km south of Belgrade.

pick up speed and when its identity as an *administrative hearth* of not just the city, but of the young nation, was created. It maintained this role until 1999, and even today, although partially.

Kovačević leaves no place for a doubt in identifying Franz Janke¹⁹ (Kovačević 2001) as the creator of the overall street grid, still visible today. Janke created an orthogonal grid with rectangular blocks, three main streets (Prince Miloš's street, Nemanja's Street and King Alexander's Boulevard) and two streets (Gavrilo Princip's Street and Queen Natalija's Street) which connected the new settlement with the settlement inside the fortress walls²⁰ (Fig. 1).

What is interesting here is Kovačević's emphasis on the leading role of prince Miloš in this undertaking, stating that "everything was done according to his detailed instructions" (Kovačević 2001). This can be interpreted as the beginning of the interference by national high politics in urbanism and public image creation which on this specific location has never stopped and is still very present and observable today.

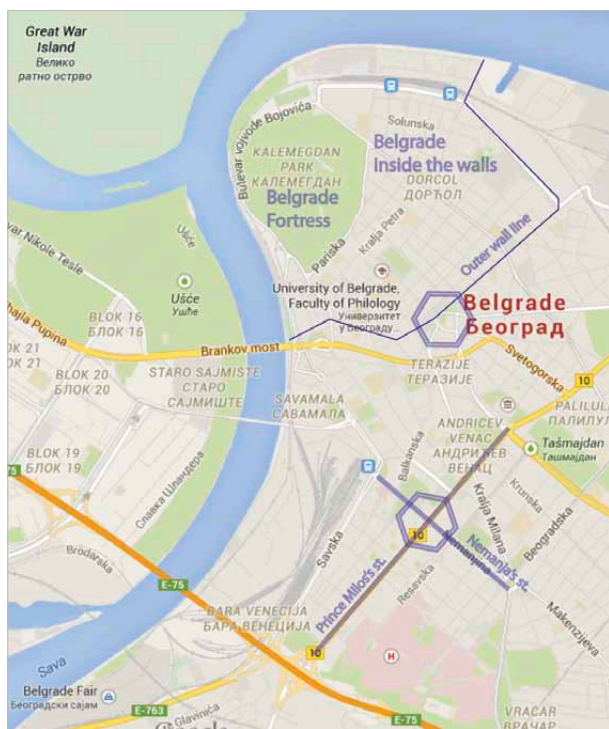


Fig. 1. Location of the intersection in the wider urban tissue of present day Belgrade. *Source:* Interventions of the author on the map available on Google maps.

¹⁹ Franz Janke was an engineer from Vienna, who came to Serbia after prince Miloš's invitation at the beginning of 1830s and served as the *state engineer* until 1842 when Prince Miloš was forced to exile.

²⁰ The settlement was between inner and outer fortress walls, known as *Varoš u šancu* ('The borough in the ditch'). It existed until 1868 when it was mostly destroyed due to urbanisation, outer fortress wall demolition and street regulation.

Following the street regulation, the first buildings constructed under prince Miloš's orders at the intersection of Prince Miloš's and Nemanja's street were to house his residence, military barracks and the offices of the Government. A few years later, Prince Miloš ceded his residence to the State Council and the Ministry of Finance. This intersection emerged as the administrative centre of the slowly forming Serbian state and this became even more observable as new buildings started to be added.

For easier orientation, Kovačević's naming of blocks surrounding the intersection (Fig. 2) according to the compass: North, East, South and West and his historical overview of the buildings built in the respective blocks (Kovačević 2001) were adopted.

Careful examination of the spatial organization reveals the intention of the creators – western and northern blocks were designated for the civil part of the government, while eastern and southern blocks were for the military part. The key dichotomy of each government, division into civil and military power was materialized in space, and before the Second World War this was the actual and symbolic centre of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Two of the buildings are especially interesting here, as they are crucial for the understanding of the location – *Ministarstvo vojske i mornarice* (*The Ministry of the Army and of the Navy*) and *Vojna Akademija* (*The Military Academy*). These were the direct predecessors of Dobrović's buildings – Building A was built on the parcel occupied by the Ministry of the Army and of the Navy, and Building B on the parcel of the Military Academy. The reason why they are interesting is their fate as they were both destroyed in the Nazi-Germany attack on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on April 6th 1941. On the images from the period of the Second World War it is possible to observe that the remains of the Ministry of the Army and of the Navy were cleared sometime during the war – an empty parcel is clearly observable on the aerial photographs taken by the Allied forces during the bombing of Belgrade on Orthodox Easter Sunday April 16th 1944. The remains of the Military Academy were cleared after the war, immediately after the liberation, as can be observed on the photographs of the period.

From everything previously stated it is possible to extract several conclusions regarding the deeper understanding of the location and its significance for this discussion. The most obvious are its multiple and repetitive connections with the military operations, wars and destructions, traceable from the very beginning. Functionally different and stylistically diverse

objects on the location were clearly erected following the same line of thoughts as Prince Miloš's initial idea to form, physically and spiritually, an administrative centre of the emerging state. Having in mind the constant scarcity of financial resources and several wars which Serbia, and later Yugoslavia, passed in those hundred years, and also the stylistic changes during that time, it is possible to conclude that the visual unity between them is lacking, despite several efforts to achieve it. Only in this sense can the author partially agree with Kovačević's claim that it was an "individual construction of buildings, without any desire, opportunity or need to reinforce and stabilize the composition on that important location in any way" (Kovačević 2001). Finally, as with the case of the name, a symbiotic connection between high politics and the art of city building is apparent.

The history of the location after the Second World War is closely connected, in diverse ways, with the professional career of Nikola Dobrović and this is the reason why it will be discussed in more detail further down.

Untangling the inextricable – typology and style

Beside the questions of name and location the question of typological and stylistic classification is very important for the interpretation of every architectural object (Fig. 3). The Army Headquarters is no exception to this, but even today, after so many decades, it is still an impossible task to perform.

"How to name what is called the Army Headquarters?" is one of the main questions asked by Kovačević (2001), pointing to the fact that different

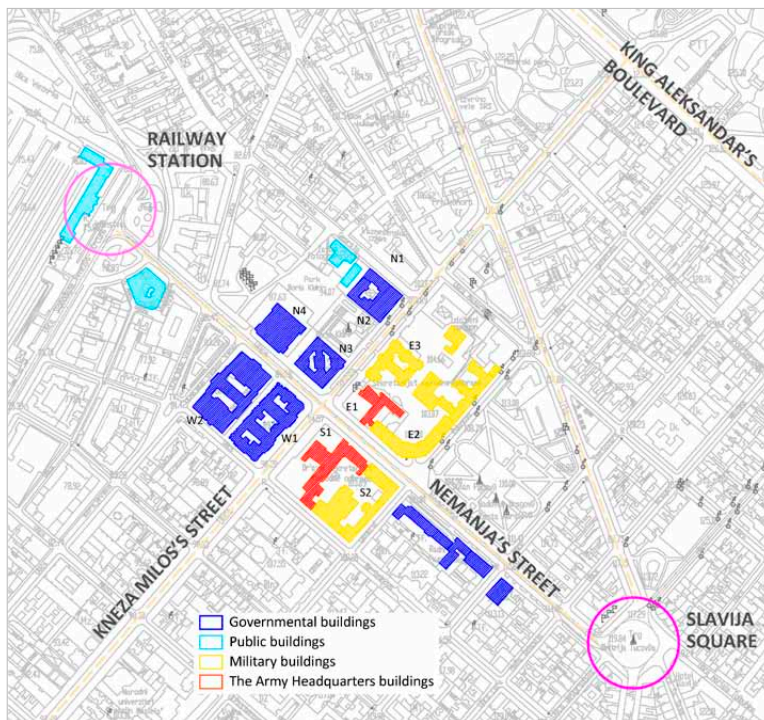


Fig. 2. Closer layout of the intersection with the disposition of main buildings in blocks and their function at the time of construction²¹. Buildings A and B are marked as E1 and S1, respectively. Source: interventions of the author on the cadastral map of Belgrade.

