

Central and Eastern European Review

Katerine Carl and Srdjan Jovanović Weiss, eds., *Lost Highway Expedition 30/7-25-8/2006: Photobook*, co-published by Centrala Foundation for Future Cities and School of Missing Studies and Škuc Gallery, Veenman Publisher, Rotterdam, 2007, 314pp. ISBN 978-0-9800245-00, 0-1.

Rebuilding after the disintegration of Yugoslavia is photographically recorded using a journey along the unfinished ‘highway of Brotherhood and Unity’ as its framework, also visiting many unfinished buildings originally intended to celebrate those ideals of the Tito regime. There are also pictures of large hotels and museums which have suffered the same fate of abandonment before completion. Works of over 30 photographers show the variety of development, structural and visual transformation, which have taken place, much of it arbitrarily in a decade and a half in nine cities of the six former federal republics of Yugoslavia, and Albania. This last is also included in the *Expedition*, maybe as there was serious discussion in the mid-to-late 1940’s of incorporating Albania into Yugoslavia as a seventh Federal Republic (‘Gobble it up!’, was Stalin’s suggestion to Tito). Albania’s Stalinist development after Tito’s break with Stalin in 1948, diverged enormously from that of Yugoslavia, and it could not again be visited freely by Westerners or even Yugoslavs, until 1990. In this volume, Albania melds well into Yugoslavia, and were there a map, one would see the convenience of taking the *Expedition* through Albania, (even though roads across its mountainous borders are few and very poor in quality) forming a clearer circular route than had it stuck behind those tall mountains of Albania’s eastern and northern borders.

The novel idea of involving almost 300 architects, artists, writers and curators from Europe, the Western Balkans and North and South America, some travelling and some meeting, brings terrific variety. The collection of images conveys the current urban planning confusion (including Turbo architecture), bypassing or bending building regulations, which has replaced the earlier ideals of voluntary participation. This participation by the Youth Brigades of post-World War II was enthusiastic in rebuilding and connectivity, after the loss of one tenth of the population to that war. By contrast today's wave of building results from individual initiatives and private enterprise, little to do with idealism. In their *Introduction*, the editors claim to have described a positive aspect of balkanisation, showing the 'distinctive ways that each city fashions its particular place on the map'.(9) The photographs themselves show a wide range of style, quite apart from the pictures they are portraying, some relying on unusual angles, for example 'looking up' (193), gives a spectacular design formed by parts of two adjoining buildings.

Contrasts in Ljubljana are nicely juxtaposed: STC city 'one of the largest business, shopping, entertainment, sports and cultural centres in Europe' meriting two pages to portray its vastness with old institutional buildings put to alternative artistic use. For example both the former Rog factory and Metelkova, the former military barracks, are now turned over to artists' galleries. A Ljubljana designer created a multi-purpose booth, some transported to different areas of former Yugoslavia as telephone kiosks, sales kiosks, etc.. Another juxtaposition is shown by the horizontal line of the Highway to the vertical in railway carriages.(132-33) And yet another: between Belgrade and Skopje, the ruined building of a political party, and the building of a new Orthodox church in the same village.

Other contrasts are between wide open spaces and cramped, non-assigned play spaces, and between the variety of uses for buildings as changes of regime create obsolescence. Other observed buildings caught in photographs show structures which might have passed completely unnoticed (a wooden shack on the slim divide between a highway's north/south lanes). Some form historical record, for example graffiti depicting the siege of Vukovar. There is a strong accent on construction, and the display of the undersides of motorways. In Montenegro, where a motorway was built over the top of an Ottoman bathhouse, this latter has been reconstructed as an alternative bookstore and café—all under the motorway. Perhaps the greatest change brought about by the disintegration of Yugoslavia, is the need for such a tremendous increase of customs posts. Since this volume focuses on the Highway, we are not enlightened about how many new such border buildings had also to be created for railway traffic, and railways and stations are little represented—though Sarajevo's ruined central station complex is portrayed.

The photograph of an elaborate new Serbian Orthodox church under construction in the Novi Sad section, is captioned 'Most of the new churches built by the Serbian Orthodox Church are set in empty areas unclaimed by modernist planning'. Such could also be seen throughout Kosovo/a, the largest (not featured in this volume) of which is that in central Prishtina (with golden cross visible throughout the majority Muslim town). The new Saud mosque and Islamic Center in Sarajevo has similarly attracted comment as an imposition of outside influence. This and a huge new Catholic church are both located next to the Olympic Village—in anticipation of wealthy migrants? In Croatia, on the other hand, the only religious building that the members of the *Lost Highway* team included is a mosque. In Croatia, the most determinedly (and problematically) Catholic country, it is hard to believe

they didn't see any churches—there is one tiny one, unremarked, in the distance, on one of the large landscape photos, but that is all.

A picture of Danube Park is accompanied with notes on the many different and popular uses and names it has enjoyed within only fifty years. Currently its use as a playground is illicit as it is locked due to an ownership dispute. A photograph shows the not locked, but neglected and apparently unvisited, forlorn-looking unfinished Museum of the Revolution in New Belgrade. It is noted that Milošević did not take his chance to leave his mark by imposing his influence on the architecture of the capital. The only lasting structure of his influence depicted in this book is a monument to the 'Victory of Serbia over NATO' erected in 2000, curiously with some spelling errors. The monument was debased 'as Milošević's political rating plummeted', and remains untended, and covered in graffiti. On the next pages of the book are photos of floating and elevated weekend houses on the Sava River. The Belgrade section ends with depiction of a postmodernist activity—making an audio recording of a haircut.

A page in the Skopje section is devoted to the Roma area known as Shutka, noting that this is the largest urban Roma settlement in Europe. Reconstruction after the 1963 earthquake in Skopje resulted in a unique mixture of architecture combining Yugoslavs working under a self-management regime and Japanese donor architects. Unsurprisingly, the route from Skopje to Prishtina is littered with a variety of buildings, replacing the devastation of the 1999 War. What is more remarkable is their number, size and grandeur, and the fact that so many, even of those completed, are unoccupied.

From Macedonia, the 'first encounter with Albania' could be better identified, likewise the cross 'on the way to Tirana'. Such captions would not help readers find

these landmarks for themselves. Elbasan, noted as a commercial centre, omits the fact that although it was claimed to be Albania's greatest industrial achievement under Communism, its major industry, the steelworks has long been a derelict health hazard.

There are assorted buildings adorned by a variety of styles in scaffolding, and soft toys to ward off the evil eye. In Tirana, the influence of artist Mayor, Edi Rama is lively and remarkable, both in the colourful painting of apartment block exteriors, and in the revival of former city parks which a decade earlier had been covered with unplanned kiosks. What is the location of the backpackers' hostel shown? The Enver Hoxha 'Pyramid' Museum in central Tirana has been put to very good uses both inside (for offices) and outside (as a playground, its sloping sides serving as massive slides).

The book ends with pictures of some of the creators, meeting before departure to their various corners of the world

The greatest need for a reader, to understand this kind of *Expedition* is a map. But no map is provided, detracting enormously from the interest and understanding of the project. Unfortunately many photographs are given as little as one tenth of a page. These and the extraordinarily small print of the captions, create handicaps for the reader/viewer. While the object of the book is to show urban development, the terrain of these cities is entirely missing. There is emphasis on the flat lands of the *Highway*, giving the false impression that the whole region must be flat.

Putting aside the above criticisms, there is a surprising amount of information contained in spite of the fact that is basically a volume of pictures. No price is named.

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