

Spomenici: Hauntological Spectra of Yugoslav Architecture

Spomenici: Hauntološki bauci
jugoslavenske arhitekture

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Abstract This article explores Yugoslav monuments — *spomenici* — through the lens of hauntology and *différance*, framing them as spectral architectures where memory resists closure and meaning. Conceived as concrete affirmations of antifascist struggle and socialist solidarity, these structures now linger in an unsettled state: neither fully absorbed into the present nor entirely consigned to the past. Their ambiguous condition exposes the instability of collective memory, which is shaped as much by neglect and erasure as by acts of commemoration and reinterpretation. The study aims to demonstrate how *spomenici* challenge conventional understandings of memorial architecture, which often presume stable or singular narratives. By applying deconstructionist theory, the analysis interrogates the ways in which meaning is destabilized, re-inscribed, and contested across socio-political and aesthetic contexts. Methodologically, the research combines theoretical analysis with selected case studies and a pedagogical experiment in model-making conducted at Graz University of Technology, where students engaged in hands-on explorations of form and symbolism. The findings suggest that *spomenici* demand understanding of memorial architecture that moves beyond fixed narratives. The pedagogical case studies discussed here further illustrate how interdisciplinary methods — particularly those that foreground experimentation and dialogue — can uncover the multiplicity of meanings embedded within contested typologies. The article concludes that a hauntological reading of *spomenici* highlights their value as critical resources for rethinking the politics of remembrance. Far from being static carriers of history, they persist as spectral presences that continue to unsettle dominant narratives and provoke new engagements with cultural memory.

Keywords spomenik; hauntology; memorial architecture; post-socialist landscapes; deconstruction.

Sažetak Članak istražuje jugoslavenske spomenike kroz prizmu Derrideinih koncepata hauntologije i *différance*, predstavljajući ih kao arhitektonske bauke nezavršenog sjećanja i nestabilnog značenja. Osmišljeni kao uprostorene afirmacije antifašističke borbe i socijalističke solidarnosti, ovi objekti danas postoje u stanju neizvjesnosti: nisu u potpunosti integrirani u sadašnjost, niti su potpuno prepušteni prošlosti. Upravo ta ambivalentnost otkriva krhkost kolektivnog sjećanja, oblikovanog jednako zaboravom i brisanjem koliko i činovima komemoracije i reinterpretacije. Cilj rada je ukazati na to kako spomenici osporavaju konvencionalna shvaćanja memorijske arhitekture, koja često počivaju na pretpostavci stabilnih, jedinstvenih narativa. Primjenom dekonstrukcionističke teorije ispituju se načini na koje se značenje destabilizira, ponovo upisuje i pregovara unutar različitih društveno-političkih i estetskih konteksta. Metodološki, istraživanje kombinuje teorijsku analizu s odabranim studijama slučaja te pedagoškim eksperimentom izrade maketa provedenim na Tehničkom univerzitetu u Grazu, u kojem su studenti kroz praktičan rad istraživali formu i simboliku. Rezultati ukazuju na to da spomenici zahtijevaju razumijevanje memorijske arhitekture koje nadilazi fiksne narative. Pedagoške studije slučaja dodatno ilustriraju kako interdisciplinarni pristupi — posebno oni koji naglašavaju eksperimentaciju i dijalog — mogu rasvijetliti mnoštvo značenja ugrađenih u osporavane tipologije. Zaključak rada je da hauntološko čitanje spomenika otkriva njihovu vrijednost kao kritičkog resursa za preispitivanje politika sjećanja. Daleko od toga da budu samo statični nosioci historije, oni opstaju kao nemirna prisutnost koje nastavlja dekonstruirati dominantne narative i poticati nove oblike angažmana s kulturnim pamćenjem.

Ključne riječi spomenik; hauntologija; memorijska arhitektura; postsocijalistički prostor; dekonstrukcija.

1 Introduction

Long before Mark Fisher translated the experience — and the taste in music — of a generation by declaring that we are haunted by the “lost futures” of the twentieth century, Jacques Derrida had already named the condition that makes such haunting possible. In *Specters of Marx* (1993), Derrida coined the term *hauntology* to describe the uncanny persistence of what is no longer present: the spectral survival of unrealized possibilities that continue to unsettle the present.

Fisher — cultural theorist, writer, and critic of late capitalism — took up this term in the 2000s to describe a mood saturating contemporary culture. In his book *Ghosts of My Life* (2014), he argued that music, film, and popular media were trapped in a loop, endlessly recycling the forms of the past because the future promised by modernity had failed to arrive. For Fisher, hauntology was a diagnosis of cultural stagnation under neoliberalism: we remain haunted by futures that never came.

The resonance between Fisher’s cultural hauntology and Derrida’s philosophical one finds a striking architectural form in the monuments of former Yugoslavia. These commemorative structures, designed as spatial frameworks of antifascist struggle and socialist solidarity, now persist as reminders of a world that might have been abandoned, reinterpreted, *othered*, or aestheticized, but never fully extinguished. To acknowledge them is to feel the weight of unrealized futures pressing into the present, demanding that we learn, with Derrida, to live with *spectres*.

This article insists on using the term *spomenici*. Yugoslav monuments have long been inscribed in the canonical vocabulary of modern architecture, where the pan-Yugoslav word *spomenik* simply means “monument.” In Western discourse, however, the term is often incorrectly pluralized as *spomeniks*, reflecting a deeper problem of misrepresentation. *Spomenici* have been subject to decontextualization and exoticization in digital and visual media — stripped of their memorial role and socialist background, their form and materiality elevated as aesthetic spectacle, despite their history and reception being well documented and theorized through several distinct scholarly phases.