²¹ (N)orthern block:

N1 – *Vaznesenjska crkva (The Church of Our Lord's Ascension)*, 1863, civil engineers Pavle Stanišić and Jova Ristić; N2 – present-day *Ministarstvo finansija (The Ministry of Finance)*, 1889, architect Dušan Živanović, with an added second floor in 1920, expanded to its present shape in 1924 by architect Nikolaj Krasnov and with an added third floor and attic in 1959; N3 – *Ministarstvo finansija (The Ministry of Finance)*, 1925–28, architect Nikolaj Krasnov, with an added fourth floor in 1938; N4 – *Ministarstvo građevina (The Ministry of Construction)*, 1938–42 by architect Gojko Todić.

(E)astern block:

E1 – Location of the *Ministarstvo vojske i mornarice (The Ministry of the Army and of the Navy)*, 1895, architect Jovan Ilkić, with an added floor after the WWI; E2 – *Kasarna VII puka (The Barracks of the 7th Regiment)*, 1901, architect Dragutin Đorđević; E3 – *Generalštab (The General Staff Building)*, 1928, architect Vasilij Fjodorovič Baumgarten.

(S)outhern block:

S1 – Location of the *Vojna akademija (The Military Academy)*, 1850s, architect Jan Nevole, with an added second floor at the end of the XIX century and with an added third floor at the beginning of the XX century, S2 – *Nova vojna akademija (The New Military Academy)*, 1899, architect Dimitrije T. Leko.

(W)estern block:

W1 – *Ministarstvo poljoprivrede i voda i šuma i ruda (The Ministry of the Agriculture, Waters, Forests and Ores)*, 1928, architect Nikolaj Krasnov; W2 – *Ministarstvo Saobraćaja (The Ministry of Traffic)*, 1932, architect Svetozar Jovanović.



Fig. 3. The Army Headquarters prior to 1999 bombardments in a recognizable total of two buildings and the main portal motif from the direction of the Main Railway Station. Buildings A and B are on the left and right side of the picture, respectively. Source: Kovačević (2001).

commentators (architects, architectural theoreticians and critics, art historians, etc.) were using and still use different physical structure's typology to describe Dobrović's work. This is not the question of simple etymology and correct naming of Dobrović's work, but the far complex question of semantics and the intertwined relations between signifiers (words and phrases) and their meaning. From a house, houses, dual house, dual houses, group of buildings, complex, ensemble, composition, palace, pair of buildings, to urban prospect, urban landscape, engaged space... the discussion is still ongoing. The fact that Dobrović's work was and still is named not according to the typology of its form but according to its function shows how profound and crucial the problem of naming is for the understanding of the object. Throughout this article it is possible to notice the interchangeable use of both singular and plural forms to name Dobrović's work. Singular when the discussion is about the totality of Dobrović's work, and plural when the discussion is on the Buildings A and B individually.

It is even more complicated to pinpoint and to explain the stylistic affiliation of the Army Headquarters, because different commentators interpret it differently and often contradictorily. For a long time it was considered to be a modernist, late modernist or advanced modernist building and this claim was underlined by the fact that Dobrović was mainly active before the Second World War when the modernist or international movement was on its peak. This was further supported by the famous urban legend that the editorial board of the well-established architectural magazine "L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui"²², when presented with

an image of the finished object in 1963, thought that the construction year was permuted. Kovačević identifies Zoran Manević, architectural theoretician of the XX century architecture, as the initiator of two most common interpretations of the Army Headquarters: as an anachronous building and as a collage-building consisting of enlarged elements of Dobrović's previous modernist work. He opposes the second interpretation stating "that some motives and recognizable elements got their final form and meaning only on the building of the Army Headquarters" and that in this sense "the building does not represent the peak of Dobrović's work with recognizable elements, since the elements used (red stone) were designed for Belgrade in the first place²³, and due to some historical circumstances used only now" (Kovačević 2001). In the modernist light the building is interpreted by Jovanović-Weiss in his article, discussing its stylistic distinction from architect Plečnik's work for the same competition. For Jovanović-Weiss, "in the pro-liberal experiment that was Yugoslavia after the break with the Eastern block was unlikely to favour Plečnik's Neo-classicist variations on national identity, especially since Stalin had already appropriated the Neo-classicist image for the communist state. Yugoslavia was about to choose a new image for its Army Headquarters and Nikola Dobrović knew that very well" (Jovanović-Weiss 2000). Jovanović-Weiss's interpretation of Dobrović's work through the phrase "new image" is questionable since the environment in which it was constructed was already well acquainted with the "modern style", including the construction of large, governmental, administrative buildings, some also for military use²⁴. Kovačević allows the consideration of the Army Headquarters as anachronous, but in this he sees it as a step towards post-modernism, or better to say pre-post-modern and defines it as "the first serious post-modern situation in the Serbian architecture of the late 1950s and early 1960s" (Kovačević 2001). On the other hand, Kulić considers the Army Headquarters "as not so much anachronous from the modernist mainstream, as outside of it, as something outside of time" (Kulić 2010), and in that sense unidentifiable.

It was Kovačević who pointed to two additional "readings" of Dobrović's work – commenting on Dobrović's writings on German Expressionism he

²² Kovačević (2001: 75) (footnote 185) and also the personal recollections on "Savremena arhitektura i urbanizam" lectures held by Prof. Miloš Perović in 2003/04.

²³ Kovačević is referencing Dobrović's 1938 competition project for the PRIZAD building in Belgrade.

²⁴ Most important for the discussion here would be three buildings of the architect Dragiša Brašovan, two in Belgrade (1934–1941 The State Printing Building; 1939 The Command of the Air Force) and one in Novi Sad (1939 Banovina Building, now the Executive Council of the Vojvodina Province).

pointed to some parallels with the architecture of the Army Headquarters building and as a building belonging to neo-neo-baroque indicating some of its features – “movement of space, mostly visible on the red wall; continuance of authorship; axiality-conclusiveness-void; tectonic and composition; dealing with apparent size of the object” (Kovačević 2001).

History of the Army Headquarters – the competition(s)

The Second World War left its profound mark on the urban tissue of Belgrade and that fact imposed, as the most urgent, the question of the restoration and reconstruction first of the infrastructure and immediately later of the built structures. It also brought multiple changes of political systems – first from the monarchist, multiparty to the republican, multiparty system and soon after from the republican, multiparty to the republican, single-party system. The Communist Party thus became the ultimate winner of the war and very soon the only authority in Yugoslavia. Throughout the lifespan of socialist Yugoslavia, *Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija (The Yugoslav People’s Army)* as a legal successor of the “National Liberation Army and Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia”²⁵ played a very prominent and important role in it.

