SYNTHESIS OF THE ARTS WITH THE REGION

Juraj Neidhardt's Sculptural Architecture of the 1960s within Regional Planning of Tourism

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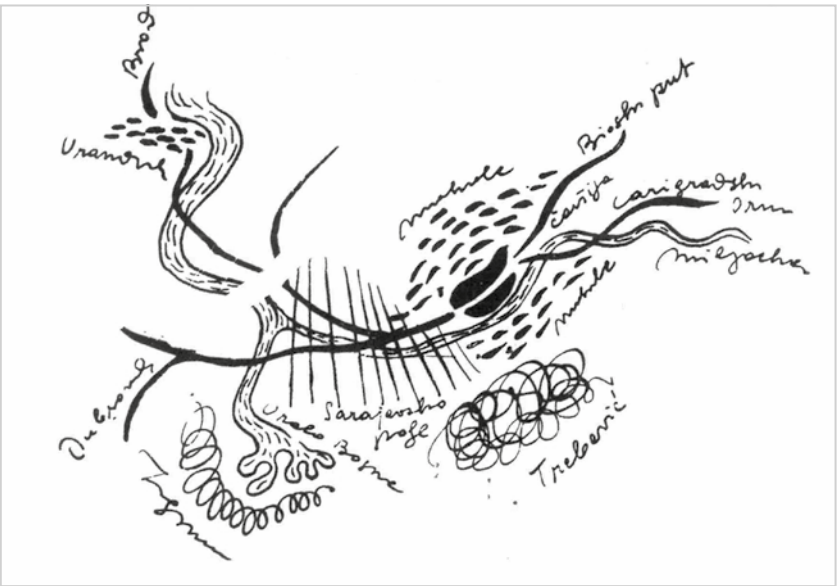
ABSTRACT: Some of Juraj Neidhardt's most emblematic projects are situated in pristine, non-urban settings. From the Ski House in the pine forests of the Bosnian hills to the Hotel Agava immersed in the Mediterranean shrubbery of the Adriatic Coast, his designs in the landscape were key for him to define his architecture as seeking proximity to and harmony with nature. The design strategy that Neidhardt utilized to realize this ambition was, however, far from constant. While in the 1950s, he relied solely on the "unwritten laws" of the vernacular models to define techniques of new design integration into the specific regional environment, in the 1960s, he produced a series of striking artistic compositions of natural and architectural visual elements, which he described with the notion of "phantasy in tourism."

This paper analyzes Neidhardt's writings and several projects of the 1950s and 1960s in order to situate his 1960s architecture excursus into the visual arts within the post-war discourse of the "synthesis of the arts." Under the influence of his and Dušan Grabrijan's geography-informed understanding of the unity between art, life, and the regional environment and his research in the regional planning of tourism (both presented in the book Architecture of Bosnia and the Way towards Modernity (Grabrijan & Neidhardt, 1957), Neidhardt developed an original architectural language that synthesized not only architecture and sculpture but also the specific regional landscape into one harmonious visual whole. This aesthetic synthesis, however, communicated a deeper synthesis between architecture, geographic region, and modern state economy, facilitated by the emerging regional planning as the ultimate absorption of the total environment into the comprehensive kind of modernism.

KEYWORDS: Juraj Neidhardt, Yugoslav modern architecture, Geography, Regional landscape, Regional planning, Synthesis of the Arts, Dušan Grabrijan

INTRODUCTION: Throughout his mid and late career, Juraj Neidhardt emphasized the importance that the natural setting held for his architecture and urban design. His 1957 magnum opus of architectural theory *Architecture of Bosnia and the Way towards Modernity* (coauthored with Dušan Grabrijan) defined "relation with nature" as one of the "unwritten laws" of the "oriental vernacular" architecture of Bosnia (Grabrijan & Neidhardt, 1957, pp. 302-311). Ten years later, in 1967, Neidhardt still maintained that architecture needed to "merely complement nature, to adjust to it and to remain as restrained and unobtrusive as possible" (Neidhardt, 1967, p. 72). While this declarative position was, therefore, constant, Neidhardt's elaboration of design techniques that facilitated such a balanced union of architecture and nature changed considerably. His early post-war projects, such as the Ski House on Trebević Hill and the Guesthouse near Boračko Lake, featured "unwritten laws" and "elements" of Bosnian architecture–cantilevers, pitched roofs, atria, and masonry walls–defined on the bases of his and Grabrijan's architectural-ethnographic research of the Ottoman historic core of Sarajevo. His 1960s projects, such as the Vranjača tourist settlement near Sarajevo and the Agava hotel on the Adriatic coast, however, were characterized by biomorphic sculptural forms that interspersed with rocks, water streams, and vegetation.

