

# 4 SELF-MANAGEMENT ON DISPLAY: NEGOTIATING THE VISIONS OF YUGOSLAV SOCIALIST MODERNITY AT EXPO 58 AND *PORODICA I DOMAĆINSTVO* EXHIBITIONS

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In an article published in the magazine *Industrijsko oblikovanje* (Industrial Design) in 1970, the architect and design critic Fedor Kritovac outlined the search for “national character” in Yugoslav design. Defining the country’s “self-managed social structure as the ‘Yugoslav thing,’” Kritovac suggested that the building of self-management and modern design were closely aligned: design had a fundamental task of materializing self-management in tangible form.<sup>1</sup>

First introduced by the Yugoslav government in June 1950, self-management was a complex political, social, and economic system that underpinned all aspects of everyday life, from industrial production to education, from housing to leisure. As the key feature of Yugoslav socialism, it formed the basis of its non-aligned foreign policy. Envisioned as a form of direct decision-making, for Yugoslav leaders, self-management marked the return to a “truer” version of socialism, as opposed to a “Stalinist deviation.”<sup>2</sup> For this reason, presenting the essence of

self-management on an international stage became a key political project, one in which design was to play an important part.

Still, despite its central role in Yugoslav society, the meaning of self-management, both in official ideology and everyday practice, remained elusive and was open to continuous interpretation and debate.<sup>3</sup> The lack of a monolithic vision of self-management was reflected in design practice. Over the course of the 1950s, efforts to “design” self-management became a source of tension and anxiety, unfolding both within the design profession and through outward-facing public displays, exhibitions and events.<sup>4</sup> These tensions were made visible in two exhibitions held in 1958: the Yugoslav pavilion at Brussels Expo 58 that opened to the public in April, and *Porodica i domaćinstvo* (Family and Household), an exhibition held at the Zagreb Fair in September that same year.<sup>5</sup> Examined side by side, these exhibitions highlight two contrasting rhetorical and visual registers that were used to display self-management in material form. Addressing an international audience, the Expo pavilion projected an abstract vision of self-managed socialism, one that appeared unconcerned by consumption, domesticity, and the material culture of everyday life and focused, instead, on a top-down political narrative. *Porodica i domaćinstvo*, on the other hand, was attended mostly by local visitors and proposed a less self-conscious image of self-management. Rather than being showcased as an abstract ideological goal, at *Porodica i domaćinstvo* self-management was indexed to everyday experience and presented as a means for improving the overall quality of life.

These contrasting display strategies highlight the role of cultural diplomacy and transnational exchange in shaping both the image as well as lived experience of state socialism amidst the tensions of the Cold War. In the Yugoslav case, as the country was trying to establish its non-aligned position in between the two blocs, the Brussels Expo served to showcase its “third way” socialism on the global stage.<sup>6</sup> However, the Yugoslav government struggled to harmonize the international image it desired to portray with the experience of self-management as an everyday practice. Beyond the pavilion’s architectural quality, Yugoslav political leaders and architectural critics alike found its representation of self-management to be off the mark. As a result, the Expo was not only a platform for exchange and cultural transfer abroad, but also instigated a moment of introspection at home. An alternative vision was evident at *Porodica i domaćinstvo*, highlighting how wider tensions about the meaning of self-management were translated into an object of design in exhibitionary form.

## DEFINING SELF-MANAGEMENT

The efforts to represent Yugoslav socialist modernity in material form became particularly urgent following Tito’s split with Stalin in 1948. The split escalated

following a series of disputes about Yugoslavia's socialist policy and its relationship with the neighboring Balkan countries. These debates, however, masked the central issue: the Yugoslav government's claims about "the unique and autonomous origins and legitimacy of the Yugoslav regime."<sup>7</sup> To affirm its power in the period of economic and political uncertainty that followed the split, the Yugoslav government set about establishing its own "third way" socialism, in-between the two Cold War superpowers. The most important step in that process was the introduction of self-management in June 1950.<sup>8</sup> Premised on the social ownership of the means of production and withering away of the state, self-management placed factory management in the workers' hands. In this decentralized system of economic and political management, the Yugoslav technocrats envisioned that workers would become key decision makers within industry, exercising their power by grouping into workers' councils.

Positioned as a "founding myth" of socialist Yugoslavia, from the early 1950s self-management quickly became both the practical and rhetorical linchpin of everyday life under Yugoslav socialism.<sup>9</sup> Political leaders declared that "the development of socialism cannot proceed in any other way but through the constant strengthening of . . . self-management of the peoples' masses."<sup>10</sup> However, this ideological emphasis on participation and decentralization remained abstract and far removed from everyday life. To gain validity, self-management needed to be tied to everyday experience. For this reason, from its initial introduction within the political and economic sphere, self-management was to extend into everyday life through local councils and housing communes. Through self-management, Yugoslav workers could influence their position outside the workplace by taking decisions with regards to the attribution of housing, private loans for house-building, healthcare, education, access to holiday resorts, childcare, or other social services. In this way, self-management was implicitly tied to domesticity and modern, comfortable lifestyles. As a result, sociologist Sharon Zukin has argued, Yugoslav citizens came to understand "self-management more in terms of economic benefits than ideological goals."<sup>11</sup> For Zukin, this "dualistic view of self-management" meant that it was the promise of a "good life" and material abundance that made Yugoslav citizens more inclined to identify with and participate in self-management.<sup>12</sup>

This resulted in a paradox. On the one hand, Marxist theory, with an emphasis on collectivization and workers' emancipation, took center stage in public discourse. On the other, the everyday practice of self-management legitimized individualism and self-interest. As Zukin asserts, "the Yugoslav ideology was the first to state explicitly that working to raise one's standard of living is legitimate under socialism," thereby elevating "self-interest into a historical necessity in an underdeveloped socialist country."<sup>13</sup> This understanding of self-management was embraced by Yugoslav designers, who sought to affirm the legitimacy of design practice by emphasizing its role in the building of socialism. In their writing in

architectural and design magazines such as *Čovjek i prostor* (Man and Space) or *Arhitektura* (Architecture), they claimed there was a pressing need to “create an environment suitable for our new social reality” based on self-management.<sup>14</sup> Modern mass housing and rational, economical furniture were to become indicators of the successes of self-management, presented to the public through exhibitions and fairs. These public displays became a testing ground for experimentation in design, as well as a platform for negotiating the disjunction between government rhetoric and everyday practices of self-management.

