

# Mitrovica Speaks: A Postmodern Urban Tale

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## Abstract

Predominant studies on Mitrovica, a city in Kosovo, have traditionally employed linear, historical urban narratives that adhere to a universal truth, often diverging from the complex realities perceived by its inhabitants. As this method of narration oftentimes overlooks certain dimensions of urban storytelling, this paper embraces non-linear narration, advocating for a postmodern methodology in framing the urban tale of Mitrovica.

Drawing from the longstanding analogy between architecture and language, the proposed narrative framework envisions the city as a communicative entity, similar to the way words are assembled into sentences within a linguistic structure. It explores how urban components combine to form a cohesive urban identity, thus challenging the conventional notion of urban expression.

The paper analyzes visual and textual materials, coupled with postmodern urban tales, to expand on how Mitrovica articulates its narrative, its syntactic composition, and the auditory perception of its inhabitants. This exploration ultimately sheds light to the complex interplay between urban identity, postmodern narrative techniques, and the communicative potential inherent in cities like Mitrovica, offering new insights into the ways urban spaces are interpreted and engaged with.

**Keywords:** *Mitrovica; Postmodern Narration; Urban Identity; Reticence; Paralepsis.*

## 1. Introduction

Mitrovica epitomizes a city historically rooted in civic engagement, economic prosperity, cultural dynamism, and urban development. To unravel Mitrovica's complex identity over time, it is essential to construct a multidimensional narrative using symbols and fragments that have defined the city at various points. Contemporary discourse highlights a stark contrast between the current perception of the city and nostalgic memories of its past.

As cities evolve, they risk losing the distinctive characteristics that form their unique cultural signatures and intrinsic essence.

The challenge extends beyond Mitrovica's urban evolution to include the potential erosion of its identity. Components that once defined Mitrovica, such as: diverse cultural life, industrial affluence, economic vibrancy, and dynamic intercultural interactions, are at risk of fading away, due to its politically tailored urban profile [1].

These components form the fragments through which Mitrovica communicates its narrative. It is a linear historical narrative consisting of the very fragments, and the voids in between, thus demanding closer examination and revealing of those parts appearing as voids. This paper explores Mitrovica as an analogue to language, an entity that communicates through its elements and its prolonged silence. The city's taciturn nature offers a unique case study for examining people's reactions to its urban language, and the dual interpretations of its silence: *reticence* and *paralepsis* [2].

Mitrovica has persistently spoken through its fragments, many now silent or extinguished. Uncovering these missing pieces that render Mitrovica's narrative incomplete provides insight into how this narrative is perceived and what remains unspoken. This analysis enhances the understanding of Mitrovica's urban identity and illuminates the broader implications of urban silence and communication within architectural theory.

The exploration of these fragments and the silence they embody, emerges from a methodology liberated from the confines of chronological time and theological interpretations of history - the Postmodern Methodology. This approach suggests that historical events and interpretations are not necessarily interconnected but can be deconstructed into independent fragments that form new entities. This fragmented, subjective, and often contradictory nature, underscores the multidimensionality of perceptions, allowing for diverse

interpretations. Hence, the postmodern approach deconstructs the binary nature of traditional narratives:

- Linearity is supplanted by non-linearity and fragmentation (Stewart, 2022);
- Objectivity and the notion of uncontested truth give way to subjectivity and multiple possible truths (Derrida, 1980);
- Certainty and coherence are replaced by uncertainty, contingency, and contested knowledge (Stewart, 2022, pp. 110-112);
- The chronological totality of the modern approach is complemented by the autonomous fragments of the postmodern perspective (Lyotard, 1984);
- Instead of a single linear narrative, there are multiple contextual narratives;
- The seriousness of modern expression is challenged by the ironic and humorous treatment of facts in postmodernism (Literary Theory and Criticism, n.d.);
- Comprehensive narration is substituted with localized narration, focusing on specific contexts, experiences, and dimensions;
- General truths diverge towards the postmodern appreciation of contextual, localized, regional, and collective sensitivities (GetSetNotes, n.d.).

We consider the historical knowledge as a dynamic variable, informed by experiences and collective memory, and we find fundamental the understanding of the city as a language, with its words being the fragments that constitute its identity. This paradigm promotes a deeper comprehension of how architecture, as a communicative medium, conveys the collective memory, identity, and urban and cultural evolution of a city. Consequently, the paper addresses two main axes:

- The fragmented voices of Mitrovica (through notions of Time, Space, Event, and Architecture).
- The silenced fragments of the city (those extinguished through time and space).