This switch from the rule-based, rationalized design process to the inspired form-giving agency of an architect-artist was present in the post-war work of several modernist architects, including Neidhardt's lifelong



01 Juraj Neidhardt, "Areas addressed in the book," drawing published in Architecture of Bosnia and the Way towards Modernity, 1957. © Tatjana Neidhardt (Grabrijan & Neidhardt, 1957, p. 4).

reference, Le Corbusier. Much of this transformation of modern architecture's fundamental repertoire of forms and priorities unfolded under the banner of the "synthesis of the arts," both in the countries of the Western and the Eastern Block (Torrent, 2010, p. 9).

Around 1957 in Yugoslavia, the official discussions on the unification of architecture with other visual arts presented "the synthesis" both as a means of tempering modern architecture's exceeding rationalism and as a political tool of social transformation, all the while upholding the values of abstraction. Dušan Grabrijan's and Juraj Neidhardt's long-anticipated book *Architecture of Bosnia and the Way towards Modernity*, published the same year, was seemingly unrelated to this officially propagated version of the "synthesis of the arts." If anything, its emphasis on "people's architecture" may inspire a hasty association with the Eastern European version of the "synthesis," which had often provided a national inflection to architecture (Drosos, 2016, p. 134). A closer inspection of Neidhardt's portfolio, however, presented in the second half of the book, easily dispels such conclusions: thoroughly avoiding the blunt typological or formalistic quotations of the vernacular, his designs produced between 1938 and 1957 display a combination of Le Corbusier's geometric formalism and consistently applied social-spatial topologies and materialities identified in the Bosnian oriental historical agglomerations.

Observed on the backdrop of this idiosyncratic orthodoxy of Neidhardt's 1950s mid-career opus, his sculptural architectures of the 1960s may seem to expose a radical discontinuation in the development of his personal architectural language.

This paper proposes that the meaning and importance that the idea of the geographic region held for his work must be understood to identify the consistency and continuity of Neidhardt's approach to architecture, including the incorporation of visual arts into his architecture of the 1960s. Defined in the early 1950s as part of the preparatory research for the book *Architecture of Bosnia and the Way towards Modernity*, the notion of the geographically specific regional environment became the main determinant of Neidhardt's architecture (Zatrić, 2018, p. 129). Based on human, geographic, and theoretical references and extensive ethnographic research, *Architecture of Bosnia* represented the Central Bosnian Basin as a geographic whole inside of which natural landscape and human forms were seamlessly and harmoniously interspersed. The specificities of the Basin that made up this balanced unity were mapped in the book, including both its natural features and its vernacular architectures [FIGURE 01]. Under the influence of his professional development (particularly his retreat from the realm of urban planning), Neidhardt changed his design tools, but the final goal of integrating his architecture into the regional specificity of the Central Bosnian Basin remained the same throughout his mid- and late career.

THE "SYNTHESIS" IN ARCHITECTURE OF BOSNIA AND THE WAY TOWARDS MODERNITY

The straightforward message of the book Architecture of Bosnia and the Way towards Modernity was relatively simple: it defined principles of the vernacular "oriental" architecture and urbanism and argued that these needed to serve as bases for socialist architecture and urbanism in Bosnia. The heterogeneous principles were either systematized as "unwritten laws" (that linked architectural knowledge with social-spatial practices and customs) or as "elements of Bosnian architecture" that specified elementary formal principles, akin to Le Corbusier's "Five points."