During the Yugoslav period itself, the construction of these monuments was accompanied by a flourishing of publications — monographs, tourist guides, and architectural studies — that celebrated the new culture of remembrance. These early works, though largely descriptive, remain invaluable for their extensive photographic documentation, preserving visual records of memorials later damaged or destroyed during and after the 1990s wars.

After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, a new wave of research approached *spomenici* with critical distance, examining their shifting meanings within post-socialist and transitional societies. Among the most significant contributions to this discourse is *Shaping Revolutionary Memory: The Production of Monuments in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Horvatinčić and Žerovc, eds., 2023), which contextualizes *spomenici* within the political, institutional, and aesthetic systems that produced them. The volume

explores not only their commissioning, authorship, and typological diversity but also their afterlives in both the post-Yugoslav region and international scholarship.

Sanja Horvatinčić’s research, in particular, has been central to rethinking Yugoslav memorial culture. Her work traces the interrelations between architecture and memory politics, showing how *spomenici* mediate between collective trauma and the socialist vision of the future. As a member of the curatorial team for MoMA’s 2018 exhibition *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980*, Horvatinčić helped position Yugoslav architectural production — memorials included — within the broader canon of modernism. The exhibition marked a crucial moment in the international recognition of Yugoslav architecture, yet it also highlighted a paradox: by the time *spomenici* entered the Western architectural discourse, they had already been circulating widely in the global media as decontextualized aesthetic objects.

This global fascination can be traced to the work of Belgian photographer Jan Kempenaers, whose 2010 photobook *Spomenik* presented the monuments as haunting sculptural relics isolated from their ideological and commemorative contexts. A year later, French journalist Frédéric Chaubin’s *CCCP: Cosmic Communist Constructions Photographed* further cemented this visual narrative, positioning socialist-era architecture as surreal remnants of an alien modernity. Both projects, while visually compelling, effectively detached *spomenici* from their antifascist and revolutionary origins, transforming them into enigmatic symbols of “lost futures.”

The viral dissemination of these images online — often through platforms like Tumblr, Instagram, and Pinterest — led to what architectural critic Owen Hatherley famously termed “concrete clickbait.” In his 2016 article “Next Time You Share a Spomenik Photo, Think About What It Means,” Hatherley warned that these decontextualized representations erased the antifascist legacy of the monuments precisely at a time when far-right ideologies were once again gaining traction globally. He argued that such casual consumption of imagery reproduced the very forgetting that *spomenici* were built to resist.

A similar concern underpins the work of researcher and curator Tihana Pupovac, who extensively documented the decay and destruction of *spomenici* while critically addressing their aesthetic fetishization. Through her involvement in exhibitions and conferences — most notably the 2015 symposium *Socialist Memorials and Modernism* in Zagreb — Pupovac has underscored how Western depictions often ignore the historical and political depth of *spomenici*, reducing them to empty formal gestures.

Architectural historian Vladimir Kulić further advanced this critique in his essay “Post-Socialist Orientalism: Yugoslav Monuments and Their Reception in the Media” (in Horvatinčić and Žerovc, 2023). Kulić situates the Western fascination with *spomenici* within a longer tradition of Orientalist framing that presents Eastern European modernism as exotic and otherworldly. In such representations, *spomenici* appear as “alien” artifacts from a failed utopia rather than integral expressions of European modernist experimentation. This “othering,” Kulić argues, parallels the local neglect of *spomenici* in

