Postmodern Architecture and Political Change – Poland and Beyond

Organizers: Błażej Brzostek, Florian Urban, Annika Wienert

The conference is open to the public. There is no conference fee. Please register by sending an e-mail to: dhi@dhi.waw.pl

Conference Venue: GHI Warsaw, Aleje Ujazdowskie 39, 00-540 Warsaw

The conference language will be English; select contributions and the Round Table discussion will take place in Polish.

How is postmodern architecture related to political and economic transformation? In Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries postmodernism developed during the last decades of state socialism and remained influential after the end of the socialist regimes in 1989. It emerged along with the disintegration of authoritarian rule and the gradual introduction of market capitalism.

In Poland and its neighbour countries the period of 1970s and 1980s was not only characterised by economic shortages and anti-communist protest. It was also at time of great architectural innovation and systemic changes related to the gradual introduction of private practices and, by Eastern bloc standards, of comparatively intense international exchange.

At the time architects attempted to overcome the limitations of functionalist modernism and prefabricated design, and developed international postmodernism in a particular local context. Their output ranged from conservation and restoration projects to innovative residential and public buildings to a wave of church architecture that was unprecedented not only in the socialist neighbour countries but also in the West. They also engaged in a discourse on the value of urban architecture, historic precedents, and individual expression that resonated similar debates abroad.

Recent scholarship has increasingly moved away from interpreting postmodern architecture as an exclusively Western European and North American phenomenon. Postmodernism is no longer first and foremost linked to capitalist exuberance and images of villas and office buildings with opulent façades and playful, often ironic neo-classical references.
This conference seeks to shed light on the significance of postmodern architecture in the context of political and economic transformation in Eastern and Central Europe since 1980. It will put Polish postmodern architecture into an international perspective that straddles the Iron Curtain, and at the same time relating it to broader questions of economic and social history.

Was postmodernism an agent of transformation? An architecture of resistance? A signifier of market capitalism? A national style? Or an expression of unpolitical nostalgia and aestheticism? And how is the Polish experience related to the architectural innovations in other Central and Eastern European countries? We will discuss these and other questions related to the architecture of the late socialist and early post-socialist era in Poland and beyond.

Thursday 12 September
17.00-18.00: Registration
18.00–18.10: Welcome: Ruth Leiserowitz, Deputy Director, GHI Warsaw
18.10–18.30: Introduction: Błażej Brzostek, Florian Urban, Annika Wienert
18.30-19.30: Keynote Lecture
Léa-Catherine Szacka, Manchester: The Presence of the Past: From Centres to Peripheries
followed by a Reception

Friday 13 September
09:00-10:30: Session I – Poland
Chair: Marcin Zaremba, Warsaw
Marcin Zaremba, Warsaw: Introduction
Emilia Kiecko, Wrocław: The Meaning of Postmodernism in Light of the International Exhibitions of Intentional Architecture 'Terra'

10:30-11:00: Break

11.00-13:00: Session II – East Germany, Romania, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia
Chair: Arnold Bartetzky, Leipzig
Tobias Zervosen, Munich: Building History. The GDR’s Postmodernism
Maroš Krivý, Tallinn: Boom, Boom, Boom

13:00-14:00: Break

14:00-17:00: Session III – The Soviet West
Chair: Felix Ackermann, Warsaw
Andres Kurg, Tallinn: Estonians on the Scaffolding: Ethnicity, Class and Single-Family Housing in Late-Socialism
Oxana Gourinovitch, Berlin: National Theatre. The State Theatre of Musical Comedy in Minsk
Ievgeniia Gubkina, Charkiv: The Architecture of Socialist Postmodernism in Ukraine

17:00-18:30: Break

18.30-20:00: Public Round Table Discussion: Architektura postmodernistyczna i zmiana polityczna [Postmodern Architecture and Political Change]
Welcome Note: Miloš Řezník, Director, GHI Warsaw
Chair: Anna Cymer, Warsaw
Panelists:
Konrad Kucza-Kuczyński, Politechnika Warszawska, Warsaw
Maria Lubocka-Hoffmann, former General Conservator of Elbląg
Maciej Miłobędzki, JEMS Architects, Warsaw
Ewa Porębska, Architektura Murator, Warsaw

Saturday 14 September

09.15-10.15: Keynote Lecture
Andrzej Leder, Warsaw: Unconscious Design of the City Space. The Case of Warsaw

10.15-10:45: Break

10.45–12.45: Session IV – Postmodern Architecture and the City
Chair: Léa-Catherine Szacka, Manchester
Piotr Wbinskowski, Kraków: The Postmodernisation of Polish Architecture
Piotr Marciniak, Poznań: Postmodernism and New Urban Concepts in Poland

12.45-13.30: Break

13.30-15.00: Session V – Postmodern Architecture before and after 1989
Chair: Annika Wienert, Warsaw
Michał Wiśniewski, Kraków: Tomasz Mańkowski and Brutalist Influences on Postmodern Architecture in Kraków
Ania England, Poznań: The Other Postmodernism of the Basilica of Our Lady of Licheń

15.15–16.00: Closing Remarks and Wrap-up Discussion
Chairs: Błażej Brzostek, Florian Urban, Annika Wienert

REFERENCE: