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Craup, no. 21: Documenting and Conserving Postmodern Heritage

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When Charles Jencks destroyed the Pruitt-Igoe complex in 1972, it ironically marked the end of the Modern Movement and the birth of a new architectural form, known as postmodern architecture. While difficult to define as it drew on a multitude of references, this architectural period took place between 1966 and 1989. In line with 1970s neoliberalism and the demise of major narratives defined by Jean-François Lyotard, it represented a wide range of perspectives, taking into account minority voices. Furthermore, it valued the "complex," the "hybrid," the "uncommon" and the "ambiguous," opposing the uniformity of rationalism and the dogmatism of international style.

However, some fifty years after its appearance, postmodern architecture has today become controversial in terms of its conservation. In 2014, for example, Michael Graves spoke out against the potential destruction of the Portland building he inaugurated in 1982, which has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 2011. In 2017, debates erupted over the Snøhetta agency's renovation project for the AT&T building in New York, designed by Philip Johnson. More recently, in 2022, Denise Scott Brown published an opinion piece opposing Annabelle Seldorf's redesign of the Sainsbury Wing at the National Gallery.

As time progresses and these buildings come under threat, protection measures and symbols of recognition are also on the rise. In the United Kingdom, as many as 17 postmodern buildings were given Grade I status on the National Heritage List for England in 2018, their highest ranking. In Italy, Paolo Portoghesi's archives were listed as being of notable historical interest by the Superintendency of Archives of Lazio in 2006. In France, the Antigone district was awarded the title Architecture Contemporaine Remarquable in 2018. Moreover, following the death of architect Ricardo Bofill in early 2022, the French municipalities in which he designed urban neighborhoods joined forces to pay him tribute in a full page spread in Le Monde.

Alongside these heritagization and restoration efforts, research is being carried out in order to document this architecture and investigate its preservation. In 2020, Bryan Clark Green organized a panel at the Society of Architectural Historians conference entitled "Preserving the Postmodern Past." In 2022, the University of Weimar and ETH Zurich featured German postmodern architecture in the conference "Denkmal Postmoderne: Erhaltung einer 'nicht-auszuschließenden' Epoche."

This issue presents an overview of the current state of knowledge and preservation with regard to

postmodern architectural, urban and landscape heritage. Postmodern architecture is generally considered to be part of a period that saw a return to the city, with urban spatial design taking precedence over architectural space, as in Bofill's French projects. They also question landscape heritage, such as Jencks' Garden of Cosmic Speculation, Portoghesi's Calcata garden, or even highway service areas like that of Bernard Lassus in Caissargues.

This call for papers invites us to explore postmodern design —whether architectural, urban or landscape— produced anywhere in the world between 1966 and 1989, and currently undergoing processes of identification, heritagization or transformation. Some questions that may be explored are methods for identifying and promoting heritage, the specific features of these projects and the (new) heritage values associated with them, as well as their material and symbolic sustainability. International comparisons or overviews of ongoing heritage projects in specific political and cultural contexts are encouraged. Contributions that consider non-European and North American contexts, such as Asia or South America, would be appreciated. Proposals for articles may be submitted in one of the following three themes.

Recognition, identification and visibility
This theme looks at the process of defining, identifying, inventorying, recognizing and showcasing "postmodern" architecture, landscape and urban planning projects. What are the outlines and specific features of these projects that enable their classification as postmodern? How, under what framework and by whom is this recognition achieved? Is it shared and/or questioned? For example, the issue of taste and reception by a non-specialist target audience could be explored. Proposals in this area may reflect on the inherent difficulties in defining recent architecture, and thus in situating it within recent history.

The question of documentation as well as graphic and film media involved in recording postmodern projects could also be addressed. For example, to what extent does the plurality and wealth of documentation used by postmodern design architects play a part in processes of recognition and dissemination when it comes to architecture that remains little-known? Does the use of certain architectural forms as backdrops (cinema, advertising, etc.) contribute to its recognition?

What kind of heritagization?
This theme examines the processes and players involved in the heritagization of postmodern architecture, urban planning and landscape projects. What determines the selection of certain projects? In what context, and by whom, is the heritagization process initiated?

If we can stress the simultaneity of "heritagization" and "postmodernism" as phenomena, to what extent do the specificities brought about by postmodernism influence heritagization (or not), as may be the case with modern architecture? For example, does the popular dimension of this architecture influence the actors mobilized in the heritagization process? How does heritagization take into account the playful, ironic and symbolic dimensions of this architecture? How do protective measures accommodate the gigantic scale of certain urban projects? How does use value take on a particular significance in projects founded upon popular taste and use? How is the evolving nature of certain programs (particularly housing developments) taken into account?

Case studies in which these questions are relevant to the heritagization of postmodern projects will be welcome. International comparisons of heritagization processes are encouraged.

Finally, the very definition of heritagization as applied to postmodern projects will be explored: what protective tools are needed, and what support (financial, administrative, technical, etc.) is required for restoration?

Restoration: questioning the authenticity of ideas and/or materials
This third theme explores the restoration, conversion and physical transformation of postmodern architecture. Here again, the specific nature of each project will serve as food for thought. For example, in the case of architecture where discourse underpins the project, to what extent are restoration efforts guided by the initial idea or concept behind the design? Does the idea take precedence over material aspects, given the poor quality of certain materials (plastic, for example) and the experimental and transient dimensions of some projects? What is the fate of the colors used in the original projects, which have often been altered or covered over?

More broadly, proposals may raise the issue of preserving material that has proven to have little durability, or address the paradox of retaining elements that, produced by the consumer society, were intended not to last. In this way, the role of authenticity can be questioned, as well as the subjectivity of taste in restoration projects, given that aesthetic qualities fluctuate over time.

It will also question whether restoration techniques and tools have been adapted to these new materials. Does the restoration of postmodern architecture have an impact on restoration methods?

Finally, how does restoration respond to changing uses? In the case of housing restoration, for example, how do projects address the issue of updating materials and amenities?

Lastly, what place and role should be reserved for living architects in the restoration process?

Proposals for completes articles should be sent by e-mail before 12 February 2024 to the Craup' editorial office: craup.secretariat@gmail.com

For more information, contact Aude Clavel on +33 (0)6 10 55 11 36

The articles must not exceed 40,000 characters (spaces included), notes and bibliography are not included in the character count.

Languages accepted: French, English.

Articles must be accompanied by:
- A biography (for each of the authors) between 5 to 10 lines (first and last names of the author(s), professional status/titles, institutional affiliations, research themes, latest publications, e-mail address).
- Abstracts in French and English.
- 5 keywords in French and 5 in English.

Coordinated by Benjamin Chavardès, Audrey Courbebaisse et Léa-Catherine Szacka.