It is also no secret that, ever since the Communist Party seized the power, the development of *New Belgrade*²⁶ on the left bank of the Sava River as a symbol of a new, progressive and communist society became the priority at the expense of an old, reactionary, monarchist Belgrade on the right bank of the Sava River. Parts of the built legacy from the previous periods were cleared with the rest of the rubbles left by the war, although some were either slightly damaged or intact. Great chances are that the key figure in this massive undertaking was the already well established and well respected architect and urban planner Nikola Dobrović, the then director of the Urban Planning Institute of Serbia. His professional practice and the location itself would soon become inextricably and potentially toxically linked, to the extent that the Army Headquarters would remain his only materialized object in Belgrade and present day Serbia.

²⁵ Anti-Nazi and anti-Fascist resistance movement in Yugoslavia led by the Communist Party and Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980), who later became the lifetime president of Yugoslavia.

²⁶ The topic of New Belgrade, controversies connected with the date of its inception, its name and meaning as well as different appropriations has been a topic of numerous studies. For further information see Nikolić, Radonjić (2012) and Radonjić, Nikolić (2012). However, no matter how interesting, this discussion is not the topic of the article.

Once again, Kovačević’s book (2001) is an irreplaceable source of information when it comes to the history of the building, its inception, its design stages and ultimately, its physical materialisation in real space. Just as in the discussion on the location it will be broadly reinterpreted and combined with the author’s personal knowledge as an attempt to point towards its connections with the high politics of the time.

The first architectural competition for the new administrative building to house the Army Headquarters was conducted in 1948 with the architect Branislav Marinović as its winner but it was never executed. Kovačević assumes that “because of the Informbiro Crisis²⁷ this competition was put aside, and resumed only when the crisis was resolved in 1953” (Kovačević 2001). This really interesting assumption is followed by another, equally important, stating that “military authorities of that time were not sympathetic towards the architectural practice of the previous regime (surrounding the location), but most likely the existing military objects and military geostrategic thinking has determined the position of future buildings” (Kovačević 2001). Both of them are adding-up a significant leverage to one of the main arguments that connections between politics, this specific building, its location and its reincarnations are extremely strong, constant and timeless.

In November 1953 the Army organized the second, this time closed (by invitation-only), architectural competition for ten participants with only the Building A as a subject, while the Building B had to be presented only as an architectural sketch. Kovačević in his research manages to identify 5²⁸ of those 10 participants, stating that they were invited “taking into consideration the criteria of their professional reputation and”, what is more important in this discourse, “equal Yugoslav ethnics’ representation”. This equal ethnics’ representation or appearing to be so, would become one of Yugoslavia’s lifelong characteristics spanning from entertainment²⁹ to politics³⁰.

By the end of June 1954 Dobrović knew that his and Marasović’s project went into further deliberation,

²⁷ Informbiro Crisis, Informbiro Period or the Time of the Informbiro, June 28th 1948 – June 2nd 1955, was a period in Yugoslav history marked with an ideological and political split between Tito and Stalin, Yugoslavia’s withdrawal from the Soviet bloc, and Party purges on both sides. It was finally resolved following Stalin’s death and Khrushchev’s visit to Yugoslavia in 1955.

²⁸ Those five were: Jože Plečnik, Rikard Marasović, Aljoša Žanko, Ratomir Bogojević and Nikola Dobrović (Kovačević 2001).

²⁹ For example the selection of Yugoslavia’s representatives for the Eurovision Song Contest.

³⁰ The perfect example is the choice of the President of the Presidency, collective head of SFR of Yugoslavia.

and when Marasović withdrew from further competition, the jury proclaimed his project as the winning one and immediately after, the work on more detailed plans started.

History of the Army Headquarters – Dobrović vs not-Dobrović

Almost immediately with the beginning of the work on architectural plans, the problems between the Investor and the architect emerged. Those problems would have far-reaching consequences in the time to come; up to the point that Dobrović's authorship would be questioned. Truth to be said, Dobrović, in a fit of temper, rejected the authorship over the Army Headquarters several times. Kovačević sees this as something "not to be taken seriously, as an affective gesture, done in the heat of the moment" (Kovačević 2001), but the consequences of such acts were/are lasting and serious.

Nikola Dobrović handed in the preliminary project for the Building A at the beginning of 1955, which successfully passed the Revision Commission and very soon the start of its construction was publicized in the newspapers. Kovačević identifies the beginning of May 1955 as the starting point of all future disagreements between the Investor (the Army) on one side, with their requests for the increase of the area of the building and the architect on the other, with his well-known short temper and his "several calls for the termination of the contract" (Kovačević 2001). In September 1955 Dobrović finished, signed and handed in the main project in the scale 1:100. In the following months Dobrović continued to work on the design for the Building B, survived several severe offenses from the Revision Commission and successfully defended his project in front of the then State Secretary for People's defence³¹. "Dobrović's design for the Building A was accepted only on September 3rd 1956" (Kovačević 2001).

If the situation regarding the authorship over the design plans for the Building A is more or less straightforward, this is most definitely not the case with the design plans for the Building B. For the 1953 competition the disposition and form of the Building B were asked only as a sketch, although it is three times the size of the Building A. Kovačević, after careful and detailed archival work, was not able to find any of the documents and plans for the Building B carrying Dobrović's signature except the 1958 preliminary project in the scale 1:200. But Dobrović continued to be named and signed as the *Projektant (the Leading Architect)*.

³¹ The State Secretary was Ivan Gošnjak. There are several urban legends about his and Dobrović's communication or lack of it.

According to Kovačević, "two Investor's bodies – the Revision Commission and the Architectural group of the Investor, in one moment have taken over Dobrović's ideas, plans and authorship and started to act as Dobrović in order to finish the Building B" (Kovačević 2001). He questions the distinction depth between Dobrović's project (in the 1:200 scale) and non-Dobrović's projects (in 1:100 and 1:50 scales), the difference between ideas and realisation, but he considers non-Dobrović's ideas to be Dobrovićesque in essence, stating that in "the most important features Dobrović's ideas and concept were followed and executed" (Kovačević 2001). Kovačević believes that "the overall authorship of the Army Headquarters can and must be attributed to Dobrović alone" (Kovačević 2001). In the context of the overall debate, which started even before the 1999 events, *the question of Dobrović's authorship* is by no means unimportant, especially when it comes to determining architectural and cultural values and reasons for enlisting and delisting it from the registry of cultural monuments and also contemplating on the authenticity³².

History of the Army Headquarters – from the "concrete baby" to the "great silent neighbour"

The actual construction work on the Building A started at the beginning of 1957, almost two years after it was publicized. In the time when his access to the construction site was gradually restricted, and even later, Dobrović referred to the building as "*his concrete baby*"³³. This was his way of showing on one side professional and private vanity and on the other, serious preoccupation with the future of what he considered to be his masterwork. Dobrović was aware of, what Manević calls, "deep professional and public inability to comprehend that the unrealised objects are equally important as the materialized ones, and for this reason Dobrović does not exist in Belgrade beside its DSNO"³⁴. This was Dobrović's unique opportunity to leave his architectural mark in Belgrade. But, unfortunately, Manević was and still is right and today *Dobrović exists in Belgrade only through the Army Headquarters*, although there were some other, unrealised, projects on which he worked during his professional career. In the light of the most recent

³² In the Article 13 of the Nara Document on Authenticity (1993), the authenticity of form and design precedes all other aspects of authenticity sources (UNESCO 2014).

