

Chronotopes of Catastrophe

At the beginning of 2025, *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* announced that the symbolic *Doomsday Clock* had been advanced to 89 seconds to midnight. This metaphorical scale—a device for measuring the degree of global precarity and the potential for humanity’s self-destruction—has never registered closer to “midnight,” the moment of the world’s imagined end. The Clock was inaugurated in 1947 by scientists of the Manhattan Project (including figures such as Albert Einstein and J. Robert Oppenheimer) to function as a crucial indicator of global instability and fragility of our civilization. This year’s decision to move its hands forward signals the convergence of multiple contemporary threats: from the specter of nuclear conflict and global warfare, through climate change and extreme natural events, to the risks inherent in the misuse of artificial intelligence and the potential emergence of new pandemics. The close proximity of an apocalyptic future is thus not only a subject of scientific modeling but an increasingly central element in state and international risk management strategies. For instance, the European Union adopted a Preparedness Union Strategy to prevent and react to emerging threats and crises in March 2025, defining rapid-response mechanisms for emergency situations. Such agendas entail the activation of civil protection systems through warning exercises that instruct citizens on immediate behavior in the event of war, a nuclear attack, or a natural disaster. This includes testing automated mobile alerts and developing digital applications that can, within moments, transform entire cities into zones for catastrophe simulation. These practices, though intended for the protection of the population, profoundly shift our relationship to the everyday, where preparedness for a state of emergency becomes an unavoidable, constitutive element of the social reality—a domain regulated by a permanent state of tension, uncertainty, and the pervasive fear of imminent catastrophe.

Within the context of a (re)established, and seemingly continuously renewed state of catastrophe preparedness, which has persisted since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019, Ivan Petrović’s photographic project *Underground Shelters* confirms its actuality and

acquires an additional layer of critical significance. This series, created over a ten-year period (2002–2011) across multiple cities in Europe, reads today not merely as an archive of past threats and fears, but as a layered visual commentary on the contemporary condition of permanent crisis.¹

Petrović approaches the underground shelters as sites of urban archaeology, translating them into a photographic image where the material remains of failed Modernist visions of progress intertwine with the infrastructural traces of Cold War military paranoia. In these subterranean spaces, which become the subject of his photographic inquiry, collective notions of security, survival, and the possibility of sustaining life amidst destruction are inscribed. Although typologically uniform and technically utilitarian, the shelters in Petrović's work emerge as multifaceted symbols of an era: at once relics of past catastrophic imaginaries and reflections of a present world living once again under a horizon of uncertainty and fear of mass destruction. Conceived as underground structures intended to precept and sustain the civilian population, the shelters were designed to ensure the continuity of life in the event of nuclear war. Their specific materiality (concrete walls, decaying interiors, outdated ventilation, and electrical supply systems) constitutes an archive of the experience of an epoch that believed in security through isolation, in the rationality of technology, and in the possibility of controlling catastrophe. From today's perspective, however, they appear as a kind of time capsules in which the fears of the past intersect with the anxieties of the present.

Within the context of Petrović's photographic *oeuvre*, it is important to note that this series of photographs anticipates the artist's sustained interest in the observation of interior scenes, specifically the interior as a locus of concentrated and condensed time, where the rupture of a former regime and an approaching change converge. In *Underground Shelters*, the interior functions as a conserved environment in which historical fear and present-day anxiety remain in tension. This specific liminal ambivalence of the interior becomes further elaborated as a conceptual framework in Petrović's subsequent work. Such an approach characterizes the series of photographs *Reconstruction* (2008) and *Building* (2012), both developed as studies of the interior of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade during its reconstruction, as well as the

¹ The *Underground Shelters* series of photographs was initiated in 2002 in the Netherlands as part of the *Civilians in Uniform* project, where shelters in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Utrecht were photographed. The commenced work continued throughout 2003 and 2004, initially in Serbia (Belgrade, Kruševac) and Austria (Vienna, Eisenstadt, Graz), and subsequently in Germany in 2011 (Regensburg).

photographic project *Eclipse* (2011), in which the artist examines the untouched interior of the atomic bunker in Konjic prior to its conversion into an exhibition space.