## YUGOSLAV PAVILION AT EXPO 58: SELF-MANAGEMENT AS RHETORIC

In 1956, *Arhitektura*, published by the Croatian Association of Architects, announced the shortlisted entries for the competition to design the Yugoslav pavilion at Brussels Expo 58.<sup>15</sup> Despite awarding three winning prizes, the selection committee decided that “the competition did not produce satisfying results in terms of the number of entries that offer the required quality for such an international exhibition.”<sup>16</sup> The jury’s dissatisfaction suggests the serious commitment of the Yugoslav government towards its participation at Brussels. The exhibition, held ten years after the Tito-Stalin split, offered a unique occasion to present its “third way” socialism on the international stage. Among sixteen submitted proposals, the jury awarded third place to the entry designed by the architects Vjenceslav Richter and Emil Weber.<sup>17</sup> Their design proposal was a two-story cube made of metal and glass that aimed to integrate the inside and the outside of the pavilion, with a distinctive roof that filtered natural light through the exhibition space. The jury did not express much enthusiasm for the project. Compared to the winning proposal, a hyperbolic paraboloid, whose dramatic sloping construction revealed layered gallery spaces connected by an elevated ramp, Richter and Weber’s geometric design was deemed by the jury to be too “rigid.” They remarked that “the elementary design characteristics leave in a certain sense the impression of a utilitarian building,” while the Expo required a more “expressive” representation of Yugoslav identity in architectural form.<sup>18</sup>

A second competition organized shortly after, this time by invitation only, produced more satisfactory results.<sup>19</sup> The jury report stated that the “invited architects submitted work on the expected level of general architectural quality in relation to Yugoslav and international standards,” although submissions ranged in “audacity of design and construction,” with some proposals offering “particular expressive effects.”<sup>20</sup> Among six invited teams, it was Richter and Weber’s proposal that ultimately won the final pavilion commission. While maintaining many design features of the first iteration, the new building was conceived as a floating object, suspended from a 70-meter-high central pillar. The jury rewarded the

architectural vision of this gravity-defying construction. Called by Richter “foundations in the air”, the pavilion’s **audacious** design clearly met the expressive qualities the jury was looking for, even though it recognized that the complex construction “may not be entirely in-line with our current production and technological reality.”<sup>21</sup> Still, the building could be read as a powerful symbol of “human strivings for progress and the launching of the first rocket into space.”<sup>22</sup> The symbolism appeared fitting both for the theme of the Expo—“A World View: A New Humanism”—as well as the battle for progress in science and technology that dominated Cold War debates.

That such an ambitious design came from Richter was no surprise.<sup>23</sup> Trained in the interwar modernist tradition, Vjenceslav Richter was a key figure of the Yugoslav neo-avant-garde that charted the country’s move away from socialist realism in the early years after the Tito-Stalin split.<sup>24</sup> Richter was one of the founders of the group Exat 51, which set out to define the forms of spatial, material, and visual expression suitable for self-managing socialism.<sup>25</sup> In their manifesto, the artists, architects, and designers grouped around Exat advocated for the *sinteza* (synthesis) of different art forms, calling for the abolition of any distinction between fine and applied arts.<sup>26</sup> The call for the breakdown of disciplinary hierarchies signals the influence of interwar modernism on Yugoslav architects and designers. For members of Exat, this influence came from Zdenko Strižić, a professor in the Department of Architecture at the Faculty of Engineering. Having studied and worked in Berlin under Hans Poelzig, a member of the Deutscher Werkbund known for his expressionist approach, Strižić introduced Exat architects to the principles of modernist architecture with an emphasis on “functional analysis” over “architectural expression.”<sup>27</sup> According to the architect Božidar Rašica, Exat members sought to emulate the work of Kazimir Malevich, Le Corbusier, Paul Klee, and Piet Mondrian, and their emphasis on analysis and synthesis stemmed from this avant-garde lineage.<sup>28</sup> Exat members were also lecturers at the Academy of Applied Arts in Zagreb, founded on the Bauhaus model in 1949. Although short-lived, closing after only six years of activity, the academy proposed a new model for arts education organized around experimental, multidisciplinary workshops.<sup>29</sup> According to the art historian Ješa Denegri, access to the writings of László Moholy-Nagy, Siegfried Giedion, and Max Bill provided the theoretical foundations for Exat’s manifesto, as much as for the group’s approach to teaching.<sup>30</sup>

For Exat, *sinteza* was crucial for the production of a new material environment for the new socialist subjectivity. In the view of design critic Radovan Ivančević, “the synthesis was only possible as a result of collective work ‘in which the architect, sculptor and painter would collaborate from the very beginning.’”<sup>31</sup> The synthesis of visual arts—both in its call for the breakdown of disciplinary hierarchies as well as collective labor—formed a suitable theoretical and practical model for architectural and design production within the context of an egalitarian, horizontal

order of the self-managed socialist state. It is unsurprising, then, that Richter drew a clear historical parallel between *sinteza* and socialism. In his 1964 book titled *Sinturbanizam* (Synthurbanism), Richter declared that “visual synthesis,” as the precondition for the progressive development of visual arts, was only possible in the context of socialism as its “social medium.”<sup>32</sup>

Aligned with the Yugoslav socialist project, Richter’s ideas about synthesis were fully formed through a number of exhibition projects designed in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Developed in collaboration with Exat members Ivan Picelj, Aleksandar Srnc, and Zvonimir Radić, these early projects included the Yugoslav pavilions at the Vienna International Trade Fair in 1949, Stockholm International Fair in 1949–1950, and Chicago International Trade Fair in 1950. Commissioned by the Yugoslav government, they established a clear modernist visual and spatial register through which the state was to present itself on the international stage. The pavilion at the Chicago fair, for example, featured a modular structure made of white metal rods that rhythmically marked the space, forming light geometric shapes and prisms that framed objects on display, thus unifying the set-up into a coherent spatial whole. This modernist language was striking considering the lingering debates about socialist realism. For the design historian Jasna Galjer, the state “consciously approved this departure, clearly with the intention of representing the visual culture that in this case was to be understood as a correlative for



**FIGURE 4.1** Yugoslav Pavilion at Expo 58, view from outside with the plaza and steel sculpture seen in the corner. Fund 56, Generalni Komisarijat Jugoslovenske sekcije Opšte Međunarodne izložbe u Briselu, Archive of Yugoslavia, Belgrade.

democracy.”<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the modernist synthesis of visual arts appeared as the ultimate formal, visual and spatial dogma of the self-managed socialist state.