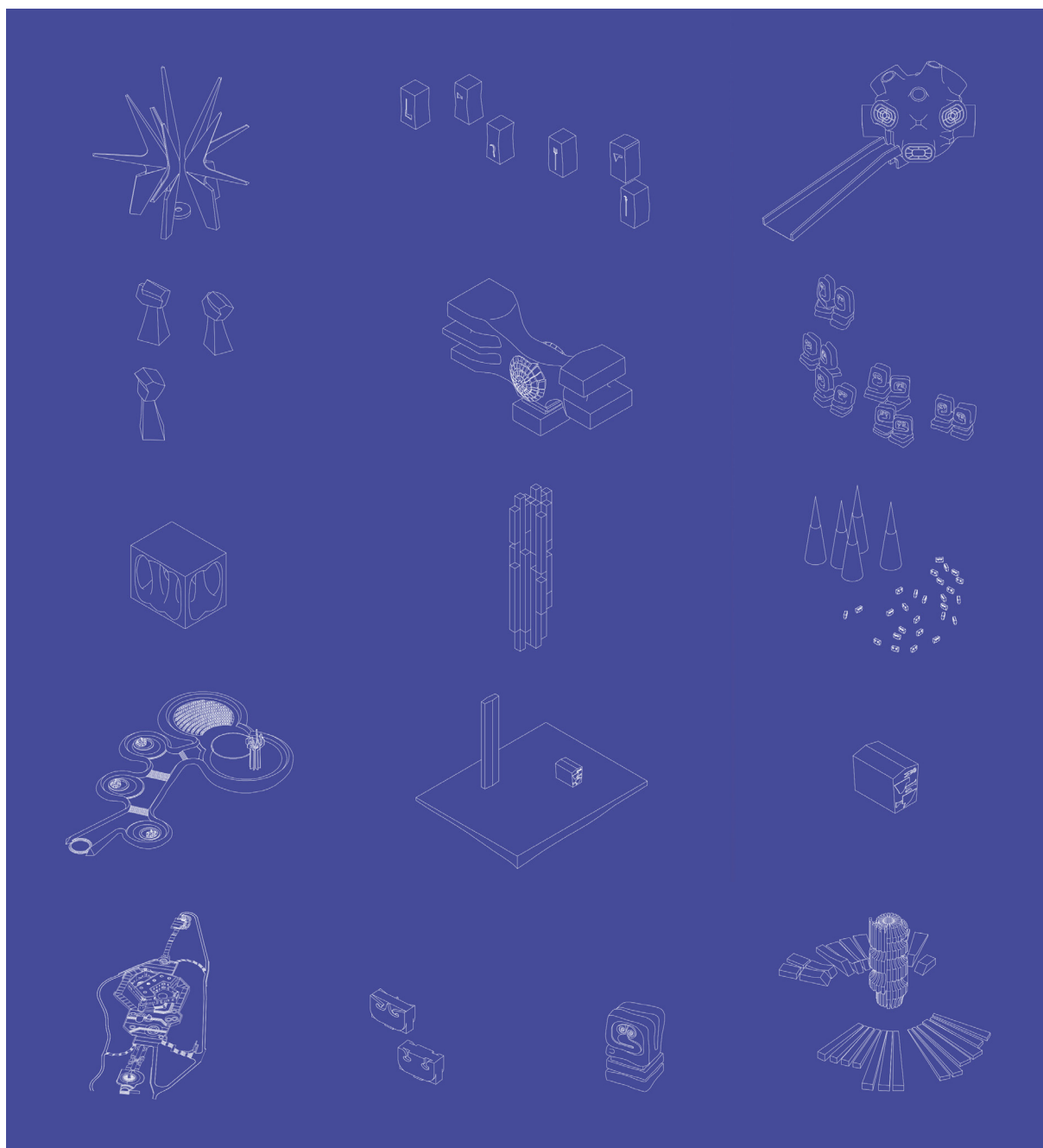


Figure 1 Spomenik Tableaux. Source: Author, 2025.

the post-Yugoslav states, where they are often treated as unwanted remnants of a discredited ideology. Against both tendencies, he calls for a dual strategy: the reactivation of *spomenici* within their social and historical contexts, and the consistent historicization of their meaning for international audiences (Kulić, 2023, p. 359).

Kulić also points out the limitations of photography as a medium for conveying ideological content. In projects such as Kempenaers' *Spomenik* and Chaubin's *CCCP*, the accompanying texts do little to compensate for these gaps, instead reinforcing the perception of *spomenici* as mysterious, authorless forms. Even Kempenaers' use of numerical labels, rather than names or dedications, abstracts the monuments from their political purpose and historical grounding.

The result has been a flattening of Yugoslavia's monumental landscape into a single visual category — vast concrete abstractions — while erasing the diversity of scale, form, and local significance that once defined it. As Kulić and others emphasize, this depoliticization denies the broader social relevance of *spomenici*, particularly in an era marked by historical revisionism and the normalization of fascist narratives. Recovering their meaning, therefore, requires more than preservation: it demands re-inscription into both local and global histories as material witnesses to antifascist struggle and socialist imagination.

This article seeks to contribute to that effort, reasserting the historical and material complexity of *spomenici* against the grain of their contemporary misrepresentation.

Through the pedagogical exploration of model-making work with students of architecture, it argues that these monuments to the People's Liberation Struggle must not be understood merely as abstract, exoticized architectural forms, but as culturally and historically significant memorials rooted in socialist ideology and the antifascist struggle that defined Yugoslavia's founding narrative. Their current representation in Western discourse — frequently detached from this context — has contributed to cultural appropriation and symbolic erasure, transforming them into aesthetic artifacts divorced from their political origins.

To counter this, a thorough analysis of the multiple meanings of these objects was conducted within a Western educational institution, engaging more than eighty students over the course of three years in spatially re-reading *spomenici* through both a Derridean prism and their own individual experiences and interpretations. By situating *spomenici* within the cultural hauntology of unrealized futures and the ongoing contestations of memory in the post-Yugoslav space, this article aims to restore their position as living monuments — neglected, yes, but still insistently present as witnesses to collective resistance and emancipatory possibility.

2 Derridean Lens

To grasp Derrida's concept of hauntology as it manifests in *spomenici* — and in memorial architecture more broadly — it must be situated alongside key ideas from his wider oeuvre. Derrida consistently questioned the foundations of meaning and presence in language, thought, and culture. His primary method, deconstruction, exposes how structures (textual or other) and concepts contain internal contradictions that prevent them from ever possessing a fixed or final meaning. This is particularly relevant to monuments, which are inscribed with specific meanings at the time of their erection — usually aligned with the political agenda of their commissioners — but whose significance inevitably expands and shifts through subsequent historical developments.

Spomenici exemplify this process: their official function collapsed with the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia, yet their presence continues to generate new interpretations. In this respect, they are not unique. Every monument shifts its meaning as political regimes change or as societies renegotiate their relationship to the past. Contemporary debates over statues of colonial figures in Western contexts, many of which have been toppled or removed under public pressure, illustrate this dynamic of memory and shifting historical consciousness.