By approaching the shelter interior as a distinct archive of historical tension, Petrović situates his work with the broader field of the visual culture of the nuclear age—an arena shaped in dual ways by the medium of photography. On the one hand, photography served as a primary mode of visual representation for the postwar atomic era, while on the other, it actively shaped the the perception and comprehension of Cold War reality itself.² Following the assertion of photographer Blake Fitzpatrick, who emphasizes that “the meaning of nuclear war always transcends the partiality of any representational framework,”³ we may ask what role photography plays in understanding the post-atomic legacy and in articulating contemporary concern about nuclear threat. In this context, Petrović’s approach to photography can be interpreted as an endeavor to map sites where the visual tension between archiving and anticipating nuclear catastrophe becomes materially inscribed. The *Underground Shelters* thus operate both as witness-images of the post-catastrophic imagination and as instruments for its critical re-examination.

In Petrović’s photographic work, the underground shelters are transformed from architectural spaces of protection into sights of political and civilizational fragility, functioning simultaneously as visual manifestations of contemporary anxiety. What was once concealed beneath the surface—the infrastructure of fear and survival—becomes visible in his photographs, exposing the tensions between technological rationality and existential powerlessness in the face of global crises. The aesthetic of dereliction, marked by traces of erosion, disuse, but also by the new employment and repurposing of the shelter spaces, becomes a means of critically reflecting on a society situated in a paradoxical synthesis of progress, fear, and isolation; a society living in a state of permanent anticipation of catastrophe. In this regard, these photographs function as a testimony to an epoch where the end of the world is no longer imagined as an event, but as a permanent condition.

² Claudette Lauzon, John O’Brian, “Introduction: To See through Post-Atomic Eyes,” *Post-Atomic Eyes*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal and Kingston 2020, 7.

³ Blake Fitzpatrick, “Atomic Photographs in a Fallout Shelter,” *The Cultural Work of Photography in Canada*, ur. Carol Payne, Andrea Kunard, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal and Kingston 2011, 195.

Petrović approaches the shelters as spatial manifestations of paradox: “While offering a certain kind of security, [atomic shelters] simultaneously attest to the fact that genuine security does not exist; that the safety they offer pertains to situations of general insecurity, and that their existence is justified by wars.”⁴ By spatializing this paradox, which equally expresses a belief in the possibility of individual survival and an acceptance of the world’s potential destruction, Petrović’s photographs register the shelter interiors as spaces saturated with the tension between preservation and annihilation. They function as visual meditation on humanity’s need for control, anticipation, and fear of catastrophe, as well as on the limits of imagined safety. In this light, underground shelters can be understood as the architecture of failure—the failure of politics, diplomacy, negotiation, and all mechanisms that should secure peace and stability.

In Ivan Petrović’s photographs, underground shelters also appear as ruins of the nuclear age and Cold War culture, in the sense articulated by Brian Dillon: “The modern ruin—the industrial ruin, the defunct image of future leisure (the vacant mall or abandoned cinema), or the specter of Cold War dread—is in fact always, inevitably, a ruin of the future. And that future seems, retrospectively, to have taken over the entire twentieth century: all of its iconic ruins (...) now look like relics of lost futures, whether utopian or dystopian.”⁵ Dillon’s formulation opens one of the key dimensions for interpreting Petrović’s *Underground Shelters*, in which the contemporary ruin no longer signals the decay of the past, but the erosion of an imagined future. In addition to making visible the collapse of an ideological matrix that once promised security through isolation and technological rationality, Petrović’s photographs also point to the gradual disintegration of social frameworks grounded in the values of modernity and the idea of social progress. By focusing on the representation of the conserved legacy of a (possible) catastrophe, on recording the subterranean spatial infrastructure of a permanent state of preparedness, Petrović’s shelter photographs evoke an atmosphere of suspended future and articulate the specific temporality of these spaces. The very act of photographing the shelters thus becomes a temporal gesture itself one—concentrated in the tension between the past, the present, and the possible.

⁴ From a written statement by I. Petrović.

⁵ Brian Dillon, “Fragments from a History of Ruin”, *Cabinet* 20, Winter 2005/2006, <https://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/20/dillon.php>.

In Petrović's work, photography is not merely a means of documenting and displaying, but a medium of translation in the sense of intervening or mediating between past events and their imprints on forthcoming time. In *Underground Shelters* photography is engaged as a means to re-signify the materiality of spaces of uncertainty into critically constituted observations about society, history, and expectation, through the production of a surplus of meaning that opens up space for the interpretation of a latent, post-cataclysmic future. The shelter is a structure conceived to "halt" time, to suspend the flow of history, and to "amortize" the catastrophe occurring above ground. In this respect, it is analogous to photography, which operates as an action of temporary fixation. The translation of the shelter into a photographic image unfolds as a gestural reflection on temporality in a world organized around protocols of preparedness, evacuation drills, and digital warning systems. The photography of the shelters thus becomes a dual temporal intervention, where the permanence of the architecture and the temporality of the photographic medium mutually reinforce each other in constructing a concentrated time charged with uncertainty, anticipation, and silent waiting. Like a dual chronotope, the shelters become a space that promises the physical suspension of the cataclysm, but also the suspension of the future. Hence, Petrović reveals the underground shelters not only as specific architectural structures or the remnants of urban archaeology, but also as temporally affective spaces, where history, anticipation, and imagination converge in a *topos* that ensures the persistence of crisis and insecurity. These spatial structures appear as the ruins of past fears, but also as images of a present in which the possibility of the end of the world has become an everyday, administratively regulated horizon of experience.

Hronotopi katastrofe

Bilten atomskih naučnika (The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists) objavio je početkom 2025. godine da je simbolički Sat sudnjeg dana (*Doomsday Clock*) pomeren unapred, na 89 sekundi do ponoći. Ova metaforička skala, koja meri stepen globalne ugroženosti i mogućnost (samo)uništenja čovečanstva, nikada nije bila bliža „ponoći“, odnosno trenutku zamišljenog kraja sveta. Časovnik su 1947. godine napravili naučnici okupljeni oko Projekta Menhetn (među kojima su bili i Albert Ajnštajn i Džulijus Robert Openhajmer) s namerom da funkcioniše kao indikator globalne nestabilnosti i ranjivosti naše civilizacije. Ovogodišnja odluka o pomeranju njegovih kazaljki unapred upućuje na višestruke savremene pretnje: od upotrebe nuklearnog oružja i globalnih ratnih sukoba, preko klimatskih promena i ekstremnih prirodnih nepogoda, do rizika od zloupotrebe veštačke inteligencije i mogućnosti pojave novih pandemija. Bliska apokaliptična budućnost nije samo predmet naučnih procena, već i sve prisutnija agenda državnih i međunarodnih strategija upravljanja rizicima. Tako je i Evropska unija, u martu ove godine, usvojila Strategiju spremnosti za sprečavanje i reagovanje na nove pretnje i krize kojom se definišu mehanizmi za brzo delovanje u vanrednim situacijama. Ovakve agende podrazumevaju reaktivaciju sistema civilne zaštite kroz sprovođenje vežbi upozorenja koje građane informišu o ponašanju u slučaju ratnog stanja, nuklearnog napada ili elementarne nepogode: testiraju se automatska obaveštenja na mobilnim uređajima i razvijaju digitalne aplikacije koje u realnom vremenu, za nekoliko trenutaka, mogu čitave gradove da transformišu u zone za simulaciju katastrofe. Takve prakse, iako namenjene zaštiti stanovništva, značajno menjaju odnos prema svakodnevicu, u kojoj pripravnost na vanrednu situaciju postaje neizbežan konstitutivni element društvene realnosti, koja se reguliše permanentnim stanjem tenzije, neizvesnosti i straha pred mogućnošću katastrofe.

