

## Edificio commemorativo *La Casa della Rivoluzione*, un indicatore della trasformazione dell'identità urbana a Nikšić

### Memorial Building *Home of Revolution*, an Indicator of Urban Identity Transformation of Nikšić City

L'obiettivo di questo lavoro è quello di presentare uno dei più grandi, ancora incompiuti, edifici commemorativi dell'ex-Jugoslavia, la Casa della Rivoluzione, progetto di Marko Mušič, le cui realizzazioni sono iniziate nel 1977 nella città di Nikšić, Repubblica di Montenegro.

L'edificio ha un ruolo duplice, è un edificio commemorativo dedicato alle lotte di liberazione della Seconda Guerra Mondiale e un centro culturale. Nel corso del tempo, la Casa della Rivoluzione è stata percepita in modo diverso dai cittadini, da elemento principale dell'identità urbana e di orgoglio, ad elemento negativo negli anni '90, durante la guerra civile in Jugoslavia, quando l'edificio è diventato l'antitesi di tutto ciò che dovrebbe rappresentare.

Anche oggi ci sono opinioni diverse su di esso. Una parte dei cittadini ha un'opinione negativa a riguardo, mentre altri vogliono che l'edificio venga completato, consapevole del suo valore storico.

The task of this paper is to present one of the biggest, still unfinished memorial building in former Yugoslavia, the *Home of Revolution*, project by Marko Mušič, whose constructions began in 1977 in Nikšić city, Republic of Montenegro.

The building has a combined role, it is memorial buildings dedicated to liberation struggles in World War II and cultural center. Over time, *Home of Revolution* has been differently perceived by citizens, from the main element of urban identity and pride to the negative element of urban identity during the civil war in Yugoslavia in 90's when building became the antithesis of everything that is supposed to represent.

Even today there are different opinions about the building. A part of the citizens has a negative opinion about it, while others want the building to be completed aware of its historical value.



Vladimir Bojković

Vladimir Bojković finished his PhD at Università Politecnica delle Marche, Dipartimento di Ingegneria Edile e Architettura in Ancona, in 2018. He is interested in a architectural/urban city identity phenomenon, its methodological approach determination and its problems of continuity and discontinuity.

Parole chiave: Nikšić, Montenegro, identità, Casa della Rivoluzione

Keywords: Nikšić, Montenegro, identity, Home of Revolution

In the former Yugoslavia during the seventies, it was common to build memorial monuments and buildings dedicated to memory of victims killed during the liberation struggles in World War II or to the victories on Fascists and Nazis during this war. One of the biggest memorial buildings called the Home of Revolution, that is still unfinished, began with constructions in 1977 in the city of Nikšić, republic of Montenegro, when the Yugoslav competition for this building won Slovenian architect Marko Mušič in 1976. Construction was stopped in 1989 and in 1992 the building was preserved. Marko Mušič was born in Ljubljana in 1941. He studied and graduated in 1966 in Ljubljana under mentorship of professor, architect Edvard Ravnikar (1907-1993). He continued his studies in Denmark with professor, architect and archeologist Ejnar Dyggve (1887-1961) and in the U.S. with architect Louis Kahn (1901-1974).<sup>1</sup> Architect Mušič is the author of a recognizable style. In his career he designed a numerous objects of different purposes and typologies. It is possible to make, conditionally said, the division of his work into three periods. The first period represents the time after the completion of studies in which architect receives a large number of awards at architectural contests throughout Yugoslavia. The second period mainly relates to the construction of memorial and cultural objects, that were mostly built after winning the Yugoslav architectural competitions during the seventies. The third period relates to the mid-eighties of the last century to the present. It is a period that synthesizes many of the leitmotifs and stylistic features of Mušič's architecture. Urban conditions, on which will be built Home of Revolution, are based on the second post-war urban plan of Nikšić city, which was made by Planning

Institute of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy from Zagreb, in 1954. The designers were professors Joseph Sajsel and Dragan Boltar. It is important to note that this urban plan for the first time clearly defined and determined wider and narrower area of city. The quality of this urban plan was reflected in the fact that it has fully accepted the basic principles of the first regulatory plan as a base from which the modern city developed. The result was a continuity in the development of the city. Also, the quality of this plan is reflected in the proper positioning of the important social structures and buildings in a continuous strip along the historic core. (fig.1)