Yet Derridean deconstruction does not trace these external re-inscriptions; it turns inward, asking what contradictions are embedded in the very fabric of a text — or, in this case, a structure. Built to commemorate a unified, antifascist, socialist Yugoslavia — a concept that no longer exists — *spomenici* reveal under deconstruction that their founding meaning is no longer operative, while no replacement has taken firm hold. They unsettle the assumption that monuments can anchor memory securely, instead exposing memory as unstable, political, and contingent. They also trouble binary oppositions

central to nationalist or historical narratives: presence and absence, past and present, center and margin. *Spomenici* occupy a liminal state: both visible and forgotten, celebrated and abandoned, modernist and postmodern relics, national (Yugoslav) and supranational (post-Yugoslav nations).

This ambiguity deconstructs the binary logic often employed in nationalist or historical narratives, demonstrating that *spomenici* resist clear categorization as either past or future. This play of opposites reflects Derrida's method, which dismantles binary thinking to reveal the unresolved in-between spaces where meaning is always deferred.

Deconstruction also challenges the assumption that language — or architecture — can represent truth transparently. *Spomenici* often avoid figurative or representational forms, with their abstract geometry defying straightforward interpretation. Rather than serving as clear conduits of memory, these monuments are oblique, cryptic, spectral — embodying the impossibility of fully representing trauma, or identity. In this sense, they are not merely available for deconstruction; they are, in Derrida's terms, already deconstructed. They embody the failure of collective memory to remain stable or unified, refusing closure and remaining open, fragmented, and ghost-like.

Central to this reading are Derrida's notions of the *trace* and *différance*. The trace denotes the way meaning is constituted by what is absent, by the lingering mark of something no longer there. Architecture always carries traces — remnants of history, palimpsests of use, residues of time — but memorial architecture does so in heightened form, gesturing simultaneously toward the presence of memory and the absence of what it recalls. *Spomenici* embody this dynamic: they do not simply commemorate the past but become its traces, their meanings and interpretation continually shifting. They are neither fully present (their original function has eroded, and post-Yugoslav governments often dismiss them as unwanted heritage) nor fully absent (they still shape landscapes and collective imagination, particularly in light of the renewed fascination with their visual language). Their status as traces is further reinforced by the erosion of meaning: some remain intact but stripped of ideological resonance, while others have decayed or been destroyed outright, such as the ones in Kamenska, Gudovac, Landovica, or atop the Makljen Pass. What is missing — Yugoslavia, antifascist solidarity, socialist unity, and some monuments themselves — is as significant as what remains.

Equally important is *différance*, Derrida's term for the interplay of difference and deferral. Words, he argued, do not point to stable meanings but derive their significance through their difference from others (*to differ*) and through the postponement of any final definition (*to defer*) (Derrida 1967). Meaning is thus contextual, relational, and unstable. If we read memorial architecture as a form of symbolic language, then it too acknowledges the instability of meaning. Monuments allow for plural, shifting interpretations, and their engagement with trauma and loss cannot be fully contained within static forms or singular narratives. Here Viet Thanh Nguyen's concept of *just memory* is useful, emphasizing the coexistence of parallel true narratives as part of an ethical memory practice.

Through *différance*, we see how *spomenici* evade singular definition, their publicly perceived meanings continuously shaped by political, social, and aesthetic contexts. They are constantly reinscribed with new connotations: some are neglected and left to deteriorate, others are repurposed for nationalist or tourist narratives, and some are reinterpreted — or *othered* — through contemporary art and photography. This ongoing process of re-signification aligns with *différance*, in which meaning is always deferred and subject to reinterpretation.

In both form and intention, *spomenici* differ significantly from contemporary monuments — those erected across the region after the wars of the 1990s to spatialize monoethnic or nationalist ideas. Such monuments are often inscribed with overt religious symbols or ethnic markers, designed to draw a sharp line between “us” and “them” and to reinforce post-war narratives. In parallel, *spomenici* today are neither wholly abandoned nor fully reclaimed, neither entirely relegated to the past nor fully integrated into the present. They persist instead in a state of perpetual semiotic deferral — much like the very idea of Yugoslavia as experienced by citizens of the post-Yugoslav region: a presence that is always already absent. All these aspects establish *spomenici* as quintessential hauntological objects: they reveal the impossibility of a stable collective memory and resist final interpretation, remaining open, ambiguous, and spectral. However, this understanding also carries the risk of disregarding their original identity in favor of the subsequent meanings they have acquired over time, or of branding them as too complex to engage with. It is therefore essential to examine and interpret *spomenici* with full acknowledgment of their antifascist origins — the foundational layer of their meaning — while allowing subsequent interpretations to enrich, rather than obscure, their complex character.

3 Pedagogical Explorations

A thorough analysis of *spomenici* has been the focus of an elective model-making course at the Institute of Design and Construction Principles at Graz University of Technology, held in 2021, 2022, and 2023. The course aimed to explore the multifaceted meanings that *spomenici* have acquired since their creation, including ones intended and inscribed by their authors. Thirty-two analytical models were produced by students under the supervision of course leaders (Ena Kukić and Iulius Popa), each differing in scale, materiality, and analytical as well as representational focus (Figure 1).

While some students focused on understanding the visual language of the socialist memorialization movement — examining form, materiality, and the use of light — others sought to deconstruct the symbolism behind these structures or explored the broader spatial context of the *spomenik* sites. In some cases, the final models presented a clear critique of the current societal status of *spomenici*, though all acknowledged the significance of the original structures.