³³ Ivanka Dobrović in conversation with Kovačević (Kovačević 2001).

³⁴ Zoran Manević in conversation with Kovačević (Kovačević 2001).

developments, discussed further down, an imposing question could be raised: Will Dobrović be allowed to continue to “exist” with his sole work or will the history repeat itself, offering once again a clean slate?

Just as the Army Headquarters’ conceptual and physical embodiment was mysterious, its lifespan was characterised with quietness and discretion as well. It played its role successfully, simultaneously being part of the urban physical structure and staying away or aside from it. Kovačević asks an apparently simple question “How a building of one’s, anyone’s, Army Headquarters should look like?” (Kovačević 2001). He compares it to similar objects in European capitals, discovering that “they are simple administrative buildings, usually in a suburb, inconspicuous and reserved”, and concludes that in this case “most definitely it is not a simple administrative building, but a *continuation of the tradition* of placing public and military buildings at this intersection” (Kovačević 2001). Kovačević will define its pre-1999 role even better stating that “Dobrović’s Army Headquarters stands in Belgrade and exists in our architecture as a “*great, silent neighbour*”, somewhat forgotten, with very few photographs existing (mostly totals) and followed by a myth of Dobrović’s problems with the Army” (Kovačević 2001).

The construction was finished in 1965 and in the next 34 years the Army Headquarters served the purpose for which it was built, in the meanwhile surviving several institutional and state organization changes, adjusting to them as flexible as possible.

Throughout its existence and use the Army Headquarters remained in the sphere of oral, intangible, forwarded by Dobrović’s colleagues, students and friends with very few critical research in the domains of architectural theory and architectural history. To some extent it is understandable because of the security reasons, enforced by the institution which it housed and the great disproportion between those who saw the house from the outside and those who have had actually been inside. It is possible to say that the restricted access became the key feature of this building: from the time of its active use to its present state when the access is restricted for safety reasons. In the light of future developments, there is an imminent danger that the access will remain restricted in its future use – as an exclusive hotel (Blic online 2013).

History of the Army Headquarters – symbolic readings

One of the most profound and lasting controversies connected with the building of the Army Headquarters in Belgrade is the one about its sym-

bolic reading. Interestingly enough, it was sparked by Dobrović itself in a 1960 essay entitled *Moving Space – Bergson’s “Dynamic Schemes” – A New Art Environment* (Dobrović 1998). Dobrović identifies Henry Bergson’s philosophy as an inspiration source for his work on the Army Headquarters and interprets it freely and more generally. He is set to form a new visual environment, where architectural space is not static (academic), but dynamic, set in motion. In the third part of the same essay, Dobrović briefly mentions Sutjeska Canyon³⁵ as one of the sources of inspirations. Those two readings – *Bergson’s dynamic schemes* and *Sutjeska*, followed by some peripheral ones (seven³⁶ enemy offensives, seven³⁷ nations of Yugoslavia, city gate³⁸, etc.), will become so dominant and in time of system transition (from communist to capitalist) will become so politically charged that the commentators would be forced to choose sides.

Both Kovačević (2001) and Matejić (2010) have traced majority of interpretations of the Army Headquarters building back to Dobrović’s essay. Kovačević has even offered a rather simple explanation why this text is an indispensable source of information stating “not only that it is the unique existing written material about the Army Headquarters in the public but that it is equated with the appearance of the executed building” (Kovačević 2001). Bogunović, following a long line of Dobrović commentators, in a more philosophical manner, sees Dobrović’s theory of moving or engaged space as “a unique contribution to contemporary theory of architecture and urbanism, strong and persuasive explication and theorization of its own undertaking” (Bogunović 2005). For Kovačević it is, more than anything else, Dobrović’s post-festum, a written explication of the already finished building, its “re-theorization, or post-theorization” (Kovačević 2001). Matejić follows the same line of thought, but presents Dobrović’s use of Bergson’s

³⁵ Sutjeska battle was a battle between Yugoslav Partisan and German-leading forces in the wider region of Sutjeska river (present day eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina), within the Fifth Enemy Offensive, from 15.05–16.06.1943

³⁶ A cumulative name to describe seven major Axis military operations on the territory of Yugoslavia during the Second World War. Also part of post-WWII popular myths. The connection to the Army headquarters is not clear, as originally only five floors were planned.

³⁷ During the socialist period six *nations* (according to the population size: Serbs, Croats, Muslims (presently called Bosniaks), Slovenes, Macedonians and Montenegrins) and a total of 26 *nationalities* were recognized (diverse ethnic minorities, among which were Yugoslavs). In the context of the Army Headquarters the connection is not clear, unless it is referring to six existing nations plus a new, Yugoslav one.

³⁸ In connection to its dominant motif of a cascade opening in Nemanja’s Street.

ideas in the function of “naming and theoretical systematization of already existing elements of a spatial concept” (Matejić 2012). He also presents an interesting comparison between Kovačević’s and Bogunović’s reading of Dobrović’s use of Bergson’s ideas. While for Kovačević it is evident that “there has not been any clarification of ways how Dobrović uses Bergson’s thesis” (Matejić 2010; Kovačević 2001), Bogunović stresses that “Dobrović’s theory of moving space still has a foothold in the correct understanding of the essence of Bergson’s philosophy” (Matejić 2010; Bogunović 2005).

In the textual description of the designed buildings for the 1953 competition Dobrović does not mention any connection to the antifascist struggle in Yugoslavia, including Sutjeska. The only reference is connected to “the pair of monuments (one in front of each building) made of crude stones brought from diverse battlefields...which has to act expressively both to passers-by and to the employees” (Dobrović 2001a). Dobrović goes one step forward in the textual description of the 1958 preliminary project for the Building B – “regarding the symbolism of the building the following rule applies: to be avoided all remarks and stories about the significance of the building which do not have any connection with the language of the architecture. The building should be represented with what it is and not with something it is not and what is artificially attached to it. Gigantic stone blocks, which “grow” from the ground, represent the people’s uprising, its elementariness and organic connection with the soil. Square stone blocks – order and intentionality of the resistance. Interplay of plastic masses – strength and verve, wit and ingenuity of popular resistance” (Dobrović 2001b). After such vocal protest against the symbolic reading which is not to be found there, and which apparently already started to acquire popularity, it is both a surprise and no surprise at all that it was Dobrović who ultimately connected the Army Headquarters and Sutjeska canyon into an inextricable unity. In the already quoted 1960 essay he stated that “the buildings of the DSZPNO are the holders of all the essential characteristics of a defiant and combative nation; from the uprising – with an organic emergence from the soil – to buckling-up towards rugged heights and impassable cliffs. Strength, enthusiasm, courage, embodied in the prance of plastic masses such as armoured vehicles... The builder broke off a piece of the mountain, where the most fierce and profoundly fateful battle was fought for the future existence of the Yugoslav nations and he moved their artistically refined cliffs into the centre of the capital. The urban symbol of Sutjeska forms on both sides of the street in Nemanjina a new spatial ton of the artistic Eroika” (Dobrović 1998).