Although this plan was envisaged that the buildings are single-storey and double-storey, city planners submitted series of buildings with three or four storeys even five or six storeys which was in stark contrast to the plan from 1958.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Home of Revolution building, some characteristics**

The Home of Revolution building is symbolically designed to celebrate the courageous role played by the citizens of Nikšić in liberation struggles with the partisans against Nazism and Fascism. In addition to the commemorative role, the building was supposed to be a place for all cultural events in the city that would be reminiscent of the glorious past and also to bring new and modern trends. (fig. 2)

The Yugoslav Journal of Architecture, Urbanism, Design and Applied Art "Architecture" No. 158-59 from 1976 was dedicated to the cultural objects. Among the many objects, the Home of Revolution was presented. The text about this building presents the view on the

creation of architectural space in specific, Yugoslavian conditions:

"First of all, we consider that with all the forces and in spite of the internationalized schemes of modern architecture, we need to preserve the identity of our space, our customs, our traditions and temperament. And secondly, we need to conceive an inspired, dynamic architecture that is not a formal backdrop, but a wealth of all internal and external spaces with the maximum possibility of adapting to the concrete situation. Still, it remains within the limits of our technology and materials, within the limits of rational constructions and creative logic."<sup>3</sup>

From this quote, there are a few things clear. First, the Home of Revolution project insists on the identity of the space in which the building will be built. Although the relation of the building to the built space is almost abstract, it is clear that the form originated from the morphology of the surrounding hills and mountains that borders Nikšić. It is also interesting that text mentioned the temperament of the Yugoslav and the form that most suit it. Is the calm horizontal volume, which gradually grows into a vertical volume, a spatial interpretation of the Yugoslav temperament, it is an open question. Often, the Home of Revolution is interpreted as an utopian project. We think that this should not be exactly the case. From the quote it can be clearly seen that the Home of Revolution is designed for the real conditions of the technology and materials with rational constructions. If an object is not completed due to historical circumstances, it does not necessarily have to be an utopian project.

This building represents a symbolic synthesis of the memorial and cultural contents. The memorial



fig. 1 Location of the building in the city matrix.  
Source: www.google.com/maps

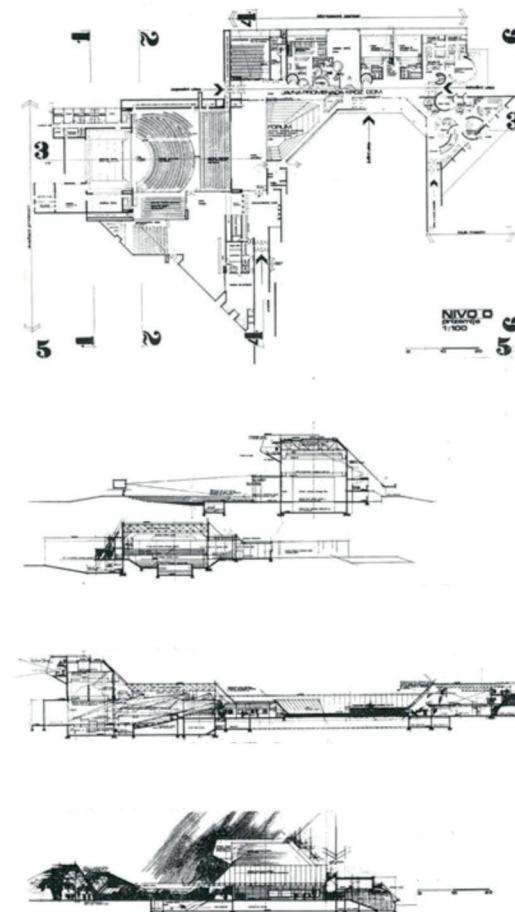


fig. 2 Entrance, ground floor of the building with cross-sections  
"Arhitektura" n. 158-159, 1976



contents are located along the building in corridors and halls. It seems that architect wanted to remind visitors on their way to the hall and the rooms where the cultural contents were placed, that thanks to the lives and sacrifice of the liberators, they can freely enjoy the culture. Also, the building through the memorial role was reminding about the victims of other Yugoslav nations, so the ideas and values on which Yugoslavia was built were promoted too. In this way, the building seems to be the guardian of memories. In the design and compositional context, the Home of Revolution has an emphasized, horizontal character that is harmoniously leveled. From the horizontal base, on the western part, the area of the theater scene rises slightly. In the context of the form there is even a certain association with the Egyptian sphinxes.