A total of eighty-four students participated in the course, including eight from post-Yugoslav countries,

whose distinctive perspectives were shaped by personal or inherited memories of these monuments. Students worked individually or in teams of two or four persons, depending on the complexity of the task. The monuments were not chosen by the students themselves; rather, the course leaders selected six different *spomenici* for each cohort, allowing multiple groups to explore and reinterpret the same site.

Because the elective course was open to both bachelor’s and master’s level students, the composition of each cohort — whether in terms of study level or other factors such as the presence of incoming or exchange students, and particularly those from the post-Yugoslav region — influenced the instructors’ selection of *spomenici*. For example, in cohorts with a majority of bachelor students, monuments with simpler geometric forms were assigned. In cohorts with a larger proportion of international exchange students, mixed groups were encouraged to work on the same monuments as local students, facilitating cultural exchange and dialogue grounded in differing exposures to the history of Yugoslavia.

In addition to independent literature research, all students were introduced to the cultural, political, and historical framework of the monuments through lectures and discussions led by the course instructors. These sessions drew upon archival research, site analyses, photographic surveys, model studies, and planimetric redrawing. After being assigned a specific *spomenik* to thematize, students engaged in critical discussions addressing the architectural articulation of identity and collective memory — considering parameters such as transparency and porosity, structural tension, materiality, volume, and mass — within both the temporal context of their original construction and their subsequent historical transformations. An intensive fifteen-week review process ensured continuous dialogue with instructors, enabling students to address knowledge gaps, refine their analytical methods, and expand their perspectives on *spomenici*.

One of the *spomenici* that was thoroughly investigated through various models was the Monument to the Uprising of the People of Kordun and Banija in Petrova Gora National Park, commonly referred to as the Petrova Gora *spomenik*, built in 1981 and designed by Vojin Bakić and Berislav Šerbetić (Figure 2). In understanding the impossibility of ascribing a singular meaning to the monument, students explored both its original identity and the subsequent meanings it acquired over time. Heavily featured in international popular culture due to its decaying state and peculiar form, this *spomenik* has been both deconstructed and reconstructed — physically and symbolically.

Architect Vojin Bakić used reflective stainless steel for the façade, which became one of the building’s most prominent aesthetic and symbolic elements. Interpreting this material as one that casts a new light on a territory marked by dark events in the Petrova Gora mountains — most notably during 1941 and 1942 — and later stripped for scrap metal during post-1990s scarcity, one group focused on exploring the metallic aspects of the object’s identity. Parallel to that, another group understood the *spomenik* as an inseparable part of the landscape upon which it stands, analysing it within an urbanistic framework by focusing on the surrounding forest and the organic morphology of the hill, reinterpreted through the



Figure 2 Models of Petrova Gora *spomenik*. Models by Joo Young Lee, Vilmantė Daulenskytė, Nikolina Stjepanović, Stefan Hochhofer, Ajla Bukvarević, Milan Eftimov, Lamija Filan, Mak Krstić, Andreas Kalcher, and Vic Schmitz. Source: Courtesy of KOEN Institute, Graz, 2021-2023.

spomenik's wavy, sculptural form. Several groups focused on deconstruction, exploring the horizontal planes and pathways that define movement through the building's interior. In an effort to understand the process of removal — both physical, through decay and theft, and symbolic, through the erasure of meaning when the monument is used in music videos or advertisements — students experimented with stripping the monument down to certain components, reflecting on the absence of the removed parts.

Another *spomenik* investigated by multiple groups was the Ilinden Memorial in Kruševo, popularly known as Makedonium (Figure 3). This is also an exemplary case of a *spomenik* conceived as a building rather than a

sculpture, offering both interior and exterior for analysis. Exploring the complex building process — which saw the authors, Iskra and Jordan Grabul, frequently challenged for what was seen as an overly abstract form — students engaged with the difficulties that such a unique shape presents in the act of construction. Using different methods and materials, the originally 25-meter-tall concrete dome, punctuated by tubular protrusions, was built at a 1:100 scale: once as a freestanding object, and the second time as a fossil-like imprint, reflecting on the monument's symbolic impact on the local community and how local experience shaped the identity of the object. A third group focused on understanding the key elements that form the monument's identity — most notably the



Figure 3 Models of Makedonium *spomenik*. Models by Johanna Lackner, Jakob Walzl, Theresa Mitterdorfer, Sarah Schirz, Gabriel Deinhammer, and Bettina Flegel. Source: Courtesy of KOEN Institute, Graz, 2021-2023.