Mitrovica, the city that struggles with the unrelenting passage of time, now faces an identity crisis. The crisis worsens when certain aspects of the city are neglected in its documentation, construc-

tion, planning, and interpretation. Drawing from here, the paper aims to identify the fragments that constitute Mitrovica's linguistic pattern, to rely on and use these components to uncover the city's silent meaning, and to engage empathetically with the city by closely listening to the significance behind its muted expressions. Consequently, we embark on a historical journey through Mitrovica's time and space, offering a thus far unattended postmodern urban tale.

## 2. The Urban Tale of Mitrovica

This is the tale of Mitrovica, and how the city of industry, economy, and culture was created:

»Ages ago, three rivers flowing freely decided to form a pact. The Ibër, Sitnica, and Lushta Rivers, united their forces with Rogozna and Kopaonik mountains, to build a city, anchored by nailed bridges, where wise and hardworking people would walk and create a life. They created the heart of the city at the confluence of the Ibër and Lushta Rivers, where public architecture raised, expanding into thriving neighborhoods in its surrounding area. They discovered the nearby mines and unearthed giant wealth of what would be known as Trepça, spreading prosperity across the Western Balkans.

It was foretold that the city would become so rich and renowned that no conqueror could resist it. And so it happened; conquerors would come and go, but citizens would always remain resolute, never allowing their lands to be ravaged. Yet, the pact of rivers and mountains did not foresee this future of ours: one river choked with stones and concrete (Lushta), another stained with blood (Ibër), whilst the mountains witnessed these tragedies in silent terror, powerless to intervene. In the abyss between these petrified mountains, the city remains exposed and vulnerable, ensnared by invisible chains and haunted by imaginary ghosts (of modern-day turmoil). Oblivious individuals tread upon the open pits of the city's foundations - pits left as scars by the destruction of theaters and streets, the stripping of memories. Suspended over this void, the lives of Mitrovica's citizens are more precarious than those in other cities. Lifeless. «

The urban tale unfolds as an enigmatic journey into a poetic, dreamlike exploration, travers-

ing leaps in time. Different eras intermingle in non-linear harmony, defying traditional narratives that confine history within chronological boundaries. As the dreamer's gaze wanders through the cityscape, buildings emerge as silent witnesses to the passage of time, ruins as remnants of the city's evolution, etched into the nostalgic memories of the older generation who recalls Mitrovica with a longing heart. Stories of urban transformation unfold amid the covered Lushta streams (a straightforward resolution of post WWII sanitation problems), the ruins of the Hotel Adriatic (once an active social hub), the City Hammam repurposed as a restaurant, the vanished cinemas (once seven, now none), and bridges bearing the weight of human perception (the stigmatized Ibër Bridge which divides the city), the once-glorious Cultural Centre now overshadowed by a shopping mall, adorned with capitalist insignia. The journey of a harsh urban transformation discloses the battles lost in guarding the pact between rivers and mountains; a pact that paled alongside historic discontinuity.

The city has taken on new odd contours, still in the making. Cinema screens have darkened, theater curtains have fallen forever. Life moves in, life moves out. A forgotten city, a city reborn. And it lost most of its charms of the past, yet it remains special; perhaps the true essence of Mitrovica lies in the way its narrative flows over layers of time. Those who remember how Mitrovica was built and how it once thrived, cannot traverse its streets or view its buildings without conjuring nostalgic images of its former self. This city, unable to forget its past, stands like a retired Olympic medalist, forever haunted by memories of its glorious days.

## 2.1 The Fragmented Voices of Mitrovica: Time, Space, Event, and Architecture

Fragmentation is a hallmark of postmodern literary practice, representing a departure from notions of wholeness and completion, embracing instead discontinuity, isolation, and instability. Fragmented narratives decompose the overarching plot into discrete fragments, integrating them with diverse elements. Jean-François Lyotard, in his seminal work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, argues that metanarratives - grand, overarching explanations of human his-

tory - are inherently limiting and stifle the debate. He posits that the fragmentary nature of historical narratives and knowledge encapsulates a multitude of conflicting truths and perspectives, fostering a richer understanding of the world.

In architectural discourse, the city represents a holistic entity, materialized through a symphony of specific events and the spaces where these events unfold. Events, in this context, are not mere spontaneous occurrences; they emerge from the city's intrinsic circumstances and resonate in the collective memory, contributing to the continuous development of the urban structure. Spaces, whether vivid squares, narrow alleys, or architecture, are interconnected nodes within the intricate web of city's identity. Their significance is derived from the events that occur within and around them (Jacobs, 1961).