It is difficult to say precisely to which architectural style the Home of Revolution belongs to. Evident use of concrete and its design features make this building brutal. Is it possible to talk about the spark of postmodernism in this work by architect Marko Mušič, remains an open question to be discussed. It is interesting that in almost the same time period, when the Home of Revolution was designed and built, another building, which Charles Jencks labeled as the epitome of postmodernism, was also designed and built, the Neue Staatsgalerie building by architect James Stirling.<sup>4</sup>

The Neue Staatsgalerie was designed after Stirling and Wilford won competition in 1977. Building was constructed between 1979 and 1984. The design echoed the neoclassical design of the older building. Elements also alluded to Stirling's earlier, unbuilt designs, as well as making reference to the Altes Museum in Berlin, the

Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Pantheon in Rome.<sup>5</sup>

What are the similarities and differences between these two buildings? The main similarities relate to the treatment of some spatial solutions, primarily halls and access paths. Also, a certain similarity can be seen in the relation between the full surfaces and openings and the relation between the mass of walls and glass surfaces, but also to the use of steel structures as composite elements. The differences relate mainly to the relation to the built context. While the connection between The Neue Staatsgalerie and the environment is obvious and logical in shaping the continuity of the built space, the Home of Revolution is connected with the environment in an almost abstract way, although the reference to traditional Montenegrin gathering places called gumno attempt to invoke the past.

It is interesting the way in which these two buildings treat monumentality. The Neue Staatsgalerie incorporates sandstone and warm natural elements of travertine in classical forms, contrasting with bright pink and blue steel handrails and industrial pieces of green steel framing system. Monumentality seems to be calm with compositional solutions and a specific usage of material. On the other hand, the Home of Revolution monumentality stands out with the composition of a gradually growing horizontal which is opposed by the vertical volume on the west side. The coldness of concrete on this object is accentuated by usage of dark, blue glass. The atmosphere obtained in this way is unusual and mystical. One thing is certain, both objects offer a strong semantic and symbolic interpretation. (fig.3)

The original plan provided that the Home of Revolution



fig. 3 Space interpretation, Home of Revolution and the Neue Staatsgalerie. collage made of photo from private archive (Home of Revolution, Marko Mušič) and photo taken from site archi-learner.blogspot.it (The Neue Staatsgalerie, James Stirling)

should have 7,000 square meters, but because of the request of political structures it grows on the 22 000 square meters. The project is anticipated that the building can accommodate 7,000 visitors, which at that time represented a quarter of the population of the city. The building is designed to have the following facilities: a large amphitheater with 1200 seats, a summer amphitheater, cinema, conference halls, radio and television centers, libraries, educational centers, art studios, galleries, a youth center, a national restaurant etc. Finally, a memorial of the building occupied only 250 square meters.

When Yugoslavia broke up in 1991, there was a suspension of construction of all federal projects including Home of Revolution". Today the building is completely abandoned and left to time. (fig.4)

### Organization of space, network of cultural and memorial contents in Home of Revolution

In the Bulletin No. 1, the Committee for the Construction of the Home of Revolution presented a detailed description of the spatial form of the building. By entering the urban reality and transferring from urban matrix to the spatial essence of the Home of Revolution, it was noted that the main problem and the key to a successful life and work of all the programmed content is in live action, inclusion and participation of the widest circle of citizens.

The ambiance of public passage through Home of Revolution is ambiance where passer-by the way is facing with activities and events in which can participate.

The ground level is rising slightly to a terrace of the Park which is open to the sun and greenery, creating



fig. 4 Home of Revolution, today.  
Source: documentary film "Revolutionary Home" by director Sead Šabotić



a quiet oasis and a humanized shell that protects the Home from the noise and the dynamics surrounding roads. (fig. 5)

Open squares are the spaces for multiple purposes, which over the glass shell extends to the building, creating a public promenade, the contact zone outside-inside. It is an area that is a part of the building which is climate-controlled environment that is at once always open and passable in all directions of the public movement. Thus, the basic structure of the building directly connected to the city network footpaths.<sup>6</sup>

In the Catalog of the winning solution, printed in Nikšić in 1978, a detailed description of the interior space and content was given:

Passage of public promenade through the building represents a major move by the spine of experiencing the activities in the building. Like a city street in sequent series of different environments, promenade goes from the east entrance and free fair with books and artistic products and design activities with the youth club to an open forum, which, like the town square is a functional extension, intended for spontaneous and organized activities on the hub west entrance and the transition to a group of memorial space.

