

Representing the Past in Architecture

Veranstalter: Herder-Institut e.V., Marburg; Lithuanian Institute of History, Vilnius; Nordost-Institut (IKGN e.V.), Lüneburg

Datum, Ort: 08.10.2012-10.10.2012, Vilnius

Bericht von: Sebastian D. Plötzgen, Department of Old Testament Studies, Faculty of Protestant Theology, Philipps-University Marburg

Architecture „rebuilds“ history. But these processes of edificial visualisation of history also influence societies and nations, and are thus historically highly relevant. Starting from this proposition the international and interdisciplinary conference for young scholars – „Representing the Past in Architecture – approached the visualisation of history in different architectural forms, not only in buildings, but also monuments or memorials, urban planning and management etc.

In his opening keynote ARNOLD BARTETZKY (Leipzig, Germany) discussed the link between reconstruction and nation-building. With reference to several examples (Wartburg: „perceived as a sign of national awakening“; Cologne Cathedral: „symbol of a new empire“; Wawel Castel in Krakau: „moment of the grandeur and culture of the nation“) he illustrated his central thesis that from c. 1900 onwards, reconstructions within many areas of Europe were intentionally carried out as expressions of „national self assertion“. Following his tour d’horizon, Bartetzky proposed five common patterns, which proved as a helpful framework for the conference: (1) Reconstructions usually emerge from a idealistic imagination of the building, which is often linked to an imagined „Golden Era“ of the respective nation. (2) In the 19th and 20th century many reconstructions were carried out without precise knowledge of the actual history and former appearance of the building. Yet, this lack of knowledge was not perceived as problematic since the aim was to rebuild an ideal. (3) Many reconstruction projects were carried out as an „act of overcoming humiliation“ the respective nation remembered as being linked to this specific structure. (4) Often it was the civil society, which initiated the reconstruction, whereas the state took over con-

trol only later. (5) Reconstructions as rebuilding of imagined ideals or revisionist attempts call into question the faithfulness of the reconstruction enterprise in matters of historical accuracy.

JOANNA PACZOS (Lublin, Poland) addressed the question of different perspectives of architectural (re)construction: partial vs. complete; use of authentic vs. stylistic material; fictional vs. authentic reconstruction. In her paper, she discussed three case studies with different approaches to the dichotomies above: (1) Hadrian building the „Villa Adriana“ (Hadrian’s Villa) in Tivoli near Rome which was meant to be collection of architectural key artefacts from throughout the Roman Empire including elements from Egypt and Persia. (2) Ignác Alpár’s ‘exhibition hall’ in Budapest. And (3) the ‘Spanish Village’ in Barcelona, built 1929 as a synthesis of Spanish architecture and a craft showcase for Spain. All three cases have in common that they are, however not in situ, reconstructions, since they faithfully resemble architecture and the history and maybe emotions, feelings and identity connected to their ‘original’ counterparts.

GÁBOR OLÁH (Brno, Czech Republic) used the example of the 2006 attack on a memorial of fallen Soviet soldiers in Budapest to discuss the dimension of meaning, memory, and materiality of public monuments as representations of the past. He persuasively forged iconicity, meaning making processes, performativity, and collective memory into an analytical model and argued that meaning becomes manifested in memorial sites, which in themselves are social performances eventually leading to actions, that is events (the aforementioned attack being an example thereof). The benefit of Oláh’s approach, to my point of view, is that it enables us to better understand the symbolic power of monuments, especially if they are located in places where different social groups compete for its interpretational sovereignty. In his model, monuments themselves are seen as public actors actively participating in social discourses.