- **Time:** This paper treats time as a non-linear concept, where the boundaries between past, present, and future blur, allowing them to coexist. Historical events are viewed not as a hierarchical chronology but as a complex interaction of different temporal layers (Ricoeur, 1983). Mitrovica's narrative is shaped by multiple overlapping historical strata, from the transformative impacts of recent ethnic conflicts to its first mention recorder in 1499 when under the Ottoman Empire, and back to 1303, when the Trepça mine, predating the city itself, was first noted down. These temporal snippets highlight the subjective nature of experiencing time.
- **Space:** The phenomenology of space and its association with acts or sets of acts is crucial to forming a brief program and translating it into physical reality. Various parameters enrich and sustain the program, emphasizing the diversity of spatial interpretations and the blurred boundaries between physical and conceptual space. Space is not merely a neutral backdrop but a product of social practices, culture, and development (Lefebvre, 1991). Mitrovica's identity is forged through these interwoven concepts and the unique spatial dynamics they create. At times, Mitrovica is symbolized by a bridge not used anymore as public space, but as a physical reminder of the divided

city; other times, by the industrial legacy of Trepça, reduced today into a not more than a space of potentials; or by the now-idle transformative influence of the 1874 railway. Amidst these grand narratives, countless smaller stories unfold in neighborhoods and streets, each adding to the city's cacophony of voices, often unheard.

- **Event:** In physics, an event is defined as an occurrence at a specific time and place in space-time (French, 1968). Derrida considers events as disruptive moments that challenge the stability of spatial and temporal frames. Events hold the potential to reshape both physical and conceptual spaces. Postmodern discourse acknowledges the importance of events in shaping historical narratives and architectural experiences (Derrida, 1973). Deleuze and Guattari draw a parallel between events and the process of thinking, unfolding in a non-linear, interconnected manner that challenges traditional chronological structures (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Mitrovica's urban fabric is woven precisely from key events spanning political, cultural, economic, and social spectra. These events, from usurpations and wars to protests, separations, migrations, and cultural festivals, collectively shape Mitrovica's multifaceted urban narrative.
- **Architecture:** In many postmodern studies and theories, architecture transcends its physical form to become a language (Jencks, 1977). When equated with language, architecture is read as a series of fragments that form a coherent corpus within reality. Architecture resembles a masked figure, elusive and hidden behind attraction, words, principles, customs, and myriad stories (Tschumi, 1977). This fills it in with meaning, making it a crucial part of city's heritage. Architecture serves as the common denominator of time, space, and events, materializing these abstract concepts into tangible forms.

In conclusion, Mitrovica's story is told through fragmented voices of time, space, events, and architecture, each contributing to the city's complex iden-

tity. A narrated photographic frame (Figure 1) is one example of figurative tale on city's transformation:

The buildings along the timeless Ibër River mark the origin of this narrative, embodying historical whispers (letter A – primer). The muffled screeches of citizens, echoing through the city's streets, reflect their struggles and aspirations (The Ooo-s). A perpetual transformation is evident in the ongoing dialogue between events and architecture (T–transformation), encapsulating Mitrovica's dynamic evolution, while numerous other conversations intertwine with the city's monologues. This figuration reveals the interconnectedness of fragments, and highlights the importance of understanding the city as a dynamic, evolving narrative.

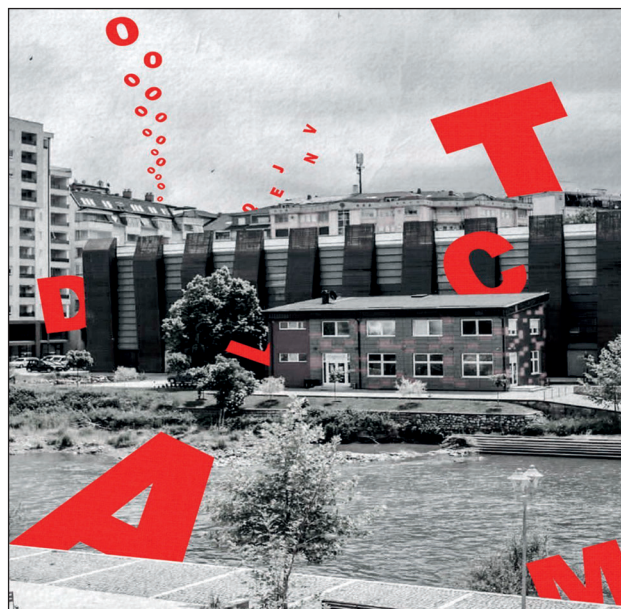


Figure 1. *Mitrovica speaking through its segments* (by authors, 2024)

### 3. How does Mitrovica speak?

How does Mitrovica speak to us? And how can we speak about Mitrovica? Can we start with the question: Who it was and who is now?

Is Mitrovica the city of rock music, more than the bearer of legacy of Trepça? Which one is fundamental to its urban identity? Or, do the people, time, space, events, and architecture speak louder? Who holds the answer to Mitrovica's true identity?