Instead risking that workrooms would be unused, placed somewhere on the side, or that work in them give institutional character of the school, everyday crossing through the Home can not be without meeting the educational center at least passively. Going from the essence of creativity that has every man, and that can be slowly lost in the tempo of life and schematized routine, all the efforts of disposition and organization of this part of the Home, are in the

creation of a creative environment and open contact with passers actions and activities.

The sequence and character of the rooms in the level of movement through the building provides contact with the contents of the most interesting groups:

- Universal lecture hall, complemented by an open public forum along the promenade (lectures, meetings, public forums, spontaneous discussions, etc.)

- Library with a niche for reading of periodicals, open to the promenade and the open reading rooms to the green atrium. All funds are available for the visitor.

- A group of artistic activities by location and the opening is the most intensely associated with youth club. Passers, of public promenade in the work of these activities, is informed by improvised exhibition in spatial niches that is supplemented with permanent exhibition gallery, creating a challenging direct involvement in the operation.

Those contents are complemented with store items for participating in the studies like drawing supplies, paints, books, instruments etc. Loft Gallery, presented in the airspace of the promenade, includes the study room for historical and socio-political, literary and theoretical circles with club extensions, contact zones and a number of separate niches for individual and group work with the discussion.

#### Glass promenade

The characteristic circular form, as a sign in the landscape architecture of the Home, represents an informal gathering spaces, spaces of human contact, rest areas and knots of spontaneous events in the linear dynamics of today's man. With such

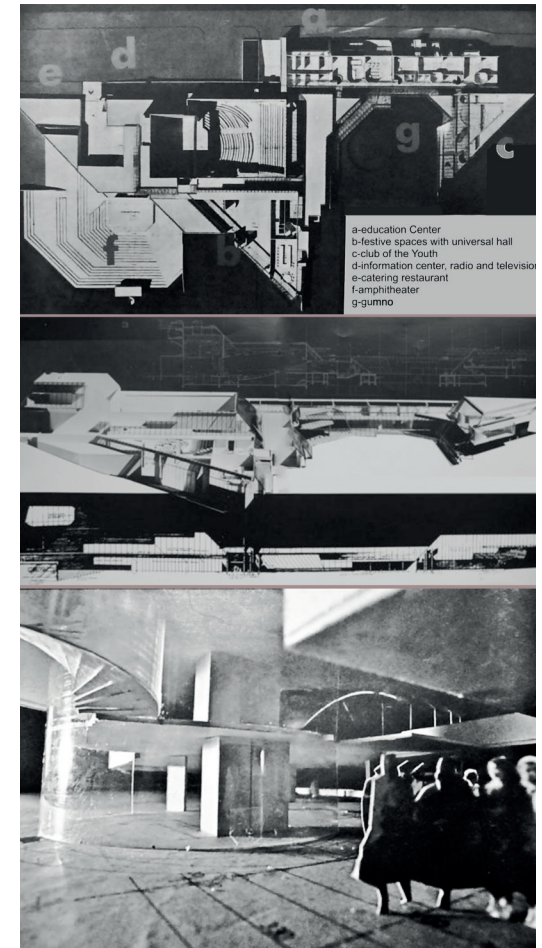


fig. 5 Scale model of the building.  
Source: the original catalog of construction of "Home of Revolution"

a connotative celebration, circle and its segments become symbolically and substantively linked with the traditional Montenegrin social life presented in the formation of gumno.

Artistic study spaces of drama, music, ballet, sculpture, painting and design as well as libraries and universal classrooms are located in a three storey space beneath the glass roof with northern diffuse lighting.

Working in the studio is constantly present in the visual area of the promenade. Direct access to the stands allow, encourage monitoring of public exercises and improvised performances while they necessary support area is located below promenade at the level of the main phase of study.