FELIX SCHMUCK (Hamburg, Germany) used the example of the Gropius House in Dessau (former German Democratic Republic) to illustrate his thesis that vagueness

can be an architectural concept. Drawing on Maurice Halbwachs' theories on collective identity and memory as a background, Schmuck argued that memory and commemoration are not only essential to identity but that - following Jan Assmann - a 'collective past' ensures the coherence of social identity. This said, Schmuck turned to the 1945 destroyed Gropius House in Dessau. In the anti-modernist climate, which characterized Eastern Germany in the 1950s, a classical Spitzdach house, called „Emma“, was erected on the site of the Gropius House. Subsequently, Schmuck outlined the debate on the rebuilding of the Gropius House. He argued that the proposals for the rebuilding were in fact not intending to faithfully reconstruct the demolished Gropius House, but to actually construct a new building resembling only key architectural features of the former structure. Or theoretically said, the concept of vagueness means that certain architectural features trigger the right associations in order to evoke a certain part of cultural/individual memory. The same could be said of the Gropius House, since its reconstructions at the one hand elaborates certain architectural aspects, which are considered typical 'Bauhaus', while other elements are reshaped or simply non-existent. Yet, the spectator will link the building to Bauhaus architecture since he is familiar with the, however vague, 'architectural language'.

MARYIA KUKHARAVA (Valencia, Spain) addressed possible interrelationships between the city (public space) as a research object and psychoanalysis and put forward the importance to include concepts of nostalgia into the reconstruction of the meaning certain buildings as parts of public space have and have had on the general public.

SLAVOMÍRA FERENCŮHOVÁ (Brno, Czech Republic) focused on urban planning as a „discursive practice constructing selective representations of cities and their users.“ In particular Ferenčuhová addressed narratives of the past as means to legitimize projects of urban development in both socialist and post-socialist environments. She proposed three aims of such urban planning: (1) touristification, (2) creating public spaces of identification for the local inhabitants, (3) urban reconstruction as a means of traumatic

history. With reference to Brno, Ferenčuhová plausibly argued that urban planning is widely used as a political mean to alter the reception and memory of the past in a state-favoured way.

ŽIVILĖ MIKAILIENĖ (Vilnius, Lithuania) presented a methodically highly interesting paper. By treating a city as an object reflecting society's demands, needs, and identity in a dense way, she introduced Vilnius as one of the many soviet capitals where Soviet regimes tried to change the city's identity according to the dominant ideology. With reference to tourists' guidebooks Mikailienė showed how in the course of time attempts were made to superimpose layers of meanings on the city. All in all, her approach to use guidebooks as a research source, to my mind, is a brilliant idea if you want to research competing ideologies within a given city space over certain periods of time.

FELIX ACKERMANN (Vilnius, Lithuania) delivered his keynote on the Belarusian town of Hrodna (northwest of Belarus). While outlining its history, he emphasized that in fact most of the Hrodna population were actually settled there after WW2 and did not bring any cultural city heritage with them (they were peasants), while at the same time they did not find any cultural knowledge present in the city. Yet, they invented themselves and the city as a Belarusian town. In order to better understand this process, Ackermann introduced the metaphor of a palimpsest. Actually denoting a manuscript page from which the text has been scraped off in order to rewrite on the material again, he pointed to city spaces as 'manuscripts', which were re-interpreted by subsequent inhabitants in the same way, the manuscript was re-written by successive scribes. – Personally I do not agree with Ackermann on the adequacy of the metaphor, since in the case of a real palimpsest the original text does not at all influence the subsequent use, while in Ackermann's theory, the city (that is the writing material), even if demolished (that is the text scraped off), will have ongoing relevancy for later inhabitants. – But nevertheless, the important point Ackermann argued for was, that even if a city is destroyed, those rebuilding it, will to a greater or lesser extent somehow derive their iden-

tity, at least partly, from the ruins and thus somehow tie themselves to the previous city's identity.

ANTON KOTENKO (Budapest, Hungary) presented a part of his PhD project dealing with Ukrainian monuments and national space. Against the background of his understanding of space being essential to creation and maintenance of national identity, Kotenko discussed the small town of Poltava of the Russian Ukraine in the year 1903 and outlined the opposite visions of territoriality held up high by the empire and its Little Russian proponents on the one hand and the Ukrainian national movement on the other. In particular, he laid out how a city's monument, first being welcomed by the local Little Russians, who were loyal to the Romanov empire, eventually was „hijacked“ by the Ukrainian nationalists for their own purposes. Kotenko's study, being one of the first case studies on contested space in Ukrainian history, highlighted an interesting example of how meanings of monuments 'switch sites'.