Perhaps, Mitrovica struggles to understand who it is, what it represents, and for whom (and by whom) is being represented? If so, why has this confusion arisen? Did it silence the city?

Can we interpret Mitrovica's silence, its reticence, as a form of speech? How can we understand Mitrovica, if we fail to listen to its way of speaking?

Is Mitrovica's silence a call for abandonment, a cry for help, or a plea for rediscovery? How should we respond? Conceal the fragments of silence and loudness of persisting socio-spatial realpolitik?

### 3.1 Mitrovica's Reticence - Tales of Speaking in *Silence*

The Mitrovica of today cannot mirror its former self; even if it could, they would remain distinct entities. Time has the power to negate certain values, preserve others, and amplify some. The Mitrovica of the present communicates through its fragments, both those it possesses and those it lacks, resulting in a fragmented language, devoid of rhetorical flourish. This incomplete narrative, characterized by reticence, still conveys meaning. Between the two versions of Mitrovica that converse and observe one another, there exists affection, understanding, and love. Stories and fragments that once shaped its identity no longer exist, except in the memories, which echo louder than words, and call for attentive listening, reading between the lines, uncovering hidden truths.

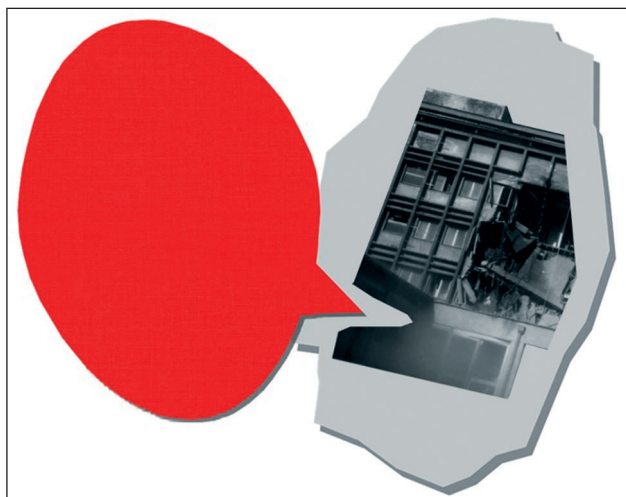


Figure 2. *City tales narrated in silence; Story of Hotel Adriatiku (by authors, 2024)*

Multiple narratives of Mitrovica are present in the city's silent screeches, such as the tragic story of Hotel Adriatiku. This iconic landmark of the 20th century collapsed in 2019, resulting in the death of one person (Prishtina Insight, 2024).

Once a bustling meeting point and a central hub for the city, Hotel Adriatiku's legacy has been overshadowed by this tragic event. The ruins continued to speak for some time, their voices falling on deaf ears or, more accurately, resonating as a muted call (Figure 2).

» Since the 1970s, a grand building stood beside the Lushta River, one of the most luxurious of its time, featuring 50 rooms, a conference hall, and a discotheque. Each room had a globe. Each globe a utopian model of the city of Mitrovica. From year to year, Mitrovica encapsulated in the Hotel Adriatiku, remained in the collective memory, an imagination in retrospect. The future was not to be introduced into the globe... the past was already a utopian vision. Years later, and the rooms were no more... neither were the globes... A new "utopian" model of Mitrovica has to be carved... one with the Hotel Adriatiku in it; a version that can only exist in the imagination, because the Adriatiku is no more.«

What does the story of this iconic history convey today? Is it the destruction of the city's cherished architecture? The loss and unsafe working conditions of its citizens? What about the silence that lingers between the death of a building and that of a citizen? Is it truly the silence, or rather a parepsis, subtly highlighted by the history and the void of what once was.

Mitrovica's parepsis, found in the case of the Hotel Adriatiku reveals tales unfolding in various dimensions: the city's morphology, physical presence or loss of certain parts, cultural, social, economic, and political aspects. Such tales underscore the complexity of city's identity: a reticence that is indirect, yet assertive. The absence of certain fragments, highlighted by Mitrovica's taciturnity, becomes a tool of emphasis, drawing attention to what is left unsaid. This stillness is not empty but filled with intentional gaps that urge further questioning and exploration. By attuning to this quietness, whether perceived as a reticent pause or the omissions of parepsis, deeper meanings and unspoken tale of Mitrovica reemerge.

#### *A Tale of Morphologic Reticence – "Changes"*

The metamorphosis of Mehë Uka Square is a symbol of the city's commitment to increasing urban vitality and prioritizing the urban experience.

