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Bogdan Bogdanović: *Dissident in life, architecture and writing*

The position of an architect as dissident is complex, multi-layered and at times a complete contradiction. Architects have often been close to the centres of power and involved with the aspects of their spatial distribution. However, even when they expressed their criticism of the ruling system, the system didn't greatly fear their reproach. This observation suggests two things: first, that architects apparently seldom offer a strong, critical voice that affects individuals in societies; and second, that they are not considered essential in the overall exercise, distribution and management of power. In this vein, Michel Foucault argued that compared to doctors or prison wardens, architects do not hold an influential position in society (Foucault: 1991: 244-5). Perhaps overoptimistically, he held that while their expertise might be relevant in channelling the flux of human bodies, movement and action in cities, public spaces and institutions, architects could never take over people's private space. He maintained that even the public space that had been planned and designed for exercising power over people could be turned into a space of resistance where that very power could be challenged. This, he believed, further diminished the chance of qualifying certain architecture as unconditionally either democratic or authoritarian.

In this paper I examine the work of Bogdan Bogdanović in the context of this theme of 'paradox of dissidence'. I aim to provide an example that demonstrates the concept of dissidence as conditional and unstable. In this respect the book *Zaludna mistrija: doktrina i praktika bratstva zlatnih (crnih) brojeva* [*The Futile Trowel: Doctrine and practice of the brotherhood of golden (black) numbers*] (1984), originally published in 1968, provides the focus for my discussion. As major books by Bogdanović have not been translated into English, I begin by introducing the author, his context and *Zaludna mistrija* itself, to propose a hypothesis that demonstrates how this apparently idiosyncratic surrealist, architectural drama could also be seen as a dissident text. I analyse the sources, methods and language of *Zaludna mistrija*, relating it to similar works that have been considered dissident. The conclusion shows how the complexity of Bogdanović's work could be related to the contemporary understanding of dissident knowledge, in part informed by the work of the poststructuralist philosophers, such as Foucault, Kristeva, Deleuze and Guattari.

The scope of this paper does not allow for a detailed account of Bogdanović's overall opus and various modalities and methods of operation his work took. It does not claim that Bogdanović was a dissident in a sense of being imprisoned on sites of torture

such as the island of Goli Otok, where tens of thousands political prisoners agonised and several thousands were killed by Tito's regime¹. Nevertheless Bogdanović confronted and challenged Milosević and his followers at the height of their power in 1986. Subsequently his life was threatened and he had to leave Belgrade.

1. Bogdan Bogdanović – the context

Bogdan Bogdanović (1922-2010) was a Serbian architect, visual artist, writer and professor of architecture at the University of Belgrade. He was the author of numerous monuments devoted to the victims of fascism in former Yugoslavia (1952-81). As the Mayor of Belgrade (1982-6), he was a liberal member of the Yugoslav Communist Party and later a strong opponent of Milosević's government. At the end of the eighties, Bogdanović was one of the first to warn that Yugoslavia was in danger of breaking up in bloodshed. He later described Yugoslavia's disintegration as a series of 'urbicides' and actively spoke against it.

In some respects Bogdanović could be seen as a predecessor of the architect-dissidents that emerged in Russia and other East-European countries in the 1980s. This is evident primarily in his drawings that emerged in the 1960s and in his concerns for the culture of architecture that was under the threat of dogmatic socialist modernism and its powerful branch – state sanctioned urbanism. And yet as a university professor, a (short-term) dean, the president of the Yugoslav Union of Architects and a member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU), Bogdanović was never a marginal. In 1981 he resigned as member of SANU in protest of what he saw as their nationalist stand that was afterwards utilized by Milosević to gain ground.² Six years later he became one of the founders of the International Academy of Architecture (IAA) within the International Union of Architects (UIA).

If we consider the meaning of 'dissident' in its original sixteenth century sense of 'sitting apart', from the Latin *dissidentem*, it transpires that throughout his life Bogdanović was a dissident in more ways than one, as he often 'sat apart'. In the most frequent use of the term, Bogdanović became a dissident rather late, in the second half of the 1980s. As a communist from a well-connected leftist family of intellectuals, he led a mostly protected life. Even when he was a revolutionary educator in the late 1960s and 1970s, aiming to radically change the School of Architecture at the University of Belgrade, he was forgiven and let go. Other less fortunate radicals, such as Milovan Djilas (1911-95), politician, theorist and author who became one of the

¹ This reality was unreported in the mainstream Western media keen to represent Tito in positive light particularly after 1948 when he split from the Eastern block. This condition helped Tito and his democratically unelected government to stay in power. When questioned about the lack of democracy in post WW2 Yugoslavia Churchill responded cynically: 'Do you plan to live there?'