The book's underlying endorsement of the "synthesis of the arts" was, however, implicit and complex. Dušan Grabrijan's contribution, defined already in the 1930s,

provided a conceptual link of his and Neidhardt's ethnographic research with art history. It came from his studies with Slovenian master Jože Plečnik and his affinity with the Austrian art historian Alois Riegel's conception of "will to art" (*Kunstwollen*)–which postulated authentic artistic consciousness of specific people in a specific historical moment (Alić, 2010, p. 37). This understanding framed Bosnian oriental "people's art," including vernacular architecture, furniture, and utensils, as the possible model for the unification of art and life. However, while the mainstream discourse relied on abstraction as a binding agent of the "synthesis," *Architecture of Bosnia* underlined the importance of the specific regional ambiance as a unifying determinant of Bosnian oriental art and architecture. The geographic component was already implicit in the notion of *Kunstwollen*, described by France Stele as "geographic constants of art history" (Alić, 2010, p. 47). Inside this specific geographic realm of Bosnia, Grabrijan recognized a unique decorative "register" characterizing Bosnian "will to art"–one that relied on the abstraction of oriental Islamic art and permitted people's artistic production to "enframe" untouched nature (Grabrijan & Neidhardt, 1957, pp. 272-275). Yet it was Neidhardt's research in the realm of human geography and ethnography that clearly linked the region's geography to the people's artistic expression. Most importantly, a reference to Serbian human geographer Jovan Cvijić's work provided a particularly clear link between the local "ways of life" and the material culture (including the vernacular house types), as well as the role of the specific regional geographic environment in shaping both, as it existed in continuous interaction with human agency (Zatrić, 2020, pp. 141-143).

Based on this new research, the authors presented the "unwritten laws" and "architectural elements" as bounded to a determining geographic reality. The cantilevered first floors, pitched roofs, atria, and masonry walls were now understood to be uniquely and systematically suited to the region. The purpose of "laws" and "elements" as design tools was, therefore, to make new architecture a part of this regional system. One of the book's captions read: "Blending with nature is a fundamental law followed by every oriental builder (*dundjer*)" (Grabrijan & Neidhardt, 1957, p. 299).

Accordingly, Neidhardt's designs presented in the subsequent pages explicitly pursued similar "blending." The projects for the guesthouse of the Society of Engineers and Technicians near Boračko Lake [FIGURE 02] and the ski house on Trebević Hill [FIGURE 03] employed a series of "principles" and "laws": the relatively vague guidelines such as "relation to nature", "right to view," "art of placement" and "right to sunlight" were combined with more precise

02 Juraj Neidhardt, The guesthouse of the Society of Engineers and Technicians near Bora ko Lake, 1948-49. © Tatjana Neidhardt.

03 Juraj Neidhardt, The ski house on the Trebevi Hill near Sarajevo, 1947-48. © Tatjana Neidhardt.

typological ones, such as "house atrium," "porch house", and "structural surface" (aesthetic expression of local materials) (Grabrijan & Neidhardt, 1957, pp. 334-39). Both houses featured the semi-open structure which referenced the traditional Bosnian house's first-floor veranda called *divhana*. Both had sloped roofs, brisolei, and masonry walls securing lower tiers of the structure. However, the most striking aspect making these projects obvious parts of the same oeuvre was how they visually integrated into the non-urban site. Placed on steep slopes, both houses rested their porch-fronted, cantilevered façades on a series of *piloties*. The volumes and roof lines defined low-lying, flat bodies adorned in local materials (wood and stone), reachable by narrow pathways, with almost no paving around them. In the accompanying text, Neidhardt explained that it was "necessary to experience nature and compose the buildings into it–each slope, hilltop and waterfront feature their specificities that need to be observed and only then it is possible to position the buildings and model them"

04 Juraj Neidhardt (1901 - 1979), Touristic Settlement of Vranjača project, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina 1967, Gelatin silver print, 3 9/16 × 4 3/4" (9 × 12 cm), Committee on Architecture and Design Funds, Digital Image, the Museum of Modern Art, New York / Scala, Florence.

(Grabrijan & Neidhardt, 1957, p . 334). Read against the backdrop of *Architecture of Bosnia*'s larger thesis, it is possible to conclude that the artistic "synthesis" Neidhardt pursued in such projects superseded the buildings themselves, as well as their relations with their immediate sites, and approximated the idea of the unified artistic sensibility, uniquely suited to the Central Bosnian Basin.