The 1958 Expo pavilion needs to be seen within this context. Its impressive design, although never realized as intended—it was too costly and difficult to execute—should be read as a culmination of Richter’s ideas about synthesis.<sup>34</sup> The final Expo building, rather than being suspended from a central pillar, featured an open geometric structure placed on steel columns, leaving the ground floor open (Figure 4.1). The theme of openness permeated the pavilion: “it was literally and symbolically an ‘open house’” that served as a metaphor for the Yugoslav system, open towards both the East and West.<sup>35</sup> Its location on the Expo grounds, nestled between Switzerland and Portugal and away from other Eastern European countries, further reinforced the country’s supposed neutrality.<sup>36</sup> The spatial organization of the exhibition themes, on the other hand, reflected the country’s ideological underpinnings. The ground floor, in fact, housed the section on the economy; this formed the “base” upon which rested the “superstructure,” which consisted of exhibits on State and Social Organization and Contemporary Art and Tourism, occupying the floors above. In his review of the pavilion published in *Arhitektura*, the architect Andrija Mutnjaković defined it as a “rationally functional and exact construction solution” whose “exhibition spaces differentiated by height . . . create a playful spatial composition across five levels, visually captured through perforations in the ceiling and reciprocal overlaps.”<sup>37</sup> This modulated, dynamic space formed the core of Richter’s ideas about exhibition design. In an article published in 1954, in fact, he argued that space is “the strongest means of visual propaganda” and that objects can only be perceived as a result of a wider spatial interaction.<sup>38</sup>

The material on display followed the pavilion’s spatial logic, with the exhibition content subordinated to the architectural design and conceived, according to critics, “in the first place as a visual solution.”<sup>39</sup> In the words of a leading Yugoslav political figure, Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo, this was the pavilion’s major downfall, for it “represented more the Yugoslav architecture than Yugoslavia as a whole.”<sup>40</sup> In fact, Yugoslavia was awarded one of Expo’s thirty-five gold medals in recognition of its avant-garde architecture, rather than the overall exhibition, whose “didactic quality’ was utterly disappointing.”<sup>41</sup>

## THE FORM OF SELF-MANAGEMENT

What did this “didactic” exhibition look like? The pavilion featured a modular exhibition design that included a range of graphic panels (some extending across all five levels of the pavilion), long tables, and glass cases. The structure framing the displays matched the construction of the pavilion, with the building’s rectangular grid animating their disposition in space. Vertical explanatory panels contained



key information about each section, while long horizontal tables explored their themes in greater depth. The modular elements were characterized by a striking visual language, an ongoing development of Exat's experiments, with geometric shapes, lines and grids, sans-serif typography, and black-and-white photographs arranged in dynamic compositions. These panels reflected the avant-garde pavilion architecture and artwork on display. This was particularly evident in the open space on the ground floor, where the Economy section blended in with the artwork displayed across the site. The artist Dušan Džamonja's metal and glass wall sculpture, for example, formed the backdrop for a display on the industrial and economic development of Yugoslav regions. However, consumer goods were conspicuously absent from the exhibition. Instead, pieces of industrial machinery



**FIGURE 4.2** Exhibition design at the Yugoslav Pavilion at Expo 58, showcasing the central graphic panel stretching across all five levels. Fund 56, Generalni Komisarijat Jugoslovenske sekcije Opšte Međunarodne izložbe u Briselu, Archive of Yugoslavia, Belgrade.



and high-tech products, such as an ultrasonic drilling machine, a telephone exchange, and parts of electric plants, as well as samples of ferrous metals, were displayed as sculptural objects, either under glass or on plinths. This mode of display emphasized the country's capital goods and offered an aestheticized vision of Yugoslav economy and industrial production. This was not entirely surprising: other socialist countries, such as the Soviet Union with its Sputnik replicas, favored showcasing technical achievements over consumer products.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, such an abstract display of technology was at odds with Yugoslav "third way" socialism and far removed from the everyday experience of self-management.

This display strategy proved even more problematic in the section on State and Social Organization. The section's main themes included the history of Yugoslavia with an emphasis on national liberation during the Second World War, the organization of economic and social self-management, culture, science, and education, as well as international relations. Together with descriptive texts and statistical data, the displays were characterized by large-scale photographs of Yugoslav workers, self-managers, partisan heroes, or schoolchildren, deployed in an attempt to humanize the abstract political and social structure of the system. However, this human touch was overpowered by rhetorical sloganeering. One panel, for example, featured a collage of photographs showing Yugoslav workers, a factory building, and a stylized hand with the phrase "In my own hands," evoking the power of workers' councils to make decisions about factory management. Another panel featured aerial photographs of a city and a public square with two main slogans stating: "Where I live, I take part in government" and "Where I work, there I am in charge." While each panel was carefully designed following unique layouts and compositional logic, reports remarked that this section was the least visited of the exhibition, with visitors breezing past the graphic backdrops.<sup>43</sup> In contrast to the Czechoslovak pavilion, for example, which featured sections on "aesthetic taste, including clothing, shoes, and designed objects, children and puppetry" as well as a *Laterna Magika* (Magic Lantern) and *Polyekran* (Multiscreen) multimedia performances, the complexity and abstraction of Yugoslav graphic displays seemed too dry in the context of the Expo.<sup>44</sup>