U kontekstu (ponovno) uspostavljenog, a čini se i kontinuirano obnavljanog stanja pripravnosti na katastrofu, koje traje još od izbijanja pandemije kovida-19 krajem 2019. godine, fotografski projekat *Podzemna skloništa* Ivana Petrovića potvrđuje svoju aktuelnost i stiče dodatni sloj kritičkog značenja. Ova serija, koja je nastajala tokom desetogodišnjeg perioda (2002–2011) u više evropskih gradova, danas se čita

ne samo kao arhiv prošlih pretnji i strahova već i kao slojeviti vizuelni komentar savremenog stanja trajne krize.⁶

Petrović podzemnim skloništima pristupa kao lokalitetima urbane arheologije, prevodeći ih u fotografsku sliku u kojoj se prepliću materijalni ostaci izneverenih modernističkih vizija o progresu i infrastrukturni tragovi hladnoratovske vojne paranoje. U tim podzemnim prostorima, koji postaju predmet njegovog fotografskog istraživanja, upisane su kolektivne predstave o sigurnosti, preživljavanju i mogućnosti održanja života usred razaranja. Premda tipološki ujednačena i tehnički utilitarna, skloništa se u Petrovićevom radu otkrivaju kao višeznačni simboli epohe: istovremeno kao relikti prošlih imaginacija katastrofe i kao odrazi savremenog sveta, koji ponovo živi pred horizontom neizvesnosti i straha od masovne destrukcije. Zamišljena kao podzemne strukture namenjene zaštiti i preživljavanju civilnog stanovništva, skloništa su imala funkciju da obezbede kontinuitet života u uslovima nuklearnog rata. Njihova specifična materijalnost (betonski zidovi, oronuli enterijeri, zastareli sistemi ventilacije i električnog napajanja) oblikuje arhiv iskustva jedne epohe koja je verovala u sigurnost kroz izolaciju, racionalnost tehnike i mogućnost kontrole nad katastrofom. Iz današnje perspektive, međutim, ona se ukazuju kao svojevrsne vremenske kapsule u kojima se ukrštaju strahovi prošlosti i anksioznosti savremenosti.

U kontekstu Petrovićevog fotografskog opusa valja naglasiti i da ova serija fotografija anticipira umetnikovo interesovanje za opservaciju prizora unutrašnjih prostora, odnosno za enterijer kao mesto koncentrisanog i kondenzovanog vremena u kome se susreću prestanak prethodnog poretka i nadolazeća promena. U *Podzemnim skloništima* enterijer funkcioniše kao konzervirani ambijent napetosti između istorijskog straha i teskobe sadašnjosti, a ova specifična liminalna ambivalentnost unutrašnjeg prostora razvija se dalje kao konceptualni okvir u Petrovićevom radu. Takav pristup karakteriše serije fotografija *Rekonstrukcija* (2008) i *Zgrada* (2012), razvijene kao studije unutrašnjosti Muzeja savremene umetnosti u Beogradu za vreme rekonstrukcije ove zgrade, te fotografski projekat *Eklipsa* (2011), u kome autor istražuje netaknuti enterijer atomskog bunkera u Konjicu uoči njegove prenamene u izložbeni prostor.