#### *The ceremonial spaces with a large hall*

Memorial Propylaea, of the main entrance and in the formal spaces with purpose hall and youth club, are stretching as spatial plastic markings deep through the green belt coinciding directions of the entrance, while in the longitudinal movement are transient portals among the sequences of the southern parks. Freely waving contour of the depth plans could tie the wealth skyline of square to the distinctive interweaving blue silhouettes of the surrounding mountains, the unique poetic scene that nature gave to Nikšić.

The complex group of large hall with memorial aura and exhibition space is multi-system rooms, which is possible, with minimal changes, to adapt to real-life situations and events. Schedule of major side room in the general is such that It is possible to combine them in mergers and divisions.

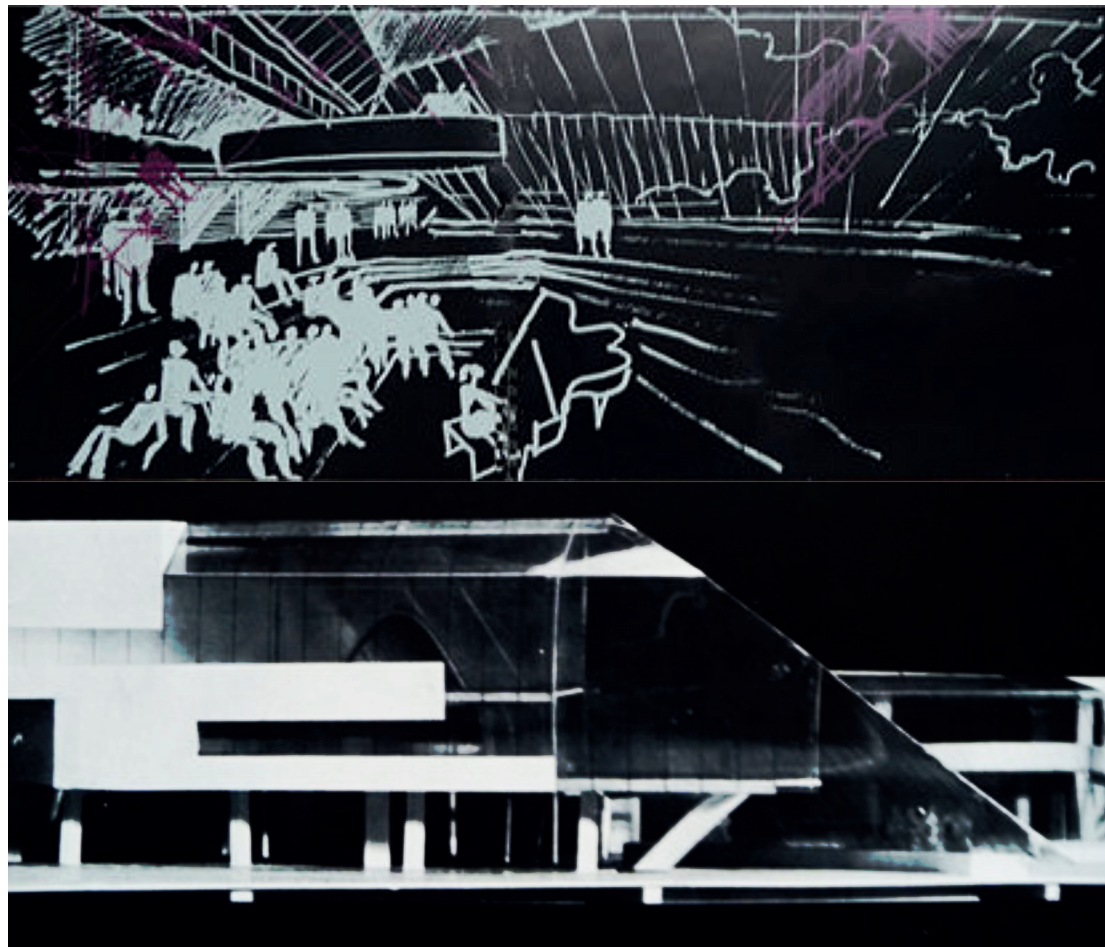


fig. 6 Scale model of the Youth club and crystal ballroom  
Source: private collection



Youth club with crystal ballroom

Events in the youth club are very diverse. The contents are arranged in four main levels associated by glass covered promenade in support of mental representations of the physical unity of the Home. The landscape of the large hall youth club hanging in the air space above the public promenade could be, in a spatial solution, a particular attraction.