² In 1986, the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences (SANU) drafted a Memorandum, the publication of which in the Serbian newspaper *Vecernje Novosti* is, retrospectively, the precipitating event that awakened Serbian national consciousness. See Morus. C. (2007).

best known dissidents in the whole of Eastern Europe, or film director Lazar Stojanović (b.1944), ended up in prison or had to leave the country. Bogdanović was never in court as were for example ‘the Belgrade six’ in the 1984-5 trial that received worldwide publicity.³ Nonetheless, from 1987 to 1993, Bogdanović had endured severe pressure inflicted by the authorities and the media. Ultimately, this resulted in his departure from Belgrade in 1993, which sealed his fate as a dissident.



Figure 1 Jasenovac – Aerial view of the memorial landscape site and Figure 2 Stone Flower – detail

Bogdanović’s meticulously argued critique of the communist party was published in *Mrtvouzice: mentalne zamke staljinizma* [*Dead ends: mental traps of Stalinism*] (1988). In this book, he shows that analysing political function is as indispensable as analysing political action. He scrutinised the social relations of the time, as he felt that the power being exercised in the former Yugoslavia was one of fear and extortion. He compared Yugoslavia’s political situation with the descriptions of Lévy-Bruhl’s primitive societies, exploring the philosopher’s idea that ‘beneficent power usually sits at the core of the society, while the threatening power remains dispersed’ (Bogdanović: 1987). Bogdanović demonstrated how the disappearance of the political functions and social roles that existed in former Yugoslavia enabled the centralised state system in each republic of the 1980s to merge with the segmented clan system. This led the state of Yugoslavia to be dismembered and destroyed. The consequences were the same as in most post-colonial and post-conflict countries: the emergence of diverse forms of (pseudo) traditionalisms.

Unlike the social critique by Milovan Djilas that was informed by social sciences, **observation** and pragmatic political experience, Bogdanović’s critique is based upon his investigations about cultures, their histories, their various practices and modes of governance. In particular he studied the way in which the everyday life related to the physical structures of the cities.

³ The Belgrade six is a name of the group of six Serbian intellectuals Miodrag Milić, Milan Nikolic, Dragomir Olujić, Vladimir Miljanović, Gordan Jovanović, Pavluško Imširović arrested in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, in 1984 and charged with counter-revolutionary activity. Nikolić, Milić and Olujić were separated and sentenced to between one and two year prison terms.

Intellectually, creatively and as a matter of choice, Bogdanović was theoretically minded, artistically driven nonconformist most of his life. This was due to his personality, his unusual kind of reasoning and the need for self-expression and originality that was evident in his architectural projects, writings and teaching. Attentive to his students, Bogdanović was approachable and unassuming. In his atelier in Mali Popović, he gave students a chance to reimagine their ideas about the city. This was a unique pedagogical and critical undertaking, but also a dissident act towards how the official urbanism of uniformity was taught at the time.



Figure 3 Mostar Cosmology detail

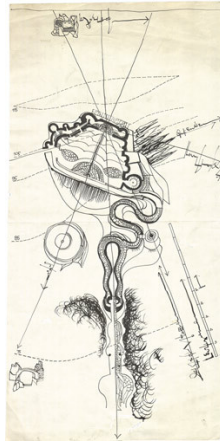


Figure 4 Mostar – Drawing by Bogdan Bogdanović

Bogdanović initiated a new type of commemorative landscape design in numerous projects for memorial sites devoted to the victims of fascism across the former Yugoslavia, such as those in Jasenovac (1959-66), Mostar (1959-65), Kruševac (1960-5), Travnik (1971-5) and others (Figs. 1-4). Here, the overall configuration of the site becomes more important than the monument itself, which is less figurative and more architectural. Bogdanović declared that the majority of his monuments were in honour of victims, not victors as they commemorated the pain of a country's civil war (Mirlesse: 2008: 3). The individual shrines and cenotaphs appear as if they spring out and rise from the ground, setting themselves in congruity with plants and the surrounding landscape.