The difficulty of translating self-management into a spatial, exhibitionary form was clear. Even the leading politician Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo expressed dissatisfaction with this section, arguing that it was "regretful that the organizers of our exhibition didn't manage to display the essence of the social order in our country in a simpler and more attractive way" to allow even the most casual visitor to gain a fuller understanding of self-management.<sup>45</sup> For critic Boro Pavlović, writing in the architecture magazine *Čovjek i prostor* (Man and Space) the main issue was not with "what was in the pavilion. But rather—what wasn't."<sup>46</sup> Reflecting on the overall commercial character of the Expo he lamented the absence of "attractive" displays, arguing that "If other pavilions presented the same conception in terms of exhibits, they would appear restrictive, in an almost ascetic mood."<sup>47</sup>

Another critic questioned whether “our country could have been better presented” in a “more efficient way that would be less refined but more accessible to ‘ordinary people,’” highlighting the struggles over the material representation of self-management in the spectacular setting of the Expo.<sup>48</sup>

International commentators, however, rejected such criticism. In fact, the Western press was pleasantly surprised with the overall quality of the Yugoslav display, testifying as much to the avant-garde status of Richter’s design as to their own prejudice towards state socialism.<sup>49</sup> In the UK, *Architectural Design* praised its “sophisticated architecture,” while in the US *Industrial Design* commended its “youthful freshness” and described the display as “simple, direct, clear and ‘human.’”<sup>50</sup> As these contrasting opinions show, the pavilion displayed an imagined reflection, one that was designed in anticipation of a foreign gaze cast on Yugoslav self-management. A different presentation of self-management, one that emerged when the gaze turned inwards, can be seen in an analysis of *Porodica i domaćinstvo* (Family and Household), part of a series of exhibitions held in Yugoslavia from 1957–1960.

## **PORODICA I DOMAĆINSTVO: SELF-MANAGEMENT AS MODERN DOMESTICITY**

While the Expo pavilion eschewed a representation of modern lifestyles, exhibitions centered around model domestic environments became a staple of Yugoslav design rhetoric in the late 1950s, framing mass production and consumption within the wider efforts to strengthen self-management. This model of exhibition display, of course, has a long history, and can be traced back to exhibitions such as the L’Esprit Nouveau pavilion at the 1925 Paris Exposition des Arts Décoratifs or the 1927 *Die Wohnung* (The Dwelling) exhibition in Stuttgart commissioned by the Deutscher Werkbund. In the Yugoslav case, *Porodica i domaćinstvo* was preceded by *Stan za naše prilike* (Housing for our Means) exhibition held in Ljubljana in 1956 and the Yugoslav pavilion at the 1957 XI Milan Triennial, both of which featured model domestic environments.

The vision of modern domesticity presented at these exhibitions owed much to transnational exchange and the country’s non-aligned openness towards both the East and the West. Publications like *Svijet* (The World), a women’s magazine designed in the early 1950s by Aleksandar Srnec, one of the founding members of Exat, became key vehicles for introducing consumerist lifestyles to Yugoslav audiences. On its pages, Yugoslav women could find advice about how to decorate their homes with modern furnishings such as daybeds and modular bookshelves.<sup>51</sup> Equally, the Zagreb Fair was central in shaping the Yugoslavs’ imagination of the good life as a reflection of one seen in the West. As the literary critic Željko Ivanjek

has written, visits to the fair offered an unmediated and corrective “glimpse into the achievements of rotten capitalism,” with displays such as a fully fitted American supermarket capturing the visitors’ attention in 1957.<sup>52</sup> Still, while such exchanges undeniably shaped Yugoslav conceptions of everyday life, consumption, and domesticity, they needed to be adapted to the socialist context. Designers, here, had a central role to play.

Bernardo Bernardi, one of the founders of Exat, argued in 1959 that the question of well-designed objects and spaces was “of particularly big importance . . . in a socialist country, where production forces are no longer used as a tool for speculation.”<sup>53</sup> Under socialism, he claimed, “where all creative forces need to be directed towards the improvement of material and cultural standards of the working people, there is a true possibility for industrial design to fulfill its social function in creating a new living landscape, the visual, plastic and spatial medium for the new man.”<sup>54</sup> Referencing the avant-garde belief in design’s “ability to *transform the consciousness* of those who were brought into contact with it,” Bernardi called on designers to shape a new, total living environment that would produce an emancipated and unalienated self-managed socialist subjectivity.<sup>55</sup>

As part of this broader effort, in September 1958 the Council of Women’s Associations of Yugoslavia organized the second edition of *Porodica i domaćinstvo* (Family and Household). Part of a series of three exhibitions, held in September 1957, September 1958, and April and May 1960, respectively, the aim of the exhibition was to educate the public about modern ways of life. The original program outline, published in 1957, declared that one of the main goals was to act “as a strong tool for collective propaganda: the fight of united forces of producers and society to win over new categories of consumers, to increase the placement of goods intended for family and households.”<sup>56</sup> This drive towards consumerism was justified as a political goal: the overall aim of the exhibition was to reflect on the position of women in society and to “free women from housework” so that they could take an active role in self-management.<sup>57</sup> Under self-managed socialism, the exhibition program suggested, domestic labor needed to be collectively shared, “transformed into a social activity.”<sup>58</sup> The question of women’s rights, a prominent issue in a socialist state with its claim to both class and gender equality, gave much needed political gravitas to the otherwise commercially-oriented exhibition.<sup>59</sup>

The second edition of *Porodica i domaćinstvo* was staged in the newly opened fairgrounds in Novi Zagreb, a sprawling urban development to the south of the city.<sup>60</sup> The fair’s pavilions in glass and steel, examples of architectural experimentation in high modernism, provided a suitable framework for the exhibition.<sup>61</sup> The fair also fostered international exchange and building of networks with architects and designers from countries across the East-West divide, such as Italy, whose pavilion was designed by Raffaele Contigiani, or East Germany, with a pavilion by Richard Paulick, a collaborator of Walter Gropius.<sup>62</sup> Within this international context, yet speaking mostly to domestic audiences, the political

significance of *Porodica i domaćinstvo* was reinforced by explicitly tying its exploration of modern domesticity and design to the building of self-management. At the core of the second edition was *stambena zajednica* (housing community), the unit of territorial self-management centered around one's place of residence. As Edvard Kardelj, the country's deputy prime minister, declared at the opening:

This year a clear concept of the housing community was offered . . . not like some sort of residents' association, but rather as a form of communal activity, a specific form where the initiative and resources of individuals, of individual working men, is connected to the planned action and resources of the commune so as to . . . satisfy our people in all their daily needs.<sup>63</sup>

As these comments suggest, *Porodica i domaćinstvo* was instrumental in instigating a paradigm shift in the way self-management was to be understood at home: not as an abstract ideological goal or as an instrument of economic management within the industry, but rather as a means through which individuals could improve their quality of life. To drive the message home, the exhibition organizers mobilized the language of modern architecture and design. The exhibition format, centered around model domestic environments, fully fitted supermarkets, and department stores, was used precisely because it served as “the most direct form of communication, or rather, the most stimulating generator of new habits and consumption.”<sup>64</sup>

Stretching across seven pavilions, *Porodica i domaćinstvo* opened with a model housing community for 5,000 residents with associated services: schools and supermarkets as well as laundry, restaurant, and social spaces.<sup>65</sup> This model housing block was presented alongside projects that were already built across Yugoslav cities, such as Zagreb, Belgrade, or Ljubljana. As design historians Jasna Galjer and Iva Ceraj write, this exhibition format “implied that the project of an ‘ideal housing community’ is in reality the sum of existing experiences.”<sup>66</sup> This future-in-the-present format was divided into a series of thematic sections. “Housing community—extended family” showcased a range of services that were to be made available to working families, followed by a social restaurant, a supermarket based on the American model shown at the fair the year before, and a department store built as a separate pavilion exclusively for the purpose of the exhibition. Children's services and playgrounds were followed by the key section of the exhibition, the Dwelling pavilion that featured eleven fully furnished model apartments.<sup>67</sup> It was this last section that attracted the most interest;<sup>68</sup> as one visitor remarked, “you know what people are like, they prefer to see something more tangible.”<sup>69</sup>

It was this tangible nature—both conceptually and in terms of exhibition design—that made *Porodica i domaćinstvo* central to debates about “designing” self-management. One report published in the newspaper *Vjesnik* (The Herald) made the connection between self-management and the model flats displayed at

*Porodica i domaćinstvo* explicit: “According to the ideas of designers and authors of concepts . . . the housing community is not only an urbanistic, but also a socio-economic unit. In it, the citizens share their existence and resources . . . They manage and make decisions autonomously.”<sup>70</sup> Overseen by an elected council, the housing community mirrored the organization of workers’ councils within the industry, highlighting the way self-management was to extend from the economy into domestic life centered around standardized housing units. As a further validation of the exhibition’s concept, that same month the Council of Urbanists of Yugoslavia declared that the housing community was to become the elementary unit of urban planning.<sup>71</sup> In this context, projects displayed at *Porodica i domaćinstvo* seemed like a tangible representation of the system of self-management in everyday experience.

The Dwelling pavilion proposed solutions for one-, two-, two-and-a-half, and three-room apartments.<sup>72</sup> These model spaces were designed to alleviate the housing shortage, whilst, at the same time, offering “cultured” living spaces to Yugoslav workers, many of whom had only recently moved to urban centers. While small in size—even President Tito remarked upon his visit that “it all looked too tight”—these modest apartments featured fully fitted kitchens and were furnished with rational modernist furniture.<sup>73</sup> Their compact size testified to the exhibition’s realism, its desire to offer pragmatic solutions for the present rather than utopian



**FIGURE 4.3** Exhibition model of a three-room flat for four to five people shown at the // *Porodica i domaćinstvo* exhibition in 1958. Personal Archival Fund: Bernardo Bernardi; Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts—Croatian Museum of Architecture. © Archive of Yugoslavia, Belgrade.

visions of the future. By displaying things “as they were,” the architect Andrija Mutnjaković remarked, these small model flats “were first of all speaking to the public,” the Yugoslav self-managers.<sup>74</sup> Among the proposals, Bernardo Bernardi’s project stands out both for its practical solutions and conceptual underpinnings. Bernardi sought to elevate modern domesticity from “the level of mere ‘habitation’ to the higher level of ‘domestic culture.’”<sup>75</sup> He proposed a cohesive design strategy that offered one of the first applications of *sinteza* (synthesis) in the context of functional, rational and economic housing construction for the working class.

To achieve this, Bernardi developed the concept of “creative standardization,” which implied the creation of flexible, dynamic layouts and modular, multifunctional furniture. Two- and three-room flats shown at *Porodica i domaćinstvo* featured a porous organization of spaces. The bathroom and kitchen, pushed toward the center, allowed direct access to sunlight in the living room and bedrooms on either side, while mobile walls accommodated a level of internal flexibility. Equally, the “creative standardization” of furniture implied that most objects could be adapted for different uses. An image of the living room highlights how theories of *sinteza* could be translated into everyday practice (Figure 4.3). This small space featured a sofa and a low coffee table, while a sideboard, which also served as a desk, and a plywood chair designed by Bernardi suggested it could be used for both work and rest. Abstract patterns characterized the curtains designed by Jagoda Buić-Bonetti, while a tapestry by Exat member Aleksandar Srncic hung on the back wall, signaling that art was to be introduced into everyday life even in the context of modest mass housing. Indeed, rather than being displayed as aspirational, Bernardi’s apartments were distinctive in their representation of Yugoslav modernity because they addressed the housing conditions of the period, with their restrictive footprints, standardized mass construction, and limited budgets. This was not a rhetorical vision of Yugoslav socialism, but rather an example of what self-management could provide in everyday, lived experience.