From a bustling street to a pedestrian square, this transformation redefines the square as a vibrant core of the city, inviting residents to reclaim public space. Figure 3 illustrates the transformation of the Square through pictures in different times (*then vs now*).

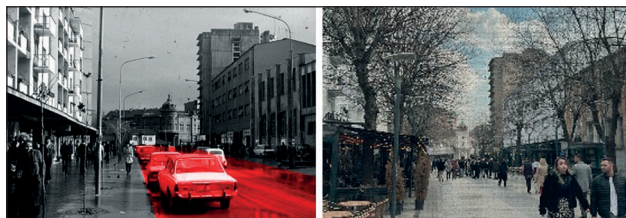


Figure 3. The old road which was used by cars, now serving as Mehë Uka Square (City Museum Archives; by authors 2023)

»A road that was traversed by the noise of cars, now embraces an existence of calmness, liveliness of people... Light steps of passers-by in the twilight of the night, between dim lights of bars closed at midnight, whispering behind the back between the cold walls, transformed the square into a realm of mystery... In a poetic convergence of past and present, a theatric play starts to unfold. A troupe of foreign artists, shedding their jackets onto the ground, begins to play the haunting chords of Frank Sinatra’s “Strangers in the Night” on a solitary guitar, invoking a timeless atmosphere that bridges eras and invites introspection. «

### *A Tale of Physical Reticence – “Building’s Secrets”*

After World War II, socialist architecture became a dominant feature of Mitrovica, though unevenly spread across the city. Pieter Troch argues that this led to a division between the northern and southern parts of the city. The north was progressive and symbolized future development, while the south remained conservative and less urban, with limited transformation potential. This division persists today. The recent conflict, with its destruction, reconstruction, and illegal buildings, has further disrupted the socialist city’s image, adding more chaos to the urban landscape (Maciulewicz, 2019). Some of the buildings constructed in the past century, such as Bankos and Zvezda (Figure 4), still stand tall in the city center. However, the

architectural identities of these structures, along with others in the city, are often at odds, leading to a disjointed urban landscape.



Figure 4. View of the Bankos and Zvezda buildings (collective housing); in 1896 and nowadays (City Museum Archives; by authors 2023)

»Under the pale veil of the moon, in Mehë Uka square, a mysterious affair unfolded between former buildings of Bankos and Zvezda. As the clock ticks toward midnight, a melody flashes the concrete veins of Bankos, awakening memories from the past and inviting Zvezda to waltz. Haunted by memories... all the years they lived there, together... facing each other like two parallel verticals... their shadows joined hands in a dance. Balconies, windows, walls, dressed and changed... chronicling shared secrets from many years ago to today. Stoically, the day finds them resuming their silent dialogue with the city, adding another layer to Mitrovica’s architectural chronicles. Another day dawns for both, with some stories locked in their concrete mouths—stories and secrets without an end. «

### *A Tale of Social Reticence – “Continuity”*

The banks of the Ibri River at the central part of the city used to serve as primary recreational spaces of Mitrovica (Figure 5). Today, this figure is harshly silenced and substituted with the divided city maxim – the river being at the heart of the division, despite the efforts of changing the narrative of the river today.



Figure 5. The Ibri River; as a recreational spot in 1967 and in 2022 (City Museum Archives; Mitrovica Guide, 2023)

»The banks of the Ibri River narrate a serene tale of time’s passage. The river whispers: “... children’s laughter splashed my waters... playful footsteps slid across thousands of stones... the nervous voices of little ones dipping their heads into the big brooms took over my days.” The river shares many stories and chuckles: “You know nothing... ha-ha... you know nothing, no, it’s fortunate that I am a river and I don’t speak... I see much, I know much... but I don’t talk. «

***A Tale of Cultural Reticence – “The City of Seven Cinemas”***

During the last century, Mitrovica gained recognition for its vibrant culture, rock music, arts, and sports. However, after the 1999 war, the city’s prominence as a cultural, economic, and industrial center began to diminish. Once home to seven active cinemas, today it has none (Figure 6). The Pallas Hotel Cinema was demolished shortly after the war, followed by others. Despite efforts at cultural revitalization, post-war Mitrovica has experienced a steady decline (Hajdari, 2024).