Figure 5 Kruševac memorial site and Figure 6 Detail

Bogdanović defined his design philosophy as non-figurative and conceptual, inspired by the ancient dualist thinking of good and evil, where his designs represented the struggle of these two principles, something that everyone could interpret differently. He argued that it was not for him to define good or evil.

Bogdanović's architectural legacy is best observed in these sites of memory and their *longue durée* effects on the landscape across the Yugoslav republics. As Croatian art critic Sonja Leboš recently pointed out, we can observe how they became a new form of land art in the 1950s, before Robert Smithson coined the term 'land-art' (Leboš: 2012: 10). The contemporary Austrian poet and architectural critic Friedrich Achleitner addressed this distinctiveness of Bogdanović's design, arguing,

Bogdan Bogdanović's memorial sites are *loci* of an urban culture ... they had always been developed out of the topography and landscape that were transformed into the sites of thinking, recalling and contemplation (Leboš: 2012: 10)

This quality remains to be discovered by wider international audiences. In this sense, Bogdanović has continuously been an avant-garde proponent of architecture and its culture. He primarily saw his landscape interventions, not as monuments, but as stories and collections of fantastical objects. This attitude and the designs come in part from the surrealist element in his childhood: he was brought up in a house frequented by surrealist writers and artists. The Bretonian search into the depths of the (un)consciousness remained a relevant insight and mode of practice throughout Bogdanović's life and cannot be underestimated. He recollected,

My studies began before the war (WW2), as I went to study architecture from a surrealist milieu. I even made a program and entitled it *Vers une architecture surréaliste*, paraphrasing Le Corbusier. I wanted to create surrealist architecture, and that had to involve willing clients, such as was the case with the house for Tristan Tzara ... In my circle, we were all surrealists and left-oriented, and when our leftist society arrived, we saw that surrealist exhibitions were not going to happen. (Grimmer: 2012: 28-9)



Figure 7 Travnik memorial site – detail.

As a young man, Bogdanović was welcomed by the Yugoslav surrealist group around Marko Ristić, Dušan Matić and Aleksandar Vučo. Surrealism was from Belgrade, but inseparable from Miroslav Krleža, the most important Croatian writer of the time. According to Bogdanović, this was a circle of Bretonian surrealists around Marko Ristić. During his 1926 -7 stay in Paris Ristić met with André Breton and the Surrealist Circle. A visit to Breton's flat inspired Ristić's concept of the Surrealist

Wall, where in addition to the 'Owl' by Max Ernst, Ristić included works by Yves Tanquy, Andre Masson as well as African masks and fetishes. According to the recent surrealist scholarship

Belgrade Surrealist Circle was arguably one of the most vibrant early-surrealist strongholds in Europe. Active from 1922-1932, the surrealist movement in Yugoslavia yielded a generation of excellent poets, numerous collective and individual art-works/artifacts (le cadavre exquis, collages, assemblages, and photographs), unusual theoretical works, and the post/high-surrealist art (cf. Milena Pavlović-Barili and Stane Kregar).⁵ (Bahun-Radunović: 2005: 38)

The fantastic and bizarre events' portrayal in Bogdanović's writings, drawings and architecture attest this background. Visually, Bogdanović's work could be compared to the work of Max Ernst (1891-1976), as his drawings of imaginary creatures and buildings are evocative of Ernst's oneiric beings. As Vera Grimmer noted, Ernst's sculptures, such as 'Capricorn', made of concrete with metal applications, are similar to some of Bogdanović's objects (Grimmer 2012: 24). Bogdanović acknowledged that there was an Ernst-like quality to his monumental structures, adding that it was legitimate to be inspired by the things one understood and empathised with.

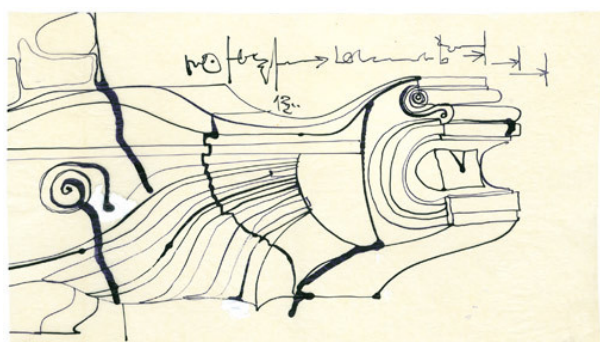


Figure 8 Bogdan Bogdanović's drawing for 'Bestiarium' Soldier's Museum Čačak and Figure 9 Max Ernst 'Capricorn' 1948 model, (1976 cast)