In the publication accompanying the exhibition, Bernardi painstakingly detailed room sizes and pieces of furniture, explaining their different uses and how they were to be produced. He argued, in fact, that the value of an apartment was determined not so much by its size or price but by its usability—a need that his cohesive approach tried to address.<sup>76</sup> These flats were functional because they were tied to the wider network of services—a communal laundry, DIY workshops, cultural centers, and children’s spaces—accessed through the self-managed housing commune. By encouraging participation in local councils in pursuit of self-interest, *Porodica i domaćinstvo* stood in stark contrast to the abstract and austere propositions about democracy, emancipation, and equality seen at Expo 58. Here, modern design and the quality of life at home were set as the yardstick with which the success of self-management was to be measured.

While not unique in its format, *Porodica i domaćinstvo* stands out among exhibitions centered around modern housing models for the clarity with which it



connected political rhetoric to domesticity. This is particularly evident when compared to a 1956 exhibition titled *Stan za naše prilike* (Housing for our Means) held in Ljubljana. The exhibition coincided with the First Yugoslav Council on housing construction and urban dwelling where it was declared that the “right to housing” was “a basic legal institute that provides the working man with one of the essential living conditions.”<sup>77</sup> Therefore, the exhibition had the goal of articulating what those living conditions were to look like by displaying a number of model family homes with custom-designed furniture: plywood chairs, low cabinets with color-block sliding doors, and elegant lighting. One apartment was furnished with objects designed by *Studio za industrijsko oblikovanje* (Studio for Industrial Design, SIO), a newly formed design office whose founders included Exat members Vjenceslav Richter and Zdravko Bregovac. SIO also coordinated Yugoslavia’s participation at the XI Milan Triennial in 1957, where its pavilion featured a model domestic environment in an attempt to define Yugoslav *kultura stanovanja* (domestic culture) in relation to postwar modernism.<sup>78</sup> Reporting on the exhibition, the magazine *Arhitektura* showcased images of the pavilion alongside Danish and Italian design, suggesting that Yugoslavia was integrated with international design networks. However, what appeared to be lacking at *Stan za naše prilike* and the Triennale pavilion was an explicit discussion of how these modern domestic environments related to the practice of self-management. In fact, model flats at *Stan za naše prilike* were not conceived as part of a wider housing community. Rather, these were terraced houses, designed for urban elites.<sup>79</sup> By contrast, the flats showcased at *Porodica i domačinstvo* were organized in compact housing blocks managed by the housing community and clearly designed for lower- and middle-class Yugoslav workers—the archetypical self-managers that featured in official rhetoric.

## SELF-MANAGEMENT BETWEEN CONSUMPTION AND IDEOLOGY

While tackling similar themes, examined side by side *Porodica i domačinstvo* and the Expo pavilion show the lack of a singular vision of self-management, despite its ideological status as a defining feature of Yugoslav socialism. These differing representations can be seen as a reflection of the wider debates around self-management at the time. In April 1958, the same month that the Expo opened its gates, the League of Communists of Yugoslavia held its VII Party Congress in Ljubljana. The party program officially sanctioned modern consumerism, stating that “the improvement of material and cultural conditions in everyday life, as well as quicker economic development of the whole of society” were one of the key goals of socialism and affirming that “a better supply of consumer products” was an essential part of that project.<sup>80</sup> This legitimized a major paradigm shift in how

self-management was to be understood that was enacted at *Porodica i domaćinstvo* in September that year.

And yet, as modern lifestyle became, in the words of architectural historian Ana Miljački, “one of the most captivating and symbolically powerful registers of the Cold War,” an examination of the Expo pavilion suggests that a wholesale embrace of consumerism and the Western vision of the “good life” proved problematic for the Yugoslav regime.<sup>81</sup> Its vision of modernity in the context of Cold War diplomacy was more closely tied to notions of cultural refinement, purity, and abstraction that characterized interwar avant-gardes, than the postwar drive towards spectacular consumption and technologically driven domestic lifestyles. While overt references to consumerism were omitted from the Brussels exhibition, those themes seemed suitable at home, where citizens needed to be mobilized to engage in self-management and to work harder in pursuit of “third way” socialism. As such, these two exhibitions show that the very idea of the Yugoslav self-managed project—how it was to be defined, measured and displayed—was fragmented, subject to multiple interpretations and debate. At Expo 58 and *Porodica i domaćinstvo*, those dissonant debates were out on display.

## NOTES

- 1 Fedor Kritovac, “Nacionalni dizajn?,” *Industrijsko oblikovanje* 1, no. 2 (1970): 23.
- 2 Milovan Đilas cited in Dennison Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment, 1948–1974* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 54.
- 3 See Dušan Bilandžić, *Borba za samoupravni socijalizam u Jugoslaviji 1945–1969* (Zagreb: Institut za historiju radničkog pokreta Hrvatske, 1969); Sharon Zukin, *Beyond Marx and Tito. Theory and Practice in Yugoslav Socialism* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Vladimir Unkovski-Korica, *The Economic Struggle for Power in Tito’s Yugoslavia. From World War II to Non-Alignment* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2016).
- 4 For a summary of these efforts see Vjenceslav Richter, “Industrijsko oblikovanje kao društveni i kulturni faktor,” *Naše teme*, no. 3 (1962): 453–457.
- 5 The World Expo in Brussels was held between April 17 and October 19, 1958, whilst *Porodica i domaćinstvo* ran from September 7 to 22, 1958.
- 6 For more on Yugoslavia’s role within the non-aligned movement see Tvrtko Jakovina, *Treća Strana Hladnog Rata* (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2011).
- 7 The autonomy of the Yugoslav regime stemmed from the Partisans’ independent effort to liberate the country during the Second World War with little help from the Red Army. Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment*, 28.
- 8 The Basic Law on the Management of State Economic Enterprises and Higher Economic Associations by the Work Collectives was passed by the General Assembly on June 27, 1950. *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*, 61.