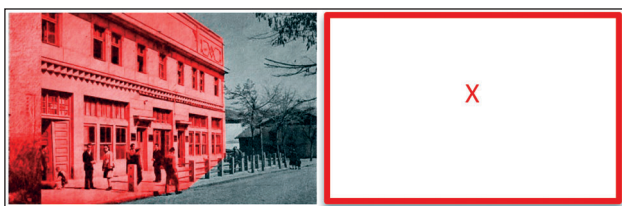


Figure 6. Hotel Palace Cinema then vs its inexistence today (City Museum Archives, by authors 2023)

»Doors of buildings, nest to doors of cinemas, nest to windows of new horizons... into the world of art, culture, and cinema... an encyclopedia. At a time when the city was surrounded by 7 cinemas from all sides, one worry loomed larger than the others: the endless que to buy tickets. Dreams materialized on screens. The film is titled *When Mitrovica meets Mitrovica after 20 years*: a utopia of parallel cities, where the cinematic landscape echoes a surreal monologue, in paranoid dimensions, where the city itself fails to know itself better. Once a drawer of dreams, now it stands empty; the cinematographic archive of a city, which mostly spoke about culture through such fragments as theater scenes and cinema halls. Faded

in memories are the ques, the movie posters, and with them, a touching tale of the loss of living scenes... now replaced by emptiness. Mitrovica remains eager for the cinematic magic that used to paint its evenings, liveliness and happy voices in the corridors of hotels, centers, and improvised buildings, all nests to cinema halls. Mitrovica in 2024 silently bows its head, in defeat in a battle that has not even started... “THE END... “

“How about we go for another comedy movie?”

“Yes, the most watched movie of 2023 is playing tonight at the Ylli cinema, I suggest we watch it”... «

***A Tale of Physical and Economic Reticence – “The Intensive Care Unit – Trepça”***

The history of the Trepça mine and its surrounding area is long and rich, culminating in the ethnological, political, and economic stagnation that has persisted since the last war (Feraud, Maliqi, & Meha, 2007). The majority of the industrial sites and buildings that once supported Trepça’s industrial development now lie abandoned (Figure 7).

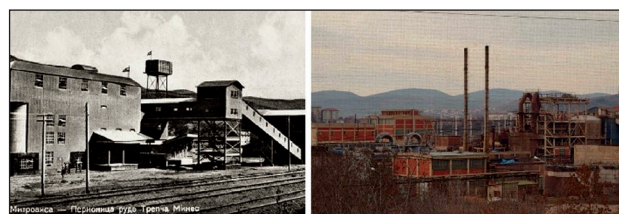


Figure 7. Trepça Industrial Complex in XX century vs in the abandoned state today (City Museum Archives, 2023) (City Museum Archives, Mitrovica Guide 2023)

»Among the white-clad walls, geometries born of necessity and work unfold. The building with a different uniform that is but a patina of an enduring heritage, stands there as a testament to a life that once flourished. Iron veins that once pulsed with mining wealth and prosperity penetrate a body that can no longer move. The windows are like empty eyes, open to an unknown horizon of the future, full of fog and uncertainty. Facades subjected to merciless time, betray a purposeful design with the chaos of human abandonment... But Trepça endures, a patient in this architectural ward that once promised life... today a skeletal remnant,

calls out pensively for a step... an electroshock... a spiritual revival... The heart that once resounded loudly with the vitality of industry now resounds with silence. Arteries blocked by the remains of abandonment no longer pump the blood of economic and industrial life. And Trepça remains motionless, trapped in an extreme melancholy of what it once was... carrying with it the weight of oblivion, of no returning. In this architectural ward, the heart of Trepça remains a silent witness of its economic mortality, a colossal body, physically existing and spiritually dead. And it calls out... it continues to call persistently, for an infusion... a human effort... for something that will give it life. «

### *A Tale of Political Reticence – “Once upon a time... right in this bridge”*

The Ibri Bridge has seen a drastic shift in perception since the 1999 war. Initially, it was a symbol of urban connection. Today, however, the Ibër Bridge is synonymous with division, overshadowed by political tensions. The current stigmatization is largely due to media and negative publicity, transforming a once significant city symbol into a point of contention (Figure 8).



Figure 8. *The Ibri Bridge, view showing the northern part of Mitrovica in the 1970s (City Museum Archives, 2023)*

From the under-bridge; a coherent dimension of years ago:

Under the bridge, life is happy... people shake hands as they cross the bridge... spoiled children tug at their mothers' sleeves... some cars pass, and some stop to take pictures of the Ibër River. Leaning on the wooden, then iron frames of the bridge structure, hundreds of people stop time there every day, right on the bridge. They pass here and there, sometimes you hear raised voices, and someone is always in a hurry, but no one gets in your way. No-

body stops... the bridge doesn't break... it doesn't divide, it doesn't break down.

From the over-bridge; known by the same name, in a parallel dimension:

Up the bridge, life unfolds differently... tension, protection, obstacles, separation, riots, north-south, news, headlines... forced perceptions. The bridge built by fear overlays a happy bridge beneath, unaware of its existence...

Is fear tangible?!