For Bogdanović, surrealism drew from past histories, the history of art and that of civilisation. He saw it as a continuation of Romanticism and also perceived the psychoanalytic aspects within it. He argued that introspective Romantic literature enabled thought to penetrate deeply and that Freudian psychoanalysis came out of this spiritual state as well as out of the conditions of Vienna in the early twentieth century (Grimmer: 2012: 29). Bogdanović's own surrealist fantasy expanded and mixed with the architectural history, his passion for grasping the artefacts of the city, their aesthetics and their role in the life of the city.

⁵ Bahun-Radunović argues that 'The critical neglect may be explained by factors such as linguistic barriers, scant interpretative body, and the belated and frequently romanticized assessment of the Central- and East-European avant-garde'. (Bahun-Radunović: 2005: 38) There was another surrealist group that was Aragonian, who were Stalinist. (Grimmer: 2012: 31)

2. Zaludna mistrija

2.1. The context

Bogdanović maintained that an architect's vocation presupposes a lifelong devotion to learning and experimentation. This approach, spiced up with the philosophy of Pythagoras, its mystery and playfulness, is presented in *Zaludna mistrija* (*The Futile Trowel*, 1968). In this unusual book, narratives and drama are an intrinsic part of the architectural realm, which includes phantasmagorical travelling in time and drawings of imaginary built forms (Fig 10).

On the surface, *Zaludna mistrija* might appear an odd and esoteric choice in the context of discussing dissidence. *Mrtvouzice* (1987), the volume which explicitly documents the politics of confrontation within the Communist Party, might appear more appropriate. And yet, a closer look reveals that *Zaludna mistrija* has always sat apart, in the sense that it has never conformed to the genre of architectural writing or any other. In this way, this strange, timeless and unconventional book has continued to challenge architects. It will no doubt carry on doing so in the future, as it provides a moment for pause when architects can take a deep breath and look inside themselves.

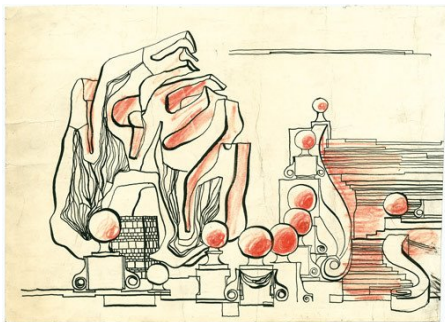


Figure 10 Bogdan Bogdanović Illustration for *Zaludna mistrija*

Zaludna mistrija leaves its readers speculating: is this text about architecture or is it a personal semi-autobiographical fantasy? Is it a serious and thoughtful piece or is it ironic and jovial? Is it a drama or a poetic reworking of architectural effects? Its refusal to fall into categories is no accident. Bogdanović constructs this position as a gesture against the architectural rigidity of dogmatic modernism of the time. In that sense, the book is a statement against technocracy and bureaucratic narrow-mindedness, arguing for a broader understanding of architecture and its effects in both theory and practice.

2.2. Architecture as the knowledge of the self

Zaludna mistrija shows the provisional nature of architecture's boundaries as a discipline and as a system of knowledge. According to Bogdanović, for those who practise it, architecture has always been a way of understanding and knowing about

the world. Within this scheme, architects' personalities cannot be taken out of equation. Architects need to develop and gain self-knowledge, which is a continuous process. The characters in the book thus accept as true that architecture is only a visible manifestation of the process of edification, which is about life, personal exploration and ethico-aesthetic knowledge.

The origin of this approach to learning takes us to Pythagoras, whose contributions to philosophy include coining the term, by calling himself 'philosophos'. Before him, learned men referred to themselves as 'sophos'. Pythagoras was the first to deploy the new term and to define 'philosophy' as a discipline. He originated and systematised a number of arts and disciplines, such as the trivium and quadrivium (Guthrie: 1987: 34).

Despite Pythagorean thought's significance and strategic centrality, this philosopher's history remains shrouded in mystery. This is partly because from today's point of view, it has been difficult to accept that Pythagoras was both a scientist and a religious thinker, both a natural philosopher and a spiritual philosopher. While he is best known for being a mathematician, he was likewise an important political theorist involved in the local government.

