

Proximity of Monuments

Vladimir Kulić

Returning to Columbia University almost exactly ten years after first presenting research on the mediatization of Yugoslav monuments—my only piece of genuinely angry scholarship—I find myself reflecting on why these sites continue to resurface in my work. For over a decade, I have approached monuments obliquely: as part of a broader study of Yugoslav architecture, as objects of media critique, as examples of design methodology. Yet despite treating them as a side project rather than central focus, they have persistently demanded attention in ways that suggest a more fundamental relationship than scholarly interest alone.

This paper embraces an autobiographical method to investigate what I now recognize as the monuments' multiple proximities in my work—genetic, familial, cultural, embodied, and scholarly. Rather than treating these connections as methodological complications to be managed or overcome, I explore them as analytical resources that generate insights unavailable to purely distanced engagement. Drawing on autobiographical episodes of embodied encounter with memorial sites, the paper offers a dialogical exploration of proximity and distance as co-constitutive methodological positions. Offered as a contribution to New Yugoslav Studies, the paper considers what it might mean to work with rather than against the various forms of closeness that inevitably shape scholarly engagement with sites of inherited trauma.



between Yugoslavia, Cuba, and Angola (Museum of African Art, Belgrade, and Vanderbilt University, Nashville, 2025), and a forthcoming co-edited volume on South-South cooperation in architecture and construction (2026).

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