Pristupajući enterijeru skloništa kao svojevrsnom arhivu istorijske napetosti, Petrović uspostavlja vezu sa širim poljem vizuelne kulture nuklearnog doba, koja je dvostruko uobličena posredstvom fotografije. S jedne strane, fotografija je služila kao sredstvo vizuelne reprezentacije posleratne atomske

⁶ Serija fotografija *Podzemna skloništa* započeta je u okviru projekta *Civilians in Uniform* 2002. godine u Holandiji, kada su fotografisana skloništa u Amsterdamu, Rotterdamu i Utrehtu. Započeti rad nastavljen je tokom 2003. i 2004. godine, najpre u Srbiji (Beograd, Kruševac) i Austriji (Beč, Ajzenštad, Grac), a potom i u Nemačkoj 2011. godine (Regenzburg).

epohe, dok je s druge strane funkcionisala kao medij aktivnog formiranja percepcije i razumevanja hladnoratovske stvarnosti.⁷ Sledeći tvrdnju fotografa Blejka Ficpatrika (Blake Fitzpatrick), koji ističe da „značenje nuklearnog rata uvek prevazilazi parcijalnost bilo kog reprezentacijskog okvira”,⁸ možemo postaviti pitanje o ulozi fotografije u razumevanju postatomske zaostavštine i u artikulaciji savremene zabrinutosti povodom nuklearne opasnosti. U tom kontekstu, Petrovićev fotografski pristup može se tumačiti kao poduhvat mapiranja prostora u kojima se vizuelna tenzija između arhiviranja i anticipacije nuklearne katastrofe konkretno materijalizuje. Podzemna skloništa funkcionišu kao slike-svedoci postkatastrofične imaginacije, ali i kao instrumenti njenog kritičkog preispitivanja.

U Petrovićevom fotografskom radu podzemna skloništa se transformišu iz arhitektonskih prostora zaštite u prizore političke i civilizacijske krhkosti, u isto vreme funkcionišući kao vizuelne manifestacije savremene anksioznosti. Ono što je nekada bilo skriveno pod zemljom – infrastruktura straha i preživljavanja – u njegovim fotografijama postaje vidljivo, razotkrivajući napetosti između tehnološke racionalnosti i egzistencijalne nemoći pred globalnim krizama. Estetika zapuštenosti, obeležena tragovima erozije, nefunkcionalnosti, ali i nove upotrebe i prenamene prostora skloništa, postaje sredstvo kritičkog promišljanja savremenog društva koje, u paradoksalnom spoju napretka, straha i izolacije, živi u stanju permanentne anticipacije katastrofe. U tom smislu, ove fotografije funkcionišu kao svedočanstvo epohe u kojoj se kraj sveta više ne zamišlja kao događaj, već kao trajno stanje.

Petrović posmatra skloništa kao prostorne manifestacije paradoksa: „Pružajući određenu vrstu sigurnosti, [atomska skloništa] istovremeno svedoče o tome da prava sigurnost ne postoji – da se bezbednost koja se nudi odnosi na situacije opšte nesigurnosti i da je njihovo postojanje opravdano ratovima.”⁹ Uprostorujući ovaj paradoks, koji jednako izražava veru u mogućnost individualnog preživljavanja i prihvatanje potencijalnog uništenja sveta, Petrovićeve fotografije beleže enterijere skloništa kao prostore zasićene tenzijom između očuvanja i uništenja, te funkcionišu kao vizuelne refleksije o čovekovoj potrebi za kontrolom, anticipaciji i strahu od katastrofe, kao i o granicama zamišljene sigurnosti.

⁷ Claudette Lauzon, John O’Brian, “Introduction: To See through Post-Atomic Eyes,” *Post-Atomic Eyes*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal and Kingston 2020, 7.

⁸ Blake Fitzpatrick, “Atomic Photographs in a Fallout Shelter,” *The Cultural Work of Photography in Canada*, ur. Carol Payne, Andrea Kunard, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal and Kingston 2011, 195.

⁹ Iz pisane izjave I. Petrovića.

U tom svetlu, podzemna skloništa mogu se razumeti kao arhitektura neuspeha – neuspeha politike, diplomatije, pregovaranja i svih mehanizama koji bi trebalo da obezbede mir i stabilnost.