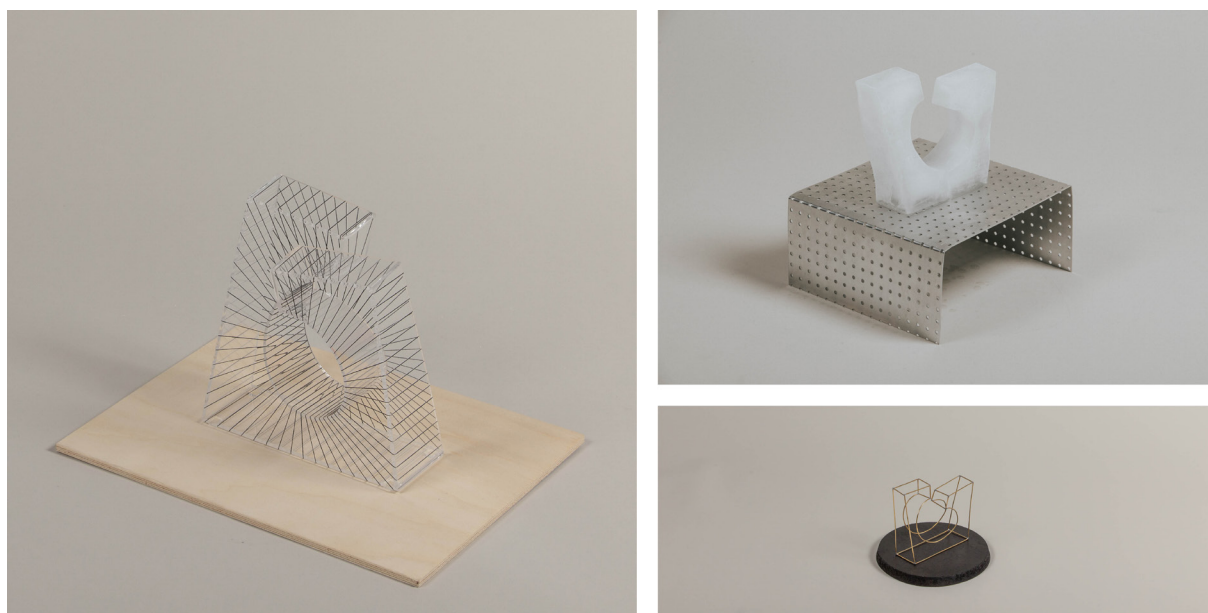


Figure 4 Models of Pleso *spomenik*. Models by Maria Cernko, Wolfgang Humer, Elma Draganović, Philipp Frank, Oskar Traut, Dávid Bálint Vörös, Daciana-Carmen Mereut, and Selina Haingartner. Source: Courtesy of KOEN Institute, Graz, 2021-2023.

four tubular extensions adorned with massive stained-glass windows by Prilep artist Borko Lazeski. As with the groups exploring Petrova Gora through fragmentation, this analysis aimed to provide commentary on the deconstruction and decontextualization of antifascist heritage through model making.

The Pleso *spomenik* in Zagreb served as one of the most poignant examples where models were used to reflect on the contemporary treatment of socialist memorial architecture (Figure 4). Explored through three different approaches, one model rendered it as a silhouette — an empty outline of something that has become socially irrelevant. Another portrayed it as a delicate, transparent construction, standing in stark contrast to its original

concrete mass. The third, the only performative model developed during the course, reflected on contemporary society's relationship with antifascism and the passage of time: the model was constructed from ice and left to melt when exposed to uncontrolled environmental conditions.

Models of the Kozara *spomenik* (officially the *Monument to the Revolution* in the Mrakovica area of Kozara National Park) reflected two analytical directions (Figure 5). The first explored the role of light — both its physical penetrability through the gaps between the monument's sculpted ribs, and the original use of textured steel plates — reinterpreted in contrasting model materials. Highlighting light as one of the main design elements served as a counterpoint to dominant post-war



Figure 5 Models of Kozara *spomenik*. Models by Tomas Castro Alcanatra, Beatriz Sanchez Vergara, Gagandeep Bhatti, Alexander Krishner, Miguel Bea Ballesta, and Carmen de Martin Hernandez. Source: Courtesy of KOEN Institute, Graz, 2021-2023.

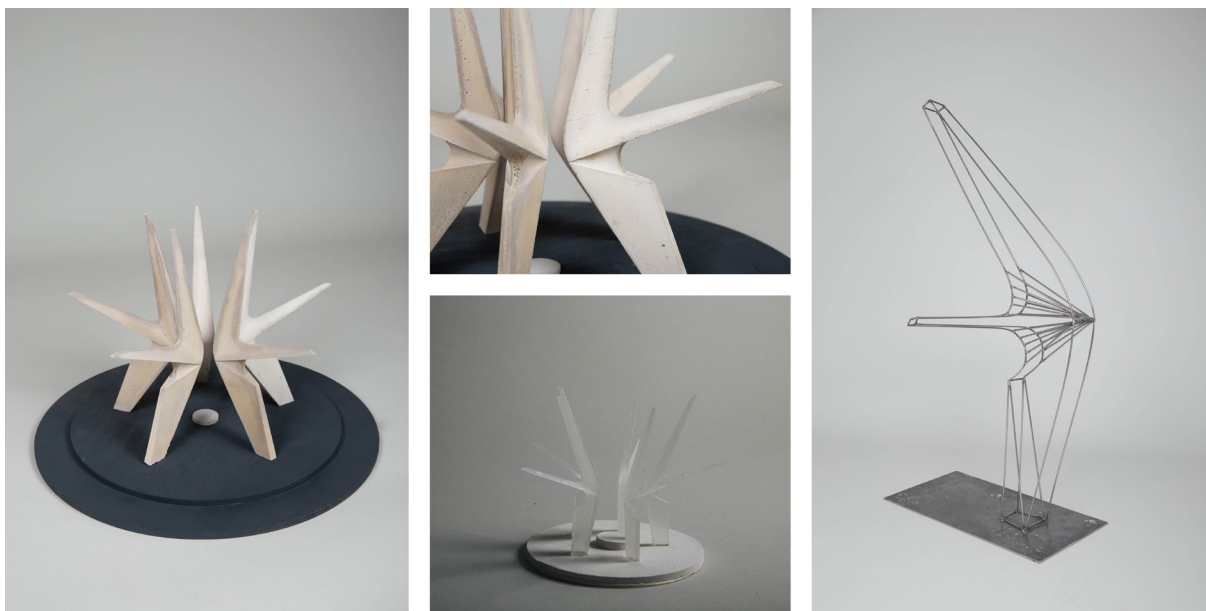


Figure 6 Models of Kosmaj *spomenik*. Models by Fabian Jäger, Konstantin Stocker, Britta Nader, Jacqueline Melcher, Elena van der Kallen, and Lukas Livesu. Source: Courtesy of KOEN Institute, Graz, 2021-2023.