Pythagoras discovered the ratios of the musical scale while he was conducting research into musical harmonies and its effects on the psyche. He believed in the kinship of all living things and was a vegetarian. Like Socrates's, Pythagoras's teaching was oral reflecting his belief that philosophy was a process and that books could neither answer questions nor engage in philosophical enquiry. He held the view that philosophical doctrines of ultimate concern should never be published and intentionally left no writings to posterity; his ideas were recorded by Plato. According to Ion of Chios, quoted in Diogenes Laertius, Pythagoras himself left us only the poems he wrote under the name of Orpheus (Laertius: 1853).⁶

2.3. *The Narrative*

Zaludna mistrija opens up with a description of the unity of all things, stating the Pythagorean understanding of the Number – number as One and number as Many.⁷ The book follows the life experiences and 'eidetic transformations' of the main characters: Bramante, Palladio, Guarini, Piranesi, Borromini, Leonardo and Ledoux. They interact with each other, with the 'little-sick-lady', with various spirits and with the writer himself. In the experiences of Bogdanović's protagonists, the private and public domains mix seamlessly, as do the realms from the twentieth to the sixteenth centuries. The members of the brotherhood hold conversations and stage discursive

⁶ For further discussion on Orphic poetry, see West, M.L. (1983) *The Orphic Poems* Oxford: Clarendon Press

⁷ We find a related quote in Plato: "...and the ancients, who were superior to us and dwelt nearer to the Gods, have handed down a tradition that all things that are said to exist consist of a One and many and contain in themselves the connate principles of Limit and Unlimitedness." Plato: *Philebus* 16c

enactments apparently about architecture, while their significations are wider.

In the episode where Francesco Borromini encounters other architects in Rome, Bogdanović contemplates Borromini's eccentricities and how they were perceived by notable Roman artists such as Gian Lorenzo Bernini and the papal officials, with whom the newcomer from Ticino had to negotiate about his work. The fellow master builders criticise Borromini for ignoring the agreeable proportions (the Number) and their logic.

The architects' understanding of Number is of a living, qualitative entity evident worldwide, whose nature needed to be discovered empirically. Understood as principle, the Number is the origin and root of all things, not a specific sign that denotes quantitative reality. It is the principle of that reality.⁸

The brotherhood echoes the fraternity originally convened by Pythagoras in Croton, South Italy, which was a religious, monastic society centred on the Muses and their leader Apollo (Guthrie: 1987: 30). For Pythagoras, philosophy was a form of purification. The problem was not becoming divine as becoming aware of the divine, of the universal principle within oneself, as explained by David Fideler (Guthrie: 1987: 31). To know the cosmos was to seek the harmonised element within oneself. The philosophy's task therefore had to be *the care of the soul*. This task is not unlike the paradigm of 'the care of the self' (*epimeleia heautou*) addressed in the third volume of *The History of Sexuality* by Michel Foucault (1984) and in his lectures on 'parrhesia' in the final years of his life. The 'care of the self' was first practiced by the ancient Greeks but Foucault, as well as Bogdanović, have shown how it is directly relevant to our own ethical situation. They have both argued that for the production of subjectivity in their access to truth must involve a prior preparation by the subject who is then, in turn, transformed by that very truth.

We learn more about the initiation into the fraternity when the author and the little lady visit a collection of architectural drawings in London. The couple's attention is directed to Piranesi's drawings, as they consider his work in relation to the sign EIZOTEO, a Pythagorean term used in the initiation ritual. The French architect Nicholas Ledoux appears in the book, too. This doomed architect (*architecte maudit*), as he called himself, is the one in the series of incarnations that emerge.

The chapter on Gaudi sees the confrontation between the writer and the lady. She criticises the author for the 'almighty' rationalism which, according to her, conveniently allows him to stop at points 'where in fact he should with some effort

⁸ Numbers, therefore, especially the first ten, are manifestations of diversity in a uniform continuum. The word *kosmos*, in addition to its primary meaning of 'order', also means 'ornament'. According to Pythagoras, the world is therefore ornamented with order and all things relate to the One through this order, which creates harmony. Architects in particular need to recognise this order and harmony if they wish to be able to draw on it and tune into it.

just begin' (Bogdanović: 1984: 87).

Ultimately, Bramante, Palladio, Guarini and Borromini complete the author's initiation with verses and the light emitted from the ritual strike delivered by the trowel. Thus, the writer joins the fraternity and little lady vanishes¹¹.