- 10** Edvard Kardelj quoted in Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment*, 54.
- 11** Zukin, *Beyond Marx and Tito*, 97.
- 12** Ibid.
- 13** Ibid., 61–62.
- 14** Bernardo Bernardi, “Definicija i društveni značaj industrijskog oblikovanja,” *Arhitektura* XII, nos. 1–6 (1959): 11.
- 15** The competition ran between April 20 and May 31, 1958.
- 16** “Natječaj za idejni projekt Jugoslavenskog paviljona na izložbi u Bruxellesu 1958. G.,” *Arhitektura* X, nos. 1–6 (1956): 67. The jury included Branislav Kojić, Drago Ibler, and Milorad Pantović, nominated by the Council of Associations of Architects of Yugoslavia, and writer and art historian Oto Bihalji-Merin. See Jasna Galjer, *Expo 58 i jugoslavenski paviljon Vjenceslava Richtera* (Zagreb: Horetzky, 2009), 288.
- 17** “Natječaj za idejni projekt,” 67.
- 18** Ibid., 70; “Uži natječaj za Jugoslavenski paviljon za Svjetsku izložbu u Bruxellesu 1958. Godine,” *Arhitektura* XI, nos. 1–6 (1957): 65.
- 19** The first three teams from the initial competition were invited to the second round. The jury for the second competition met in July 1956 and included two additional members, the architects Edvard Ravnikar and Mehmed Kadić. The engineer Đorđe Lazarević and architect Božidar Tomić assessed the technical feasibility of the projects.
- 20** “Uži natječaj,” 65.
- 21** Ibid.
- 22** Galjer, *Expo 58*, 299–300.
- 23** Following the competition, Richter signed the project as the main author, with Weber as an associate. See Galjer, *Expo 58*, 300.
- 24** Richter graduated from the Department of Architecture at the Faculty of Engineering, University of Zagreb, in 1949.
- 25** Exat 51 (short for Experimental atelier) was active between 1950 and 1956. Its members included architects Bernardo Bernardi, Zdravko Bregovac, Božidar Rašica, Vladimir Zarahović, Zvonimir Radić, and Vjenceslav Richter; and artists Ivan Picelj, Aleksandar Srnec, and Vladimir Kristl. See Ješa Denegri, *Exat 51: Nove Tendencije: Umjetnost konstruktivnog pristupa* (Zagreb: Horetzky, 2009).
- 26** Exat 51, *Manifest*, 1951, Marinko Sudac Collection, Zagreb.
- 27** Bernardi quoted in Iva Ceraj, *Bernardo Bernardi: Dizajnersko djelo arhitekta, 1951–1985* (Zagreb: Croatian Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2015): 26. For more on Strižić see Krešimir Galović, “Zdenko Strižić - Natječajni rad za kazalište u Harkovu,” *Peristil - Zbornik radova za povijest umjetnosti* 40, no. 1 (1997), 137–148. For more on Poelzig see Deborah Ascher Barnstone, “Not the Bauhaus: The Breslau Academy of Art and Applied Arts,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 62, no. 1 (2008), 46–55; Julius Poesener, *Hans Poelzig, Reflections on His Life and Work*, ed. Kristin Feieriss (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992).
- 28** Božidar Rašica quoted in Josip Depolo, “Apstrakcija, naša, prva! Okrugli stol o Exatu 51,” *Oko*, 199 (1979): 8.
- 29** For an overview of the Academy of Applied Arts see Jasna Galjer, *Design of the Fifties in Croatia. From Utopia to Reality* (Zagreb: Horetzky, 2004): 60–83; Ana Medić, ed.,

- Refleksije Bauhauasa. Akademija primjenjenih umjetnosti u Zagrebu, 1949–1955* (Zagreb: Galerija Klovićevi dvori, 2019).
- 30** Denegri, *Exat* 51, 32.
- 31** Radovan Ivančević cited in Ana Šeparović, “Od sinteze likovnih umjetnosti do Zagrebačkog salona: prilog poznavanju djelovanja ULUH-a 1960-ih,” *Radovi Instituta za Povijest Umjetnosti*, no. 42 (2018): 175.
- 32** Vjenceslav Richter, “Prognoza životne i likovne sinteze kao izraza naše epohe,” in *Sinturbanizam* (Zagreb: Mladost, 1964): 15.
- 33** Galjer, *Expo* 58, 318.
- 34** Structural engineers from Đuro Đaković Company assessed the work, suggesting it might shift under strong wind. See *Bilten Pripremnog Odbora za učešće FRNJ na Općoj međunarodnoj izložbi u Bruxellesu 1958. godine*, no. 2 (1956), Generalni Komisarijat Jugoslovenske sekcije Opšte međunarodne izložbe u Briselu, Fund no. 56, Folder no. 9, Archives of Yugoslavia.
- AJ-56-9. See also “Uži natječaj,” 65.
- 35** *Ibid.*, 300.
- 36** Other communist countries participating in the fair were the USSR, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary.
- 37** Andrija Mutnjaković, “Expo 58,” *Arhitektura* XII, nos. 1–6 (1958): 52.
- 38** Vjenceslav Richter, “Predmet kao prostorni subjekt: Razmišljanja o izložbama,” *Mozaik*, no. 3 (1954): 43.
- 39** Svetozar Vukmanović Tempo, “Kako smo predstavili našu zemlju na svjetskoj izložbi u Brislu: Dvije ocjene,” *Vjesnik u srijedu*, October 15, 1958, 7.
- 40** *Ibid.*
- 41** Vladimir Kulić, “An Avant-Garde Architecture for an Avant-Garde Socialism: Yugoslavia at EXPO ’58,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 47, no. 1 (2012): 181.
- 42** See, for example, Lewis Siegelbaum, “Sputnik Goes to Brussels: The Exhibition of a Soviet Technological Wonder,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 47, no. 1 (2012): 120–136; Susan E. Reid, “Cold War Cultural Transactions: Designing the USSR for the West at Brussels Expo ’58,” *Design and Culture* 9, no. 2 (2017): 123–145.
- 43** “Izveštaj o nekim problemima i iskustvima našeg nastupanja na Izložbi u Brislu,” Generalni Komisarijat Jugoslovenske sekcije Opšte međunarodne izložbe u Briselu, Fund no. 56, Folder no. 9, Archives of Yugoslavia.
- 44** Kimberly E. Zarecor and Vladimir Kulić, “Socialism on Display: The Czechoslovak and Yugoslavian Pavilions at the 1958 Brussels World’s Fair,” in Laura Hollengreen, Celia Pearce, Rebecca Rouse and Bobby Schweizer, eds, *Meet Me at the Fair. A World’s Fair Reader* (Pittsburgh: ETC/Carnegie Mellon Press, 2014): 232.
- 45** Vukmanović Tempo, “Kako smo predstavili,” 7.
- 46** Boro Pavlović, “Bruxelles 1958.: Jugoslavenski Paviljon,” *Čovjek i prostor* 5, no. 75 (June 15, 1958): 1.
- 47** *Ibid.*
- 48** Zaim Topčić, “Kako smo predstavili: Ni približna slika razvoja,” *Vjesnik u Srijedu*, October 29, 1958, 7.
- 49** For an overview of international press see Galjer, *Expo* 58, 502–519.