THE SYNTHESIS IN THE REGIONAL "PHANTASY" OF TOURISM

The presentation of the Boračko lake house and the Trebević house projects in Architecture of Bosnia demonstrated how, beyond the seemingly fixed "laws" and "elements" defined in the book, Neidhardt still recognized the importance of architects' mandate to produce designs as answers of their specific artistic sensibilities to the particularities of the regional landscape. This position was indeed reinforced in the years following the publication of the book, in part due to several disappointments and Neidhardt's gradual retreat from the realm of urban planning (Zatrić, 2020, pp. 245-47 and pp. 281-82). In striking similarity to his "master" Le Corbusier, who sought "reconciliation for the thwarted reformism of the public man" (Oackman, 1993, p. 64) in the liberated artistic-architectural expression, Neidhardt opened his architectural language to a radically reinvigorated repertoire of sculptural forms. But while Le Corbusier's exploration of the "morphological transactions between architecture, painting and sculpture" (which became a novel trademark of his post-war work) was a result of "the dialogue with his own various selves" (Moos, 2010, p. 97) (including, but not limited to, professional alter egos of an architect and a painter), Neidhardt's art's spark remained dependent on its flowing exchange with the specific regional environment.

The new architectural language was tested throughout the 1960s, most radically in the projects located in non-urban settings and dedicated to the theme of tourism. Although, unfortunately, none of them were realized, the elaborate models and photomontages that Neidhardt produced make it possible to appreciate the efforts he put into designing these forms to uniquely fit in the regional landscape. The hanging hotel designed in 1964 effortlessly levitates over the canyon of the Miljacka River, akin to a bird in flight; the 1966 tourist settlement in Vranjača near Sarajevo is imagined as a set of modular units carefully arranged over steep and bumpy rocky terrain, to avoid any recognizable Cartesian logic and make the ensemble reminiscent of a family of fantastic (non)organic creatures [FIGURE 04]; the 1969 Agava hotel, designed for

the Adriatic coast, stretches out its blooming, wiggling blocks deep into the surrounding Mediterranean groves; the 1969 Hotel in Baško field, and even the late 1960s "ethno park" complex in Bileća are compositions of complex, often sculptural bodies that have abandoned both the strict geometric formalism and much of the "laws and elements" of the 1950s. What remained unchanged, however, as testified by Neidhardt's publications, was the desire for the architecture to become one with the surrounding landscape.

"It is necessary," he wrote about the Vranjača tourist settlement, "that the organic permeation ensues between architecture and nature in order to evoke a similar feeling to the one we have when we look at the flock of birds that landed on the boulders" (Neidhardt, 1967, p. 72). "Fauna and flora," he argued in a later text," need to become an integral part of the composition of new ambiances" (Neidhardt, 1974, p. 19).

While Neidhardt's idea of this intertwinement in the 1960s still tributed the topologies of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian traditional architecture, his attention was dominantly dedicated to the immense visual artistic strength of specific locations that seemed to be "designed by the best sculptor–nature itself" (Neidhardt, 1967, p. 72). It is thus not surprising that his works sought to become worthy elements of these gigantic plastic compositions of Bosnian canyons and Adriatic coastlines–crawling, hanging, landing in order to get lost inside the inspired strokes of the invisible artist's hand. Without reference to a human figure and intertwined with the landscape, these projects' visual representations evoke a feeling that approaches the sublime. This striking new quality of Neidhardt's architecture invites a valid question, not only on the abandonment of regionalist architectural language but also on the entire theoretical project of architecture's insertion into the delicate balance between the ways of life and the regional environment, so carefully elaborated in the 1950s.

Neidhardt's way to identify and partially explain this deliberate indulgence in sculpture-like "biomorphism" and structural exhibitionism of his 1960s designs was to label it "phantasy," always quickly associated and justified with the reality of tourism. Apart from the "intertwinement with nature" and "art of placement," it was this element of his 1960s architecture's theoretical framework that provided the soundest (if surprising) link with his 1950s human geographic epistemology.