narratives surrounding this *spomenik*, particularly those that reframe it through an ethnonational lens, such as the installation of the Orthodox crosses in its entrance zone. The second analysis focused on the sculptural form itself: twenty tall, narrow fins arranged in a circle. These were deconstructed, reorganized, and examined in terms of the author Dušan Džamonja's concept of the bulges in the concrete as "positives" and the recessed areas as "negatives" — an interplay between presence and absence, life and death. Shedding light on the original design intention thus becomes a way of reclaiming the monument's narrative from post-1990s appropriation and weaponization against its foundational antifascist ethos.

The Kosmaj *spomenik* (*Monument to the Fallen Soldiers of the Kosmaj Detachment*) was the most popular case study among younger students with limited experience in model making, drawn to its seemingly simple geometry (Figure 6). What neither students nor casual observers initially realized was that the five wings — appearing interconnected and mutually supported — are in fact standalone elements, each stabilized through complex structural solutions. The tension between individuality (single wing element) and collectivity (ensemble of five wings) formed the basis of several analyses. Students explored the symbolism of repetition, the number five (evoking the communist star as well as the worker's hand), rotational symmetry, and structural engineering, examining how each 30-meter-tall concrete wing could stand independently, unassisted.

Other notable student projects included a concrete model of the Jasenovac *spomenik*, whose construction in model scale proved technically difficult due to the challenges of working with concrete and the monument's triple-curved geometry. This formal instability mirrors the object's symbolic instability, as its significance continues to be undermined by nationalist rhetoric in post-1990s Croatia.

Several models also explored the Ilirska Bistrica *spomenik*, focusing on its inextricable link to its immediate surroundings. Its form is, on one hand, reminiscent of stalactites and stalagmites found in the nearby Postojna cave system, and on the other, evocative of bones, given that the sculpture serves as a tombstone for the ossuary beneath it (Figure 7). Considering the statement of its author, Janez Lenassi — who noted that the chosen forms do not need any further accessories or shocking whims to attract attention, and that the process of respectful relationships evolves along the logic of familiarization with the whole matter — students attempted to illuminate this process of familiarization by producing multiple models that investigated the symbolic forms embedded within the sculpture.

The structure of the course was designed to critically reflect on the multifaceted identity of socialist memorial architecture in Yugoslavia. Derrida's work was not explicitly introduced to students; rather, his concept of deconstruction was employed as a tool for tracing internal contradictions and inscriptions, addressing binary opposites in both materiality and meaning. A limited selection of case studies ensured that each monument was explored by multiple groups, with the intention of each adopting a distinct analytical approach and engaging in active dialogue about the varying dimensions of a *spomenik*'s character. Groups often spatialized these binary opposites in models placed side by side, allowing for a highly hands-on form of deconstruction. This methodological choice aimed to foreground the complexity and ambiguity inherent in these monuments.

The passage of time played a central role as well: students were encouraged to reflect on how specific elements or aspects of a monument's design were understood at the time of its conception, and how these meanings have shifted — or been contested — over the years. The ice monument of Pleso is particularly

