

Re-framing Identities: Architecture's Turn to History (Zurich, 10–12 Sept 15)

ETH Zurich, Switzerland, Sep 10–12, 2015

Registration deadline: Aug 31, 2015

Torsten Lange

East West Central 03: Re-framing Identities: Architecture's Turn to History, 1970-1990

Chair for Theory of Architecture

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The years between 1970 and 1990 were characterized by the rise of postmodernism in architecture in Western and Eastern Europe. During this period, the 1980s in particular, several socialist countries also witnessed processes of liberalization and economic reforms, and the overthrow of state leaderships in 1989/90, which would mark the end of Europe's political division. Architecture, in these processes, became a means through which to reframe identities, reconsider relationships to history, and thus call into question not only the modern project but also its wider political promises. The aim of this two-day international conference is to revisit this historic period, and to analyse and compare parallel developments in architecture and urban design on both sides of the Cold War divide against the backdrop of unfolding geopolitical transformations.

While postmodernism's impact could be felt across different disciplines, its origins can be traced most strongly in architecture and urban design. After all, the term and concept postmodernism first emerged in these disciplines. Since the mid-1960s, an increasingly critical attitude toward functionalist modernism developed within architecture that led to a spread of revisionist thinking and a growing concern for historicism, symbolism and meaning. This change was paralleled and sustained by a proliferation of architectural theory, influenced in particular by phenomenology and semiotics. During the 1970s and 1980s, the recognition of architecture's capacity to reflect and ground identity reignited the search for ways to represent local, national and regional traditions through built form.

The conference will address, among others, questions concerning:

- the chronology of the turn to history in architecture and urban design in different European countries.
- how terms and concepts such as modernism and postmodernism were discussed by architects

and theorists in East and West.

- the relationship between postmodern discourse and mainstream architectural culture during the 1970s and 1980s, asking how elements of critique and opposition manifested themselves.
- role played by questions of heritage and identity in architectural practice, and the specific forms this took in various countries in Europe.
- the impact of historicism and postmodernism on the development of cities in Eastern and Western Europe.
- the mechanisms of international exchange and transfer that allowed postmodernism to become a global phenomenon.

In recent years, postmodernism received growing attention through both scholarship and popular exhibitions such as "Postmodernism – Style and Subversion 1970–1990" at the V&A and the Landesmuseum Zürich (2012). However, the focus of academic research and public shows tended to be on Western Europe and North America, where postmodernism's conceptual basis was developed and where, arguably, its impact could be felt most strongly. Thus far, parallel developments and exchanges with Eastern Europe have played a marginal role. A complex comparative analysis of these developments that accounts for their heterogeneous nature is missing. The question whether and to what extent the term and concept postmodernism can be usefully applied to the Eastern European context remains insufficiently addressed.

Our objective is to examine the historical turn in architecture in Eastern and Western Europe during the 1970s and 1980s as a common cultural legacy, situated in relation to fundamental and far-reaching socio-economic and political changes – the erosion of communist regimes, their eventual disintegration and the triumph of global neoliberal capitalism. We propose a framework that treats contemporaneous architectural phenomena in Western and Eastern Europe on equal terms and side by side, thus asking for mechanisms of interconnection, mutual exchange, transfer, and translation across the political divide.

The conference will bring together an international group of established and younger academics and practitioners, including a number of former protagonists. Keynote lectures by Ákos Moravánszky, Stanislaus von Moos, Joan Ockman, and Karin Šerman.

Attendance of the conference is free of charge. We kindly ask you to register your interest by sending an email to professur.moravanszky@gta.arch.ethz.ch until 31 August 2015.

Reference:

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