U fotografijama Ivana Petrovića podzemna skloništa se ukazuju i kao ruine nuklearnog doba i hladnoratovske kulture u smislu u kome Brajan Dilon (Brian Dillon) artikuliše ovaj pojam: „Moderna ruina – industrijska ruina, nefunkcionalna slika budućeg slobodnog vremena (prazan tržišni centar ili napušteni bioskop), ili avet hladnoratovskog straha – u stvari je uvek, neizbežno, ruina budućnosti. I čini se da je ta budućnost, retrospektivno, obuhvatila ceo dvadeseti vek: sve njene ikonične ruševine (...) sada izgledaju kao relikti izgubljenih budućnosti, bilo utopijskih ili distopijskih.”¹⁰ Dilonova formulacija otvara jednu od ključnih dimenzija za čitanje Petrovićevih *Podzemnih skloništa*, u kojoj se savremena ruina više ne odnosi na propast prošlosti, već na eroziju zamišljene budućnosti. Pored toga što čine vidljivim urušavanje jedne ideološke matrice, koja je obećavala bezbednost kroz izolaciju i tehnološku racionalnost, Petrovićeve fotografije podzemnih skloništa upućuju na postepenu dezintegraciju društvenih okvira koji se temelje na vrednostima modernosti i ideji o progresivnom društvenom razvoju. Fokusiranjem na prikaz konzerviranog nasleđa (moguće) katastrofe, na beleženje podzemne prostorne infrastrukture trajnog stanja pripravnosti, Petrovićeve fotografije skloništa odišu atmosferom suspendovane budućnosti i artikulišu specifičnu temporalnost ovih prostora. Sam čin fotografisanja skloništa pri tome se razvija kao temporalni gest koji se koncentriše u napetosti između prošlog, sadašnjeg i mogućeg.

Fotografija u Petrovićevom radu nije samo sredstvo dokumentovanja i prikazivanja, već medij prevođenja u smislu intervenisanja ili posredovanja između prošlih događaja i njihovih otisaka u predstojećem vremenu. U *Podzemnim skloništima* fotografija se angažuje kao sredstvo da se materijalnost prostora neizvesnosti preoznači u kritički konstituisane opservacije o društvu, istoriji i očekivanjima kroz proizvodnju viška značenja koji otvara prostor za interpretaciju latentne, postkataklizmične budućnosti. Sklonište je struktura zamišljena da „zaustavi” vreme, da suspenduje tok istorije i „amortizuje” katastrofu iznad tla. U tom pogledu je slična fotografiji, koja funkcioniše kao operacija privremene fiksacije. Prevođenje skloništa u fotografsku sliku razvija se kao gest refleksije o temporalnosti u svetu koji svoju svakodnevicu sve više organizuje kroz protokole pripravnosti, vežbe evakuacije i digitalne sisteme upozorenja. Fotografija skloništa tako postaje dvostruka temporalna intervencija u kojoj se trajnost arhitekture i temporalnost fotografskog medija uzajamno pojačavaju u konstrukciji koncentrisanog vremena ispunjenog neizvesnošću, anticipacijom i tihim čekanjem. Poput dvojnog hronotopa, skloništa postaju prostor koji obećava fizičku

¹⁰ Brian Dillon, “Fragments from a History of Ruin”, *Cabinet* 20, Winter 2005/2006, <https://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/20/dillon.php>.

suspenziju kataklizme, ali i suspenziju budućnosti. Otud Petrović podzemna skloništa razotkriva ne samo kao specifičnu arhitektonsku strukturu ili ostatke urbane arheologije već i kao vremenski afektivni prostor, gde se istorija, iščekivanje i imaginacija susižu u toposu koji osigurava trajanje krize i nesigurnosti. Ove prostorne strukture ukazuju se kao ruine prošlih strahova, ali i kao slike sadašnjosti u kojoj je mogućnost kraja sveta postala svakodnevni, administrativno regulisani horizont iskustva.