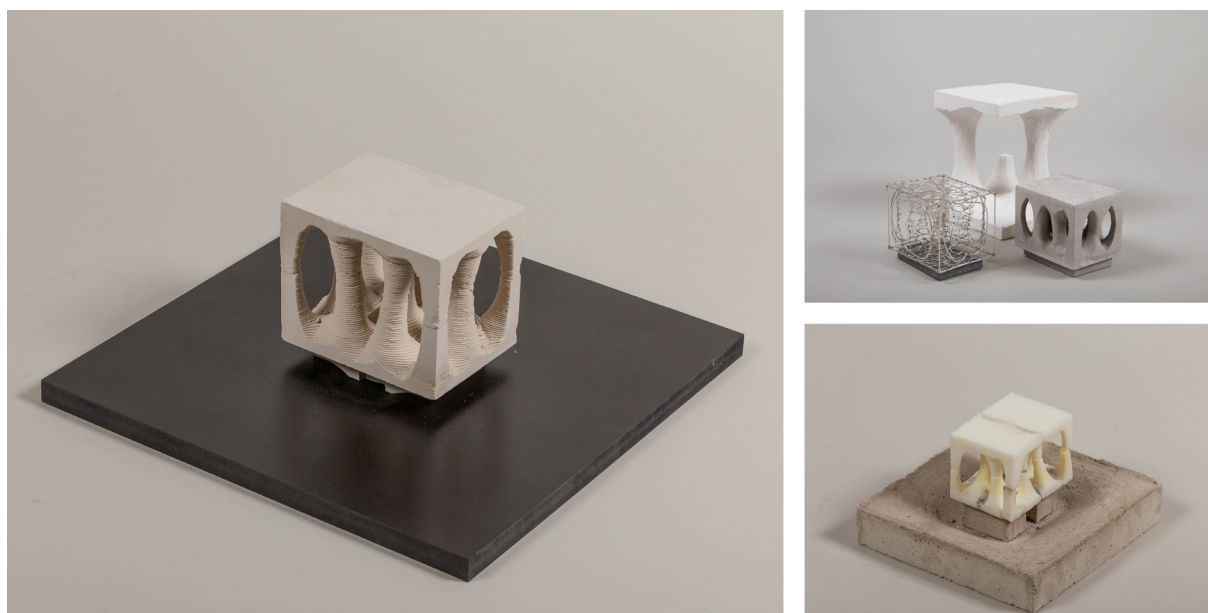


Figure 7 Models of Ilirska Bistrica *spomenik*. Models by Michael Dengg, Sarah Liebminger, Lukas Schneider, Mesude Tuncer, Dominik Hutter, Marcel Posch, Kim Benjamin Wildhirt, Sarah Korpitsch, Maria Matthäus, Daniel Lučić, and Fabian Schipflinger. Source: Courtesy of KOEN Institute, Graz, 2021-2023.

effective in this regard, as it employs the properties of its material to condense temporal layers and reference the historical decay of the entire Yugoslav memorial architecture corpus. Political and sociological frameworks surrounding *spomenici* were central to design discussions, emphasizing the inseparability of these structures from their historical and ideological contexts and helping to identify Derridean traces by highlighting what is absent. Multiple models engaging with positive-negative binary opposites in volume and mass explored this tension in depth.

A wide range of materials and techniques — including wood, concrete, ceramics, acrylic, wax, wire, plaster, XPS, textile, glass, and paper — enabled students to engage with the constructive challenges of model-making, experimenting with original materials or deliberately contrasting ones to highlight aesthetic or structural features. The outcomes of the course form a new body of knowledge, generated both through the structured guidance of the instructors and through the organic exchanges between student groups, particularly those with Yugoslav heritage, who brought reflections shaped by collective memory. The rich dialogue and peer interactions are as much a part of the course's output as the models themselves, which remain on display in the Institute's public hallway, continuing to provoke inquiry and conversation.

A total of nine *spomenici* were explored in the course: Jasenovac, Petrova Gora, Pleso, Barutana, Bratunac, Ilirska Bistrica, Kozara, Makedonium, and Kosmaj. Across three academic years, students produced thirty-two architectural models representing these monuments. Among them, Petrova Gora was the most frequently studied, with seven models developed. Jasenovac, Ilirska Bistrica, and Kozara followed, each represented through four models. Pleso, Makedonium, and Kosmaj were each interpreted in three models, while Barutana and Bratunac were explored through two models each.

The results of this experimental course should be considered as a whole, rather than focusing on individual models or case studies. Limitations arising from the course's relatively small size — one and a half hours per week — mean that there is space for further development. The course should be seen as a predecessor to a future pedagogical endeavor, in which, with more study hours and ECTS points, there would be a greater opportunity to introduce Derrida's work thoroughly before engaging in hands-on practical exploration, and to structure the categorization of models and approaches more systematically. Nonetheless, the array of different models, materials, and techniques demonstrates the diversity of analysis and representation, and the potential of this approach within a larger-scale pedagogical endeavor.

Reflections on the course suggest that deconstruction as a theoretical method works particularly well within a model-making program, especially given that these monuments belong to a functionless typology. The absence of a prior ideological framework, as well as the physical absence of parts of some *spomenici*, allows for a clear understanding of *trace* in the Derridean sense, which can be spatialized through contrasting materials, empty volumes, and the removal of spatial elements when reinterpreting specific objects. The interplay of difference and deferral, as articulated in the concept of *différance*, was also embodied in the scale models, particularly when different models of the same case study were observed side by side and their symbolic qualities compared. In this sense, a Derridean lens provided an especially apt framework for identifying and discussing the diverse meanings embedded in *spomenici*.

4 Conclusion

The analysis of *spomenici* through the framework of hauntology and *différance* reveals them as sites where memory resists closure, and where absence is as significant as presence. Their unsettled status in the post-Yugoslav landscape demonstrates how monuments can never have a fully fix meaning, but instead remain open to continual reinterpretation, like a palimpsest being continually inscribed with new layers. The persistence of these structures — whether neglected, appropriated, or embraced — underscores the spectral nature of collective memory in the region, in which the futures once promised by socialist Yugoslavia continue to linger as unresolved traces and in contrast to post-war nationalist realities.

This reading underscores both the value and the challenge of engaging with *spomenici*. They invite a more nuanced approach to memorial architecture, one that acknowledges original antifascist intentions while also recognizing subsequent layers of re-signification. By

doing so, they offer a critical lens for interrogating broader questions of heritage, ideology, and the instability of memory in contemporary societies. The pedagogical experiments described in this article demonstrate the potential of design practice to illuminate these complexities, suggesting that interdisciplinary methods can play a vital role in deepening public engagement with contested pasts.

Nevertheless, this research is limited by its reliance on selected case studies and by the interpretive nature of applying deconstructionist theory to architectural objects. Future studies may benefit from expanded comparative analyses across different memorial traditions or from empirical engagement with local communities to further contextualize the lived meanings of these sites. Even so, the hauntological reading advanced here contributes to ongoing debates in memory studies, architectural theory, and heritage preservation, positioning *spomenici* as both remnants of a fractured past and resources for rethinking the politics of remembrance in the present.

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