From the very beginning of its existence different commentators interpreted the symbolism of the Army Headquarters differently, depending on their personal or professional relationships with its architect or lack of it, and on their political and ideological alignment. In the Martinović’s 1978 essay it is possible to find probably the best explanation of the situation where it is stated that “confused observers of the new scene where the space is set in motion, facing the sky, have tried in the obvious doubt what it is about, in this essentially creative act to find the source of the direct inspiration of the architect. It was, more or less, futile search for some imaginary symbol of the Revolution, Sutjeska, town gates” (Stojanović, Martinović 1978). For Kovačević neither of the readings is the correct one, as the connection to Bergson’s philosophical ideas is not clear and the Sutjeska interpretation is attributable to “Dobrović’s attempt to secure both military and broad public support in his struggle to realize his ideas” (Kovačević 2001). Jovanović-Weiss follows the Bogunović’s readings by putting an emphasis on “the Dobrović’s Bergsonian schemes and *the void as their central motif*” (Jovanović-Weiss 2000), while Kulić offers a *political reading* by tracing down the appearance of Sutjeska interpretation in the Dobrović commentators’ work and revitalizing it by comparing it to objects of “*evocative and symbolic forms* in the work of Le Corbusier, Saarinen and Utzon” (Kulić 2010). Kulić also pointed to the very interesting and important question of the influence of the politics-of-the-moment on not only the reading of the building but also on the decision-making process regarding its future. In the same time he offered a sort of a compromise stating that “without the Sutjeska symbolism the large building would remain mute and its most important motif – the void – would be without meaning, almost absurd, the gate on the street. On the other hand, without the “moving space” it would be a banal piece of propaganda, without any other subtle aspect... The relationship between the two interpretations is as the relationship between the form and the content in a traditional rhetoric... The case of the Army headquarters is, what Charles Jencks called “dual coding”... Dobrović’s building has successfully operated on both levels, with “moving space”, a theory targeting the architects, while Sutjeska has secured the symbolism for a wide audience... Most likely, we will never be certain what Dobrović considered as the more authentic reading of his work” (Kulić 2010).

While tempted to agree with the last sentence, the author would like to argue that Kovačević’s reading is more acceptable, for two main reasons. First, it is based on Dobrović’s original writings from 1953 and 1958, where the symbolism of Sutjeska does not appear. As shown previously, it appears relatively late,

in the 1960 essay. Second, it is completely absent from any material connected to the second best witness, Dobrović's wife Ivanka. If it was ever a matter to contemplate, she should have known about it.

The aftermath – “the heart of the war machine”

In an attempt to poetically address the unfortunate events of 1999, it is possible to say that the building, although empty, met its doom and the NATO bombs on two (both night, both multiple) occasions – April 29th/30th and May 7th/8th 1999. Those bombs ended its 34-year old life, leaving deep scars (Fig. 4) not only in the physical tissue of the city and the country, but in *public or collective memory* as well, although not all commentators agree on this. Kulić states that “for the local population the destruction of the Army Headquarters was painful, but not different from the demolition of any other local building, since its symbolism lost its strength and it was identified with the late country and failed political system” (Kulić 2010). The author argues that while it is possible to state that most of its symbolism was already lost, the thesis that the Army Headquarters was strongly identified with the previous political system has some serious shortcomings. The main argument is that 1992 brought not systematic but cosmetic change having yesterday's Communist in today's Socialists disguise. The role of the building could be interpreted as becoming an even more “silent neighbour” than it was before.

Ever since the calamitous civil war in ex-Yugoslavia started in 1991, there were calls for the Army Headquarters destruction, as a place where, according to those who initiated those calls, all the decisions connected to the war were made. For the truth's sake, this could be a good place to mention that both SFR of Yugoslavia and FR of Yugoslavia had the Head of

the State³⁹ as the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces⁴⁰. In this sense, the decisions were made somewhere else, and elaborated here. Few years later, during the NATO aggression on FR of Yugoslavia, General Wesley Clark, commenting on the first attack on the Army Headquarters, and knowing that in previous days many empty governmental buildings were hit and put out of use⁴¹ said “we have stricken in *the heart and the mind of the Yugoslav war machine*”⁴².

Jovanović-Weiss argues that the main reason why the empty building of the Army Headquarters was bombed almost 40 days after the initiation of the aggression was because “NATO faced a problem of identification and unwittingly demonstrated an excellent taste in placing architectural landmarks from this century on its target list. As part of “a new struggle against fascism”, NATO selected to destroy the very buildings constructed in the post war period to *symbolize the struggle of a “stubborn nation against fascism”* (Jovanović-Weiss 2000). He also questions the NATO division of targets into strategic and tactical, with the Army Headquarters being a strategic one stating “physically, its strategic value is zero. The only possible strategic justification for the destruction of this building was its *symbolic disappearance* from the skyline”, as it is symbolic for both foreign and local audience (Jovanović-Weiss 2000). Foreign public, presented with an anthropomorphic image of the enemy through the “the heart and the mind” rhetoric, was unaware and ultimately uninterested in the architectural, historical, societal, economic values and the original symbolism. The local audience was forced to face the attack on an, more or less, established order and the attack on the institutions of the society, both physically embodied in buildings and virtual. By attacking the symbols of a society and civilizational achievements, perpetrators tried to demoralize and ultimately humiliate the victims. It could be argued that after the short-term success, when people are facing tremendous loss, both in human population and material goods, this technique becomes counter-productive and turns against the perpetrators⁴³.

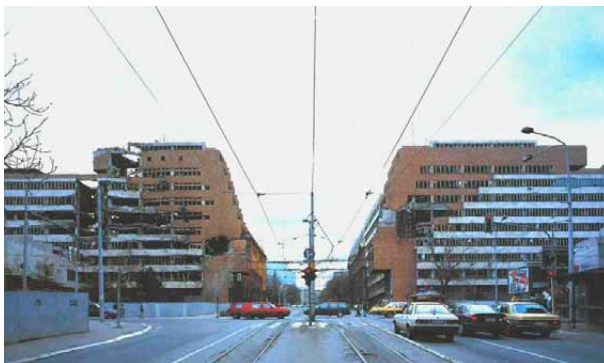


Fig. 4. The Army Headquarters after the 1999 bombardments and redefined recognisability. The Building A with significant damage and the Building B with slight damage and demolished entrance pavilion (on the far right). Source: Kovačević (2001).

³⁹ In SFR of Yugoslavia it was *Predsednik Predsedništva SFRJ (The President of the Presidency of the SFR of Yugoslavia)* and in FR of Yugoslavia it was *Predsednik SR Jugoslavije (The President of the FR of Yugoslavia)*.

⁴⁰ In SFR of Yugoslavia it was *Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija (The Yugoslav People's Army)* and in FR of Yugoslavia it was *Vojska Jugoslavije (the Yugoslav Army)*.

⁴¹ In Prince Miloš's Street: Buildings of both the Federal and the Republican Ministry of Interior, building of the Government of the Republic of Serbia. In Takovo's Street (continuation of Prince Miloš's): Radio Television of Serbia. In Nemanja's Street: the Ministry of Construction.

⁴² (Jovanović-Weiss 2010) and also personal recollection from the period of NATO aggression.

⁴³ For further discussion on the topic please see Bevan (2006).