Who changed the narrative of the bridge? «

### 3.2 Mitrovica's Urban Palimpsest – The 'writing' of the city by its every single inhabitant

The concept of the urban palimpsest is a crucial tool in urbanism discourse, clarifying its nature as a complex cultural phenomenon. Traditionally, a palimpsest refers to a reused manuscript bearing remnants of earlier writings (The Gale Group, 2005). In urban contexts, it signifies a space with visible layers of different temporal aspects beneath its surface. These layers, whether temporal, spatial, or imaginative, embody the continuous transformation of an urban entity (Buckler, 2014a).

Understanding a city like Mitrovica, with its multifaceted identity, from multicultural hub to industrial powerhouse, requires recognizing the interplay of preserved, transformed, and overlapping components that form its dynamic urban landscape. Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, relates the creation of an urban palimpsest with the unconscious 'writing' of a city by its inhabitants through daily life. While the broader urban framework might be perceived from a distance, those on the ground are often unaware of their crucial role in crafting the city's 'urban text' (Buckler, 2014b).

This concept extends beyond individuals to include all forces shaping the city, such as time, space, events, and architecture. By examining the unfolding layers, the true nature of an urban entity can be understood. Perceiving a city as a palimpsest is essential for grasping its continuous evolution, expansion, and recreation of multiple urban layers.

To comprehend Mitrovica's spatial and morphological changes over the years, urban maps and plans from 1950 to the present have been layered,



revealing the city’s evolving narrative (Figure 9). Every line, shape, and layer of this map was crafted by inhabitants of Mitrovica, as well as by countless passers-by, each leaving their permanent marks on the city’s evolving narrative. These collective imprints, formed through daily interactions and fleeting moments, weave a complex tapestry that reveals the echoes of Mitrovica’s rich and dynamic history. The city’s streets, buildings, and public spaces are inscribed with written stories and spoken tales, each contributing to the vibrant and multifaceted identity of Mitrovica. Through these intertwined narratives, the city speaks, bearing witness to its past and continuously shaping its future.

### 3.3 The meaning behind Mitrovica’s silence – What we need to listen to

Beneath Mitrovica’s apparent silence lie countless stories and voices. This silence serves as a rich canvas painted with the hues of history, culture, and transformation. To truly understand this art, one must listen closely and empathize with the city’s unique mode of expression. Mitrovica’s reticence is not merely a sign of absence or reluctance to share but is a potent form of communication,

demanding a deeper engagement with its phenomenological associations.

The challenge lies in how people respond to its silence. Do they hear it as a call to leave [3], a sign of neglect, or a plea for help? Or do they recognize an opportunity to rediscover and reconnect with the city’s hidden layers?

By engaging with Mitrovica’s reticent language, the unspoken words and the hidden fragments behind the layers of time, its identity and legacy can be uncovered. This methodological approach should be integrated and prioritized in the city’s planning and urban development processes to ensure comprehensive and sustainable growth.

The city’s true narrative is found in what is unsaid, what is omitted, and what is left to interpretation, it is exactly this aspect – *paralepsis*, that should be acknowledged in attempts to reconcile the complex dialogue between its past and present, its articulated and unarticulated words.

## 4. Conclusion

The city is a complex, multidimensional, and holistic entity, its present form the result of continuous evolution over the years. Equally intricate