- 50 Ibid., 510–511.
- 51 See, for example, “Vaša kuća”, *Svijet*, no.8 (August 1954), n.p.
- 52 Željko Ivanjek cited in Radina Vučetić, “Potrošačko društvo po američkom modelu (jedan pogled na jugoslavensku svakodnevnicu šezdesetih)”, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 44, no.2 (2012): 285. On the US model supermarket see Shane Hamilton, “Supermarket USA Confronts State Socialism: Airlifting the Technopolitics of Industrial Food Distribution into Cold War Yugoslavia”, in Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann, eds., *Cold War Kitchen. Americanization, Technology, and European Users* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 137–159.
- 53 Bernardi, “Definicija i društveni značaj,” 18.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Paul Greenhalgh, “Introduction,” in Paul Greenhalgh, ed., *Modernism in Design* (London: Reaktion Books, 1990): 13 [emphasis in original].
- 56 “Program prve međunarodne revijalne izložbe *Porodica i domaćinstvo*, 7”, Savezni sekretarijat za obrazovanje i kulturu, Fund no.318, Folder no. 151: Druge izložbe, Archives of Yugoslavia.
- 57 Ibid., 4.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 See Chiara Bonfiglioli, *Women and Industry in the Balkans. The Rise and Fall of the Yugoslav Textile Sector* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2019); Sabrina P. Ramet, ed., *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans. Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).
- 60 The new fair was partially completed in Autumn 1957, but the first edition of *Porodica i domaćinstvo* was held in the old venue to the north of the Sava river. See Eve Blau and Ivan Rupnik, eds, *Project Zagreb. Transition as Condition, Strategy, Practice* (Barcelona: Actar, 2007): 214–238.
- 61 “Zagrebački Velesajam,” *Čovjek i prostor* 6, no. 82 (1959): 2–5.
- 62 See Borka Bobovec, Ivan Mlinar, and Domagoj Sentić, “Zagrebački Velesajam kao poticaj razvoju novozagrebačkog centra,” *Prostor* 10, no. 1 (2012), 186–197.
- 63 “Velesajam dokazao snažan napredak naše industrije,” *Vjesnik*, September 11, 1958, 2.
- 64 Jasna Galjer and Iva Ceraj, “Uloga dizajna u svakodnevnom životu na izložbama *Porodica i domaćinstvo*, 1957–1960. godine,” *Radovi instituta za povijest umjetnosti*, no. 35 (2011): 279.
- 65 M. Singer, “Oslobođena radna porodica,” *Vjesnik*, September 16, 1958, 2.
- 66 Galjer and Ceraj, “Uloga dizajna,” 279.
- 67 B. Stošić, “Šetnja kroz izložbu *Porodica i domaćinstvo*,” *Vjesnik*, September 11, 1958, 7.
- 68 Daily newspapers put the final figure at over 1.2 million visitors to the fair in sixteen days. M. G., “Poruke i pohvale u ime stotina tisuća posjetilaca,” *Vjesnik*, September 25, 1958, 7.
- 69 Stošić, “Šetnja kroz izložbu”, 7.
- 70 Singer, “Oslobođena radna porodica,” 2.
- 71 P. J., “Stambena zajednica postaje osnovni suvremeni urbanistički element,” *Vjesnik*, September 27, 1958, 1.

- 72 Andrija Mutnjaković, "Stambena problematika u okviru II Međunarodne izložbe *Porodica i domaćinstvo*," *Čovjek i prostor* 5, no. 79 (1958): 4–5.
- 73 "Jugoslavenska industrija već stoji na zavidnom nivou," *Vjesnik*, September 8, 1958, 1.
- 74 Mutnjaković, "Stambena problematika," 5.
- 75 Galjer and Ceraj, "Uloga dizajna", 85.
- 76 Bernardo Bernardi, "Dva tipa stana sa industrijskom opremom," in *Stanovanje—NK Hrvatska, II. Međunarodna revijalna izložba Porodica i domaćinstvo*, 1958, 4, Osobni arhivski fond Bernarda Bernardija, Folder no. 6, The Croatian Museum of Architecture, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts.
- 77 "Zaključci prvog jugosl. savjetovanja o stambenoj izgradnji i stanovanju u gradovima," *Arhitektura* X, nos. 1–6 (1956): 30.
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- 80 *Program Saveza komunista Jugoslavije. Prihvaćen na Sedmom kongresu Saveza komunista Jugoslavije (22–26. travnja 1958. u Ljubljani)*, (Sisak: 1984): 104, 151, 185, in Igor Duda, "Tehnika Narodu! Trajna dobra, potrošnja i slobodno vrijeme u socijalističkoj Hrvatskoj," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 37, no. 2 (2005): 374.
- 81 Ana Miljački, "The Allegory of the Socialist Lifestyle: The Czechoslovak Pavilion at the Brussels Expo, its Gold Medal and the Politburo," in Robin Schuldenfrei, ed., *Atomic Dwelling. Anxiety, Domesticity and Post-War Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 67.