Inside the glass shell, as a segment of a large crystals, separates the air space of the public promenade. Thus it is possible to maintain different heating regime and the necessary acoustic insulation and still to guarantee the visual presence of events in the hall in the wider area of the Youth Club and the entire building, also the Lenin Square. (fig. 6)

In a wide range of uses and purposes of the Youth Club hall, transferring programs from drama, dance or music studies would have to become an everyday habit as much as the experience of time that young visitors has in one of the studios, which will all create an atmosphere where work and leisure, enjoyment and creation are connected.<sup>7</sup>

**Home of Revolution, transformation of identity over time**

Not long after Tito's death in 1980, started anti-bureaucratic revolution with a deep political and economic crisis that will lead to the gradual suspension of the construction of the Home of Revolution.<sup>8</sup>

Over time, disappeared blue glass which has coated the building and then lower steel elements. There were water and groundwater that have flooded most of the basement rooms. Building has become a place for the homeless and drug addicts. From the moment



fig. 7 Auditorium, today



of the construction of this building in an accident claimed the lives 15 people.

It is interesting to note that during the construction, about 50 million DEM was spent, around 400 tons of steel and so much concrete that it was possible to make 3000 comfortable apartments or 50 buildings of 14 floors.<sup>9</sup>

In the former Yugoslavia there used to be a great number of different nations and ethnic groups and yet this country was a unity of all the people. The Home of Revolution symbolically represented the spirit and unity of Yugoslavia. During construction, the building has become one of the main elements of urban identity and pride of all citizens. (fig.7)

However, when it came to ethnic conflict and civil war in Yugoslavia, it disappeared the political base and ideology of unity. At the same time disappeared the ideas on which it was conceived the Home of revolution.

### Conclusion

Home of Revolution has become a negative element of urban identity in the Nikšić. The building is not finished and never used. Over time, the building became the antithesis of everything that is supposed to represent. In this way become a negative element of urban identity. A large number of citizens think that this building should be demolished although in the construction of this building participated these same people who for decades have been giving the 3 per cent of their salary as a contribution to construction. However, many citizens are aware of the historical value that this project had and they agree that the building should be completed. The idea of the unity

of diversity, on which the Home of revolution is based should be still guiding idea, especially for future generations.

In November 2015, the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism of Montenegro announced an International, public, conceptual, one-stage, anonymous competition for the Architectural solution of the adaptation and reconstruction of the Home of revolution building in Nikšić. Nine works were received for the competition and the expert jury, in March 2016, decided that the best solution was under the code 300666 by the authors SADAR + VUGA (Slovenia) and HHF Architekten (Switzerland). This solution developed a 10/20/70 strategy. This means that 10% of the surface of the object will be used for different contents and activities, 20% of the surface will be public promenades and 70% of the surface will be closed to the public and adopted and used in some better times.

Time will show what the fate of the House of Revolution will be.

### Notes:

1. Taken from the website <http://www.ateljemarkomusic.si/biography.html>
2. Vladimir Bojković, *Continuity of the Nikšić city development through urban plans after World War II*, VI International conference #Architecture and Urbanism after Second World War, Protection as Process or Model, Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, Belgrade, 2015, pp. 44-46
3. Marko Mušič, *Dom revolucije, Nikšić*, Arhitektura, Savez arhitekata Hrvatske, Zagreb, 1976, no 158-59, pp. 129-132
4. Charles Jencks, *The New Paradigm in Architecture: The Language of Post-Modernism*, Yale University Press, 2002, p. 110
5. Paul von Naredi-Rainer, *Museum Buildings: A Design Manual*, Birkhäuser, Basel, 2004, pp. 70-72
6. Odbor za podizanje "Doma revolucije", *Dug revoluciji*, Bilten 1, Nikšić, 1976
7. Odbor za izgradnju "Doma revolucije" u Nikšiću, *Katalog pobjedničkog rešenja*, Nikšić, 1978
8. Sunčica Milošević, *Seeking identity in Former Yugoslavia's Architecture*, Master thesis, University of Cincinnati, 2013, p. 102
9. Isidora Damjanovic, *Anarhija od betona*, Studentski časopis Indeks, br 32, pp.30-35