The aftermath – ruin vs. rubble, damaged vs. destroyed and void(s)

For the following discussion on the topic of the Army Headquarters an explanation of some terms used would be useful. While the academic polemic about the differences in values and semantics associated with the terms *ruin* and *rubble* in English⁴⁴ is mostly completed by now, lasting for more than two and a half centuries, that is most certainly not the case in Serbian. In English the term “ruin” has been interpreted as something positive, worth of preserving, valuable, aesthetically pleasing and as an invitation to contemplate the reasons of how and why the devastation took place. The term “rubble”, on the other hand, has been interpreted as something disposable, without value (except maybe some economic value as a recyclable material) and aesthetically disturbing. The author agrees with Berman’s claims stated in the discussion on ruination and the role of ruins that “the term ‘ruin’ indicates not only the destruction of prior human construction, it also suggests *human agency* and in that sense the ruin marks the death of the prior life. *The ruin is both legacy and mnemonic... gazing on the ruin, we revive the past as a memory: the ruin is the talisman of resurrection*” (Berman 2010).

When it comes to the Serbian language, both terms roughly translate to the word *ruševine*, connoting usually something negative, whether it is applied to something or someone. The Serbian version of the term – *ruina* has an even more negative connotation attached to it, so while the use of these terms in English is justified, for the discussion in Serbian some other would be more appropriate. Having this in mind, the more interesting is the distinction between the terms *oštećeno* (*damaged*)⁴⁵ and *uništeno* (*destroyed*)⁴⁶, because those are the main arguments in the heated public debate which followed the bombardment of the Army Headquarters.

The question of void was opened by Dobrović in the previously mentioned 1960 essay as a feature connected with his reading of Bergson’s philosophical ideas, as something that energises the entire composition, something without which the entire composition would be empty. In this sense, the void is actually the connecting element, connecting two parts of the building into a unique scene. In the section dedicated to the symbolic reading, the question of the void was also

presented in close connection with the questions of war, devastation, resistance and ruination. Irrespective of the chosen *reading mode*, it is ultimately connected with *the question of identification and identity*. In this sense, Jovanović-Weiss has re-connected the question of the void with the 1999 events which left several *new voids* to be contemplated on. He posed a simply-phrased question, yet extremely complicated to answer. “*Which void to identify with – the one created by Nikola Dobrović within his Army Headquarters or the new one created by NATO bombs, which void to remember?*” (Jovanović-Weiss 2000). In the light of the most recent events⁴⁷, the *third void* which is not only just possible anymore, but definitely imminent is opening in the process of negotiation with the past – the void emerging from some clearings occurred at the location, the void with a potential to grow so large that it is threatening to swallow the entire building.

The aftermath – monument listing and delisting initiatives, debate outcomes and possible future

As a result of a professionals’ initiative, the Government of the Republic of Serbia in 2005⁴⁸ officially listed two Dobrović’s buildings in the Register of Cultural Goods (in the previous text mentioned as the Buildings of the Army of Serbia and Montenegro General Staff and the Federal Ministry of Defence) as *Kulturno dobro od velikog značaja*⁴⁹ (*Cultural good of great significance*) (DOCOMOMO 2013b). In the time prior to the bombardment there were some, although unsuccessful, initiatives for the protection of those buildings. Kovačević, for example, referred to the buildings as *spomenik* (*the monument*) already in the mid-1990s, fearing that “the change of use, users or owners in the event of decrease of the Army size and needs will leave these buildings in danger, after decades of good care” (Kovačević 2001).

Matejić identifies two dominant lines of thoughts regarding the possible options for the future of the Army Headquarters, their characteristics and their represent-

⁴⁴ For further information on the topic please see Woodward (2002) and Hell, Schönle (2010).

⁴⁵ Here understood as something where the devastation in the material sense was considerable, but something repairable, regardless of the economic viability.

⁴⁶ Here understood as something completely obliterated, something un-repairable, irrevocably lost.

⁴⁷ Winter 2013/2014 saw the removal of 2100 m² of the entrance pavilion to the Building B, and by the end of 2014 the removal of the destroyed part of the Building A is foreseen (Mučibabić 2014). In March 2015, it still has not occurred.

⁴⁸ Decision on the designation of the Buildings of the Army of Serbia and Montenegro General Staff and the Federal Ministry of Defence as cultural goods of great significance was published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No 115 from 27.12.2005.

⁴⁹ The article 2 of the 1994 Serbian Law on Cultural Goods provides the following three hierarchical categories: *kulturno dobro* (*Cultural good*); *kulturno dobro od velikog značaja* (*Cultural good of great significance*); *kulturno dobro od izuzetnog značaja* (*Cultural good of outstanding significance*) (Službeni glasnik 2013).

atives after the 2005 entry into the register of cultural goods and names them *conservation* and *investor model of reconstruction*. “The conservation model supporters believe that the buildings are damaged, ergo repairable, they must be reconstructed following Dobrović’s design while their opposites believe that the buildings are destroyed, ergo the location must be cleared and prepared for the new construction” (Matejić 2010). Believing that the “conservation model does not respect the past of the Army Headquarters and the investor model does not respect the future of it”, Matejić proposes to these opposed discourses, as a reconciliation compromise, the third one – *evolutionary model of reconstruction*, in which “the buildings should be reconstructed to the greatest possible measure, but the present state has to be respected with the careful treatment of the NATO caused voids” (Matejić 2010). The author agrees with the classification into the conservation and investor model of reconstruction, but would like to argue their monolithic nature, as he sees them more fragmented. Those features have become quite prominent following the announcement that several foreign companies are interested in the location of the Army Headquarters in February 2013 (Vukasović, Mučibabić 2013).

While it is observable that the conservation model follows the basic rules of the built heritage conservation profession, including references to national laws and some supranational heritage management organizations’ doctrinal texts, several lines of thinking could be identified regarding the future function of the buildings and the project on which the reconstruction should be executed. While some believe that the general administrative function must be retained, others are more flexible, allowing the change of function, from administrative to either cultural use – museums and galleries (Matejić 2010) or to a purely economic one – exclusive hotel (Blic online 2013). Kovačević believes that “everything except the reconstruction according to Dobrović’s design would be a cultural crime and criminal”, but he also points to several key problems in this process, problems connected with *questions of authenticity and integrity* (Kovačević 2001). As it is very well known, these questions are at the very core of any discussion on cultural heritage management. Kovačević also poses the question to which stage of the original design process to return, stating that “the most damaged part is the part where Dobrović’s authorship is unquestionable (the Building A and the gate motif). How to approach the non-Dobrović’s and Dobrovićesque parts?” (Kovačević 2001). Two issues in this debate deserve further attention. First, the advocates of the conservative model do not reference some doctrinal texts, which offer supportive argumentation,

thus keeping the entire debate impoverished. Possibly the best example would be to reference the Article 8 of the 1982 ICOMOS’s (2013) Declaration of Dresden on the Reconstruction of Monuments Destroyed by War, which allows full reconstructions with limitations – “the complete reconstruction of severely damaged monuments must be regarded as an exceptional circumstance which is justified only for special reasons resulting from the destruction of a monument of great significance by war. Such a reconstruction must be based on reliable documentation of its condition before destruction”⁵⁰. Kovačević states that “the complete project of the executed condition exists, although it is inaccessible” (Kovačević 2001). Second, the advocates of the conservative model do not relate vocally enough to some objects fully reconstructed to the previous state in recent years, both in Serbia – Avala TV Tower or spatially closer, the Building of the Government, on the opposite side of the street; and abroad – most notable are the examples of Frauenkirche in Dresden and Stadtschloss in Berlin. A possible reason for the lack of such reference could be the fact that in the moment of the NATO attack the buildings were not listed as cultural heritage. This is, simultaneously, the least probable reason because many objects (and not just in Serbia) were listed as ruins.