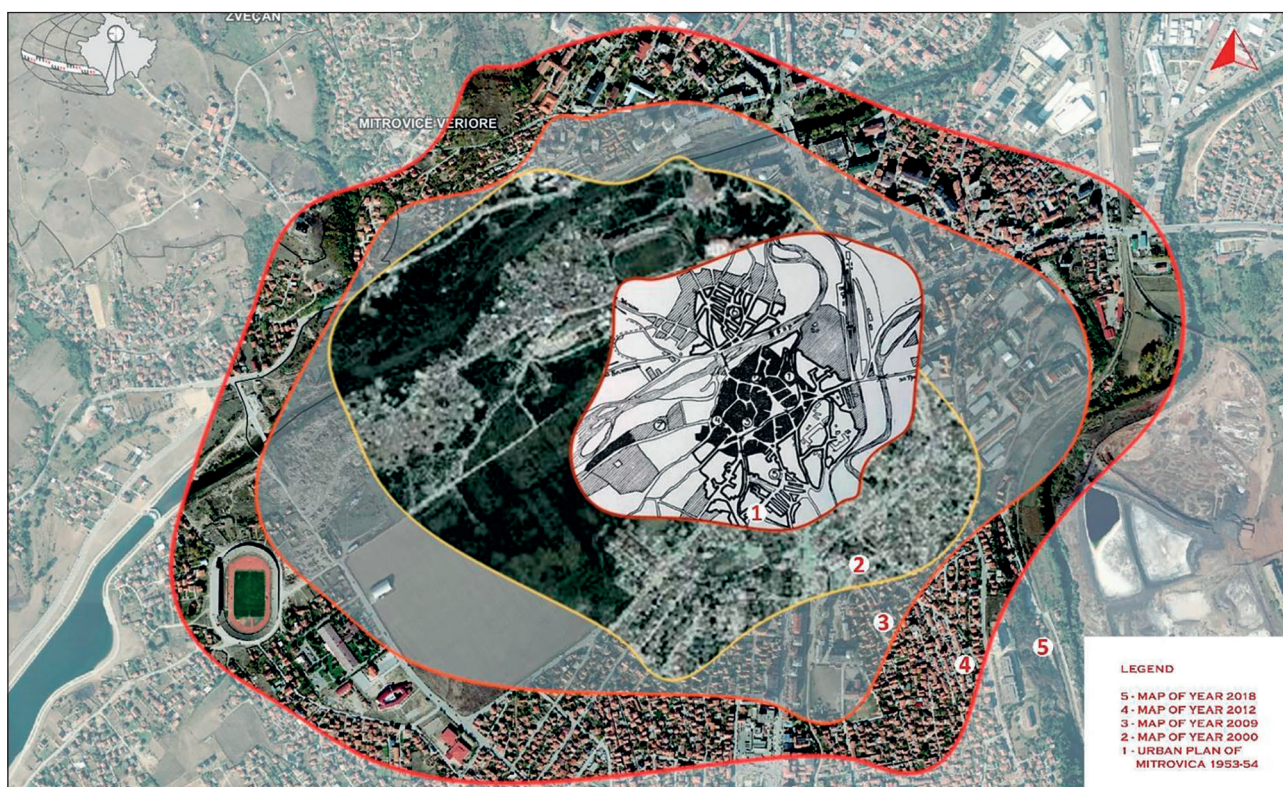


Figure 9. Mitrovica’s urban palimpsest (by authors, 2024)

is the question of its identity and the various epithets it acquires and sheds during its development. Such is the case with Mitrovica, a city once recognized as a multicultural settlement, an industrial giant, a strategic garrison, an economic center, and a hub of art and rock music. Mitrovica embodied all these roles and more.

Acknowledging Mitrovica as it once was, a promising city of the future, this study seeks to understand its current identity, the multidimensional fusion of past and present, and to explore the city through a postmodern lens. This research pioneers a new narrative paradigm for Kosovar cities, emphasizing non-linear development and liberation from the constraints of traditional historical narratives. While cities are often represented through historical chronicles, the missing pieces of urban histories remain largely untouched and unexplored. Such elements are crucial in articulating a comprehensive urban identity, based not only on the materiality of architectural and urban forms but also on immaterial attributes like actions, traditions, and ways of living.

The application of proven theoretical methods, including photographic interpretation as material evidence of a time and place, establishes a new tradition and interpretive approach. In the case of Mitrovica and its urban tale, this highlights the significant role that narrative plays in achieving a deep understanding and visioning of the city. This study proposes future trajectories for cities by encouraging the preservation of their unique stories. However, Mitrovica's Urban Tale is not merely a theoretical exploration; it unveils a paradoxical reality where the city's story remains intact, while essential fragments of its identity are lost and muted, creating voids within its urban fabric.

This paper addresses the inherent challenge of preserving and conserving identity amidst the changes imposed by time. It prompts a deeper inquiry into the forces that shape city narratives and the implications for architectural practice and future urban planning.

## Endnotes

- [1] Following the Kosovo War of 1998-99, Mitrovica has become a symbol of ethnic division. The city has been divided between an Albanian-majority part south of the Ibër River, and a Serb-majority part north of the River, an area of about 1.5 square kilometers. Following the 2013 Brussels Agreement this area was granted the status of municipality: The Municipality of North Mitrovica. The city's division has reinforced its socio-economic crisis fueled by ethnic tensions.
- [2] Paralepsis (or Omission) - a rhetorical strategy (and logical fallacy) of emphasizing a point by seeming to pass over it. While in reticence a direct suggestive figure leaves in silence to speak more forcefully, on the contrary, paralepsis is an indirect, suggestive, and harassing figure that denies in order to assert forcefully.
- [3] Mitrovica has witnessed significant migration due to economic struggles and political unrest, resulting in population decline particularly in urban areas. Job scarcity has driven many Albanian workers to seek opportunities abroad, while political conflicts, notably in northern Mitrovica, have displaced residents, intensifying demographic shifts. This persistent migration, fueled by economic instability and ongoing displacement, has strained relations between locals and newcomers, adding complexity to Mitrovica's demographic dynamics.

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