The book's overall tone is ambiguous, both ironic and serious. The little lady is the one who discloses the secrets of the fraternity's organisational structure and the writer follows her almost against his own will. Although the writer never becomes a true follower of Arithme and Logos, he admits that the lady helped him 'to realize many things and to write about a few without having learnt them all' (Bogdanović: 1984: 61).

The members' initial assessment of our writer is divided. They are concerned about the way in which the lady has single-mindedly instigated the initiation and the entry ritual about the truly edifying knowledge. This knowledge, we are told, 'we carry in our chests, while everything else is vanities and shadows of things' (Bogdanović: 1984: 99).

Bogdanović mocks his profession with plenty of vivid detail. In the form of surrealist satire, he criticises 1960s architecture using the architects of the past as mouthpieces. The brotherhood acknowledges that the newly-presented architect (the author) had striven for better architecture during a time that had seen the building of 'sinful, concrete and glass boxes', where 'people of today live like birds and in their ignorance call these buildings architecture' (Bogdanović: 1984: 103). The book finishes with writer's eidetic transformation, his ritual dispersion into nothingness and his reawakening in the park in Turin in the arms of his lady friend.

2.3. *Historical sources of Zaludna mistrija*

Bogdanović gives the historical sources for his narratives. These include the inscriptions he received from the Greek architect Patroklos Karantinos (1903-76), professor of architecture at the University of Thessaloniki (1959-68), known for his design of numerous museums including the (old) Acropolis museum. Karantinos was a disciple of August Perret and a founder of the Greek branch of CIAM. Bogdanović refers to Karantinos as a friend who sent him a collection of Orphic inscriptions taken from the inner walls and foundations of the temples in Agrigento, Bassae, Aegina and Segesta, on whose reconstructions Karantinos had worked. These inscriptions were put in secret places, in the hope that they would never be found. Bogdanović did not believe that the inscriptions were the *lithicae orphicae* (Orphic verses describing

¹¹ The day of her departure 'was the day of great symmetry of separation, the day of flowing away of the things most dear and most substantial'. (Bogdanović: 1984: 92).

the properties and symbolism of different stones). He saw them as a valuable collection of allocutions, rules, vows, recommendations and prayers: in sum, the liturgical collection of words and numbers that testify about the little-known customs of builders in antiquity (Bogdanović: 1984: 169).

On the basis of these inscriptions, Bogdanović concludes that the ancient masters did not worship their work. The building was considered a kind of sacrilege, which is why some of the inscriptions sound like excuses in the face of the divine. The builders appear to care more about their own 'inner edifices' and to look at the giant temples and their patrons with a certain loathing, argues Bogdanović. He quotes from the inscriptions including the prayer of the brotherhood cited verbatim that was found incised in the foundations of one of the temple sites where Karantinos had worked (Bogdanović: 1984: 172-3).

2.4. *Language, style and the method of writing*

Bogdanović's language is imaginative and lively. His prose contains unusual philosophical concepts, transmillennial samples of architectural jargon and specific Belgrade styles of phrasing. His writing is neither pompous nor precious; it is warm, self-deprecating and jovial. The text's appeal lies in the author's communication with his multifaceted persona.

Within the wider literary context, the imaginary dialogue with the characters from the past is in the genre of Paul Valéry's *Eupalinos, or the Architect*, where Phaedrus, Socrates and Eupalinos converse about architecture and philosophy. As Croatian scholar Ljerka Mifka notes, in its inception *Zaludna mistrija* is similar to *The Songs of Bilitis*, which was allegedly edited and translated from ancient Greek by Pierre Louys¹² in 1894 (Bogdanović: 1984: 176). It later appeared that Louys could have invented this provenance, which in fact does not undermine the quality of the ancient sensibility as delivered by Louys. Within these texts about imaginative reconstruction of absent persons in present times, Mifka argues, one invents the axis of sensibility that can relate the past and present works of art (or architecture) to each other. (Bogdanović: 1984: 176-7). In reconstructing and grasping the past sensibilities, Bogdanović uses historical references and his drawings, which become part of the critique. This methodology of apparently turning its back to the realm of the immediate present, becomes a tool and an alternative framework of engagement for a dissident architect. Bogdanović's critique of the state and its urbanism had to be sharp and profound, but also veiled in order to be able to be published and ultimately understood by those who were willing to do so.