Inside the investor model of reconstruction two lines of thinking could be identified, clustered around the role of the state in the process of the new construction – whether it should be advisory or regulatory.

The intensification of the public debate, heated by the media by publishing “unsubstantiated” (RTS 2014) stories of possible foreign investments which presupposed the demolition of Dobrović’s buildings, led to the surprising awakening from the lethargy of the prominent professionals and professional societies – architectural and town planning associations, art and architecture historians and theoreticians. It is possible to say that, maybe for the first time in years, the vast majority of professionals stood united around the defense of the Army Headquarters, as “a cause worth fighting for” (Mučibabić 2013). The editorial Board of the Facebook page Srpski arhitekti/Serbian architects started in February 2013 an online petition against the demolition of the Army Headquarters and by October 28th 2014 2,400 signatures of the professionals were collected (Peticija 2014). However, the pressing question is whether this awakening came too late for the Army Headquarters? This question will be addressed further down.

⁵⁰ ICOMOS – International Council on Monuments and Sites. *The Declaration of Dresden* (1982).

For several years after 1999 there were no official reports regarding the extent of the damage done, nor any investigations of the construction, except visual, were performed. The lack of facts fueled the debate about the possible future of the Army Headquarters, namely concentrated on the terms *damaged* and *destroyed* and actions deriving from them. The first official report was made in 2003 for the Building A⁵¹ stating that from the total of 12,654 m², 3,497 m² was completely destroyed (a bit less than 30%) (Kovačević 2001). Kovačević claims that from the total of 36,581m² of the Building B “around 5% is completely destroyed or heavily damaged” (Kovačević 2001; Mučibabić, Vukasović 2013). This report came too late, and it had a limited impact, because the discourse of *destroyed* already gained a significant institutional and public support.

The role of some official governmental institutions and their representatives in fueling the debate is unquestionable and can be easily traced in the press. A paradoxical situation emerged where *the cultural heritage of all is not the cultural heritage of each*⁵² and where some governmental institutions are questioning the decisions of other governmental institutions (Vukasović, Mučibabić 2013; Mučibabić, Vukasović 2013; RTS 2014). For them, the economic benefits surpass all others, and in the light of the constant struggle for financial stability in the national budget they see demolition and new construction as a valid reason. This can be seen as a valid reason, but some questions should be raised. First, it sets two dangerous precedents – one is selling enlisted cultural goods to private investors without a presented project and plan of activities and the other is selling enlisted cultural goods to one who offers more money, putting in danger all other listed monuments which could be targeted for their location, natural resources, ethnic problems, etc. Second, the economic benefits achieved by the selling of either state-owned companies or buildings, proved to be only short-term in effect in all previous cases.

The resurfacing of the debate and its later course caught the eye of the author who started to follow it more closely and with a mind open to different proposals. Thanks to the advantages of the modern technology and social networks it was possible to trace some of the actions taken and to observe the results of them. Maybe the most interesting one is the public opinion poll done by www.beobuild.rs, an internet portal dedicated to

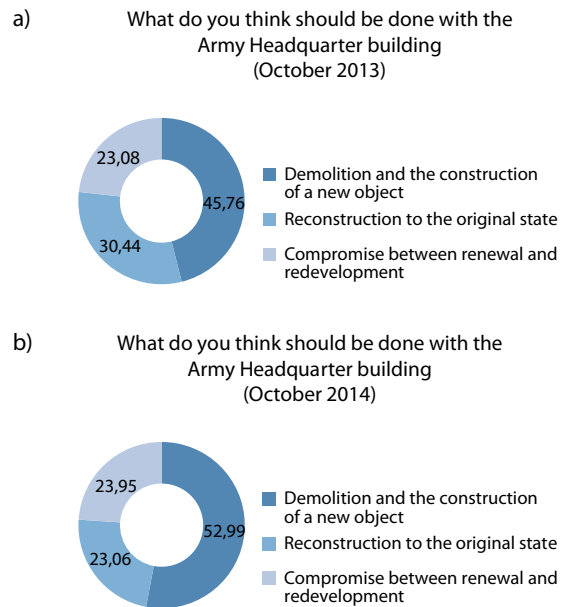


Fig. 5. Results of the online public opinion poll in two cross-sections. Source: BEOBUILD (2014).

the monitoring of major construction activities and urban development of Belgrade (BEOBUILD 2013). Two cross-sections through the poll, which ended on November 1st 2014, presented here (Fig. 5a, b) show the fluctuation of public opinion in the span of one year, from October 2013 to October 2014. Many shortcomings connected with the use of such data were acknowledged; since the poll was beyond any control from the author's side, but they are considered illustrative for the overall discussion. Immediately noticeable is the public opinion's shift towards the investor model of reconstruction. What can be speculated here and what is in line with the argument that the connections between the location, objects on it and high politics are continuous and strong, with due respect to other possibilities, is that this shift occurred because of institutional and high-rank governmental officials' support for this model, expressed in the press in this one-year span.

In an attempt to approach these results critically the author performed a small-scale opinion poll, inviting 50 of his Facebook friends, not influencing in any way the opinion of the respondents and being fully aware of the potential shortcomings of this opinion poll. Just like in the previous case considers it illustrative. The results of this poll (Fig. 6) show significant deviations in terms of choosing the primary model of reconstruction which can be attributed to many factors, credible and less credible, plausible and less plausible, but those reasons will not be examined in detail.

Whatever the reason for the incongruence in the results obtained in these two public opinion polls, they

⁵¹ Prikaz nepokretnosti za zgradu A Generalštaba Vojske Srbije i Crne Gore (Real-estate statement for the Building A – The Army of Serbia and Montenegro General Staff).

⁵² The paraphrase of the Art.8 of the ICOMOS's *Nara Document on Authenticity* (1994), which states, among other things, that *the cultural heritage of each is the cultural heritage of all*.

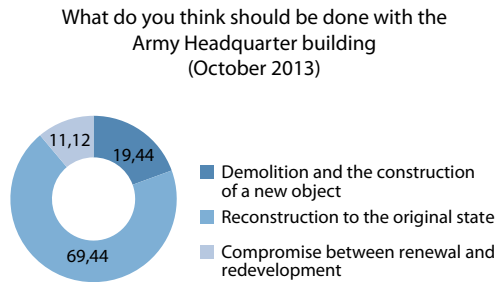


Fig. 6. The result of the small-scale opinion poll, conducted in October 2013. *Source:* the author.

have the potential to serve as a basis for further analysis which the author highly recommends, especially in the sphere of forming, shaping and manipulating public opinion according to specific needs of various actors.

Returning to the question of whether it was a late for the professional societies and established individuals to react and raise their voice, faced with both the continuous threat of losing the Army Headquarters to what is named *investitorski urbanizam*⁵³ (*Investor's urbanism*) and the recent destruction of parts of buildings, the answer the author offers is – yes, most probably, it was late. Reasons are many, from the position of professionals in the Serbian society; to their inability and unwillingness to raise their voice; to the societal deification of possible well-off investors as a magical solution for many accumulated problems; to the lack of profound understanding of the role and values of cultural heritage in a society, especially of one listed after it was reduced to a ruinous state; to their inability to comprehend Dobrović's work on a complex level; to their ideological and also pragmatic alignment; to...