In a series of articles throughout the 1960s, Neidhardt argued for the importance of architecture in the development of "contemporary tourism." "Contemporary tourist," he wrote in 1967, "loves nature, loves change, loves dynamic tourism (…) If we follow that instinct of his and give him what he needs, we will keep him in every such place as Trebević, Vranjača…" (Neidhardt, 1967, p.72). A way to provide for this need was to create new "touristic ambiances" imbued with phantasy generated by the symbolic potency of new architecture. "Without phantasy there is no contemporary tourism!" he concluded (Neidhardt, 1968).

In turn, contemporary tourism provided the most straightforward justification for the survival of "old traditional architecture." One of Neidhardt's most persistent and exuberant design ideas was a regional and management plan for the "Bosnian-Herzegovinian Tourist Axis" (at times alternatively addressed as "highway" or "transversal"). First "sketched" in the book *Architecture of Bosnia* in 1957 and published in fully developed form in the Yugoslav architecture journal *Arhitektura* only in 1972, the Axis represented a survey of all authentic vernacular culture and art of Bosnia and Herzegovina mapped around a literal roadway spanning between the river Sava and the Adriatic Coast (Zatrić, 2020, pp. 348-349).

The practice of route planning as a way of tying the development of tourism to the organization of the territory was initiated already in the late 19th century by the Habsburg regime in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It has since then been perpetuated and increasingly bounded to the economic development discourse (Zatrić, 2020, pp. 345-348). In keeping with this practice, the Tourist Axis Plan accordingly envisioned the incorporation of the entirety of the historical-natural milieu, including landscapes, architecture, crafts, costumes, and other traditions, into the fast-growing economic branch of tourism.

Neidhardt argued that the collection of diverse regional ambiences assembled by the Axis was a special endowment of Bosnia and Herzegovina and a first-class tourist attraction" (Grabrijan & Neidhardt, 1957, p. 444). Since the early 1950s, he campaigned for the dual approach to the Bosnian historical agglomerations: the "soft operations" of curating the existing "attractions" of the historic cores were to be combined with necessary "surgical operations" that added new "attractions"–works of modern architecture that, by the 1960s, acquired increasingly striking and sculptural formal features (Zatrić, 2020, p. 348).

The guarantee of coherence for these different operations was the emerging expertise of regional planning (Grabrijan & Neidhardt, 1957, p. 444), put to the service of the national economic development. Neidhardt argued that regional tourism planning should be taken as seriously as the one of industry and particularly emphasized its potential in the economic development of underdeveloped regions (Grabrijan & Neidhardt, 1957, p. 447). Considered in relation to Neidhardt's regional and economic vision, his sculptural architectures seem as integrated

into the geographic-economic regions of the socialist state as the works of Bosnian Oriental *Kunstwollen were* integrated into the historical-geographic region of Bosnia.

CONCLUSION

The transformation and growth of Juraj Neidhardt's architectural formal language were deeply bound to his urban and regional planning ideas. The design belonging to the geographic region was an important criterion of integrity for his work throughout his career–oscillating between the understanding of the geographic-historical region, characterized by its people's *Kunstwollen*, and the understanding of the geographic-economic region, reinforced and built up by regional economic planning. The artistic blending of his sculptural works of the 1960s with the elements of the regional landscape can then be considered a signifier of this dual regional integrity, realized through the absorption of the total geographic-historical environment into the comprehensive kind of modernism.

This absorption, in turn, was the necessary condition and ultimate authentication of the contemporary integrity of the regions. As Neidhardt observed already in the 1950s, it was urgent to "save our old settlements from further deterioration, give them contemporary purpose, and approach that work in a planned manner…" (Grabrijan & Neidhardt, 1957, p. 444). The Tourist Axis plan answered to this urgency, but it also created a framework for validation of Neidhardt's principle thesis: that the task of humanely functional modern architecture was to become a seamless part of regional integrity while taking into account new circumstances brought about by industrial modernity (including rapidly developing modern tourism). In Neidhardt's works of the 1950s, just as in those of the 1960s, the art of this integration became a determinant of architecture's artistic unity. His "fantastical" works of archi-sculpture were, therefore, parts of a much larger "phantasy" of Bosnian and Herzegovinian regions, symbolic forms of modern architecture inserted inside a curated testimony of regional *Kunstwollen*–a modernist synthesis of arts, environment and state-led development.

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