Another tool in this spectrum is Bogdanović's involvement with the stonemasons from whom he learnt the ritual of pitching and holding onto the rhythm while cutting

¹² Pierre Louys was a friend of such dissidents as André Gide and Oscar Wilde.

stones. In his lectures, Bogdanović reflected on these orchestrations where stone-cutting borders with music, thus bringing the discussion about musical harmonies and architectural elements to another level.

He delivered his lectures spontaneously and without a script, recalling these experiences of the processes of making. In his talks, buildings and cities were always animate, as he later revealed:

I hypostasized cities, they were beings for me, and as such they attracted me. Everybody thought I was a little bit wacky for telling such stories. (Grimmer: 2012: 32)

Bogdanović was therefore consciously mixing reality and imagination, historical documents and his own drawings, stonemasons' practices and surrealist techniques. In so doing, he instinctively confronted the silliness and crudity of totalitarianism, its architecture and its urbanism. *Zaludna mistrija* is thus Bogdanović's very important book and a dissident act that has raised many eyebrows and even more suspicions from the authorities. At the same time due to its nature they did not know how to confront it.

The intuitively shaped approach developed here was a significant step in the line of dissident acts that followed. It was carried through by Bogdanović's use of juxtapositions and apparent *non sequiturs*, which have always been features of subversive, dissident practices, from Hieronymus Bosch, Francisco Goya and Andre Breton to Max Ernst to Bogdanović.

Violating causal reasoning, with events and behaviours that are logically incongruent, the irony and cynicism in Bogdanović's book resemble *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* by Milan Kundera¹³, the stories of Danil Kharms (1905-42) Russian surrealist and absurdist writer (Kharms: 2009), and the humour found in Bohumil Hrabal's *Closely Observed Trains*. In these works from socialist Czechoslovakia and the former Soviet Union, themes of political dilemmas and their moral ambiguities recur. Many of the characters act with determination and humour, often irrationally in order to survive in absurd times and, if possible, enjoy themselves despite the circumstances.

¹³ Indeed there are some noteworthy parallels between Bogdanović and Kundera. They were both members of the Communist parties in their own countries and as such actively and critically involved in their debates before becoming dissidents. Their irony is in part due to this participation and awareness how the system worked. They also come from the similar social background and have had fathers who were involved with contemporary arts in between the two world wars. Both Bogdanović and Kundera have subsequently become professors at universities, and have been using interdisciplinary dialogue inherited from their fathers within their own disciplines. They both ended up living out of their countries.

3. Paradox of dissidence and pleasure

This notion of pleasure and the paradox of the pleasure principle were part of everyday life during socialism. It is a painful kind of humour, similar to what Slavoj Žižek referred to as Lacanian *jouissance*. (Žižek, although younger than Bogdanović, was at one time a member of the same Communist Party of Yugoslavia.) The idea of this paradoxical humour was to expose the absurdities critically, which would hopefully be understood and acted upon. These subversive and dissident practices might resurface in a new form again today, as there is a need for a certain rupture and critical release of laughter.



Figure 11 Bogdan Bogdanović in 1972

When asked about the internal edification and more esoteric aspects of his work, Bogdanović clarified, ‘The internal architecture is within me, to the extent in which I have edified myself and how much I *helped someone else* in doing so for themselves’ (Grimmer: 2012: 33, emphasis mine). This is akin not only to the Pythagorean philosophy that underpins *Zaludna mistrija*, but also to Julia Kristeva’s thinking when she states that ‘true dissidence today is perhaps simply what it has always been: *thought*’ (Kristeva: 1986: 292-300). In a society where even universities privilege performativity as a principle for representing and legitimising knowledge, free thought is the suppressed.

In that respect dissidents who have always lived in the paradoxical and marginal spaces that defy the stable representation of the forms of knowledge produce discourse that continuously contributes to critical theory of knowledge. This body of theory has been enriched by the texts such as nomad thought of Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze & Guttari: 1986), Derrida’s work inspired by Jan Patočka (Derrida: 1995) and by Virilio’s social critique (Virilio: 2002 and 2010) to mention just a few examples. Bogdanović’s work makes its own contribution to this series of works. Like the inscriptions on the foundations of the ancient temples drawn to our attention, his own *Zaludna mistrija* continues to live in similar marginal spaces, while performing a vital role of challenging the dominant practices of power and restricting their claim to knowledge.

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