The debate on the future of the Army Headquarters silenced a bit when the new development, spatially not so far from it, became the focus of public attention in mid 2014. The positive outcome of the Army Headquarters' debate was that the public, both professional and general, was far better prepared to critically assess the advantages and disadvantages of the urban redevelopment project on a gigantic scale for the right bank of the Sava River – Belgrade Waterfront project⁵⁴. The possible negative outcome could be a total loss of the Army Headquarters from the city skyline, both by allowing the new construction on its position and

renegotiating its position of an urban and spatial dominant in connection with the high-raised buildings of the Belgrade Waterfront project.

In this particular case, several characteristics make the investor model of reconstruction questionable – the lack of the assessment of value and estimation of reconstruction costs; the lack of the will of the government to take the responsibility over the use of its property and the public image this property radiates; the lack of even a preliminary design project for the location; the lack of feasibility and market studies for the proposed exclusive hotel function; the corporate architectural identity of the companies supposedly interested for its location, etc. All these characteristics make the investor model of reconstruction uneasy and uncomfortable.

The most probable future for the Army Headquarters, at least what seems to be at this moment, is that it is going to be demolished part by part, as already mentioned. The continuation of “clearance work, justified by public safety concerns” (RTS 2013; Studio B 2014; Mučibabić 2014) on the Building A's cascade motif, planned for the end of 2014 (and at this moment still not executed), will expose its counterpart on the Building B as highly vulnerable for further renegotiation and ultimately “unbearably lonesome” (Kovačević 2001). It is not hard to imagine the outcome of this “unbearable lonesomeness” in an environment where the loss of not only population but also of valuable pieces of architecture is more common than elsewhere.

Matejić rightly identifies the Army Headquarters as “one of the very few total works of art or *Gesamtkunstwerk*” (in Serbia), which has formed a unity from the physical structure, its function and its context” (Matejić 2010). It is also the unique example of the theoretical justification and explanation of the architectural design in Serbian architectural practice, and it is a registered monument of culture with established architectural and cultural values. In this sense its complete removal from the space would be a serious loss for everyone included in the process of renegotiation with the past, being either professional or laic.

Conclusions

The author argues that the conclusion and not the introduction is the right place to connect the highly complex case of the Army Headquarters in Belgrade and the surrounding narratives with the broader discussion on heritage, heritage losses, heritage management, dissonances, uses and ghosts haunting it. In this particular case it was an intentionally chosen strategy to firstly inform the reader about unresolved issues and narratives surrounding the physical structure of Dobrović's Army Headquarters, to introduce

⁵³ Term present in the general public and professional circles in Serbia, cumulative name to include all negative phenomena (urban, societal, environmental, political, economical, etc.) caused by putting the economic interests above all others, in this case in urbanism.

⁵⁴ Belgrade Waterfront – Internet presentation of the planned redevelopment of the right bank of the Sava River (Belgrade Waterfront 2014).

them to the newest debate about its possible future or lack of it prior to connecting it to the broader theoretical framework. Main reasons for this were the level of complexity and the number of layers to interpret and negotiate.

All the narratives (named controversies and complexities) discussed here, can be summarized under one term, defined as *dissonant heritage* (Tunbridge, Ashworth 1996) and deepened as *difficult heritage* (Macdonald 2009). There is little doubt that each of the case's controversies and complexities corresponds with the different types of dissonance occurrences – “dissonance implicit in commodification, dissonance implicit in place products, dissonance implicit in the content of the message” (Tunbridge, Ashworth 1996). The entire previous discussion was mainly focussed on the ways in which messages radiated by the Dobrović's building, its location and its context are to be interpreted. Messages that, depending on the receiver, could be interpreted as *contradictory, failed, obsolete or undesirable* (Tunbridge, Ashworth 1996) or which could carry a myriad of meanings.

As shown in the previous text, for the majority of commentators on the Army Headquarters the connection with the past is highly influential when it comes to deliberations on its possible future, and some see its past, “although meaningful in the present, also contested and awkward for public reconciliation with a positive, self-confirming identity” (Macdonald 2009). Elaborated previously were the two most dominant contested aspects – “the use of heritage as a cultural, political and economic resource” (Tunbridge, Ashworth 1996) and its ideological background, being marked as “*a communist heritage*” (Kulić 2010). In the post-communist discourse, marking something as a communist heritage means that it is deemed as unimportant, bad, negative, worth of erasing. This labelling opens so many questions, questions which need to stay open for further discussion. The central one is what makes a building a communist one? Is it due to the period in which it was built; its creators' membership in the Communist Party; architects' compliance with the adopted aesthetical canon to express the might of the communist state artistically and visually; its use as a house for an institution so vitally important and so dear to the Communist Party or some more intangible things – rumours, gossips, myths connected to it? Or is it something else and if so, what is that else? Who defines it as a communist heritage and for what reason?

The Army Headquarters is contested for its heritage status and its values which it undoubtedly has and which were discussed here. Both the status and values are confirmed by competent institutions and also with

a wide consensus between professionals in the field of architecture, architectural history and theory and cultural heritage. Both the status and the values are contested by those who represent the state; the state which has decided that it should be safeguarded for the future, registering it as cultural heritage. It is contested by those who put economic interest as the ultimate one and who see this heritage status as an obstacle in achieving some economic benefits in a country where the lack of financial resources is a constant companion of every public and private enterprise.

In the very end, one question stands out, probably as the most comprehensive one – is it possible to really eradicate all traces of the past or are these traces that one is trying to get rid of coming back to haunt you? Translating the Edensor's reasoning from the industrial ruins (Edensor 2005) to this type of complex heritage, can we conclude that these particular objects are imbued with the ghosts; ghosts of the past, ghosts of the present and ghosts of the, still uncertain, but influential, future; ghosts of everyone who ever contemplated, either positively or negatively, on the location with all its built space, its symbolisms and meanings?

Post Scriptum

In the moment of working on the final draft of this article the sirens sounded, with a *termination of air-raid alert* tune. Even though this was just a simple functionality check, performed monthly, at noon of every first Monday, it gave a symbolic and metaphorical ending of a story so rich in connections with air warfare and destruction. When the siren finally sounds the end, it is time to count the casualties in both humans and physical structures, to find peace with the immense loss and to try to find the ways of commemorating it by coming to terms with the fact that nothing what is men-made, including humans, does not last forever.

Disclosure statement

The author declares that it does not have any competing financial, professional, or personal interests from other parties.

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SRĐAN MILOŠEVIĆ

IMT Institute for Advanced Studies Lucca, Piazza San Ponziano 6, 55100 Lucca, Italy. E-mails: srdjan.milosevic@imtlucca.it, srdjan.milosevic.bg@gmail.com

Srđan Milošević was born in 1979 in Belgrade, then SFR of Yugoslavia, now Republic of Serbia. After successfully defending his project “Urban recycling of the Old Mill in Belgrade” in 2006 he obtained his master’s degree in Architecture from the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Belgrade. He successfully finished one year post-graduate studies in Built Heritage Conservation and Management at Academia Istropolitana Nova in Slovakia and at the moment he is a PhD student in Management and Development of Cultural Heritage at IMT Institute for Advanced Studies in Lucca, Italy.

He worked in the design departments of several architectural companies in Serbia and he also ran his own architectural company prior to his move to Italy for academic studies.

His scholarly interests include contemporary approach to complex questions of management of built heritage from the period of European totalitarian regimes (Communism, Fascism and Nazism), approaches to dissonant heritage, questions of memory and identity.