SEBASTIAN D. PLÖTZGEN (Marburg, Germany) discussed the rebuilding of Jerusalem's city wall in the mid 5th century BCE as a recreation of Israelite identity against the wider background of city walls and their perceived meaning in the Ancient Near East. He argued that on the one hand, throughout the Ancient Near East there was a strong correlation between the existence of a city wall and a high level of self-esteem and a stable identity of the city's inhabitants, while on the other hand, in the course of a city wall's destruction the inhabitant's identity most likely is jeopardized and feelings of disgrace and shame arise. Therefore, Plötzgen argued, the immediate goal of the city's population will be to rebuild the wall in order to stabilize self-esteem and identity. Using the example of the destruction of Jerusalem's city wall in 587 BCE he illustrated his thesis and based his interpretation on several biblical texts resembling the different perceptions of the built, destroyed and re-build city wall (Ps 48:1-14; Lam 1:1.3.4.7; Neh 2:17; 6:16). Thereby, Plötzgen showed that contested spaces and the importance of edifices to people's identity were as virulent in antiquity as they are in the present.

IAIN ANDERSON (Edinburgh, Scotland) presented a highly illustrative paper on case of Eilean Donan Castle as a „very Scottish reconstruction“. The castle, one of the most famous castles in Scotland, had been dismantled by the Royal Navy during the crushing of a Jacobite uprising (1709) and eventually more or less completely rebuilt by the clan McRae. Yet, the present edifice is hardly a faithful reconstruction. Built in an era of Scottish nationalist renewal, the intention of the McRaes was not to reconstruct, but to publicly re-establish an independent Scottish, and specifically Celtic, identity that recalled a traditional and ancient past. Therefore, neglecting that almost no plans of the original castle exist, the McRaes invented a castle which now stands as *the* landmark of Scottish castle architecture and functions as a symbol of a nationalist Scottish movement which is becoming more and more popular.

CLAUDINE HOUBART (Liège, Belgium) discussed against the background of analytical philosophy what 'authenticity' in matters of reconstruction means. Without voting for one option, she outlined three aspects worth considering: (1) authenticity can mean material authenticity (for example using the very same stones); (2) authentic reconstruction as identical reconstruction, whereby 'identical' could mean (a) the same form or architectural style or (b) the same category in matters of use, appearance etc. and eventually (3) reconstruction aiming at authentic experience, that is the reconstructed edifice evokes the same feelings, meanings, reactions etc. as the original one. Leading the discussion of authenticity away from the sole question of material authenticity to non-materialistic categories is, to my mind, the worthwhile benefit of Houbart's considerations.

DARIA KHLEVNYUK's (Moscow, Russia) paper dealt with Tsaritsyno, one of Moscow's museums, as an „authentic reproduction“ of Catherine the Great's palace. What is most interesting about this building is that it resembles a palace which, in fact, never had been built, but purely imagined by its architects based on their vision what the palace would have looked like if Catherine had ever finished it. But, is it authentic? Khlevnyuk argued, in my view persuasively, that we are

dealing with a different type of authenticity, namely “as if”-authenticity”, which at least to the visitors is no less authentic or historic than if the building would have indeed been completed in the times of Catherine the Great.

OANA CRISTINA TIGANEA (Milano, Italy) spoke on the topic of Romanian post-socialist cities by the example of Alba Iulia, a medium sized city in the middle of Transylvania. The city has a chequered architectural history. In 1924 one bastion of the Vauban Fortress had been intentionally demolished to give way to the *extra muros* urban development. The traces of this development are still clearly visible in the blocks of houses dating back to the „Soviet” era of Alb Iulia. Eventually, in 2009, a decision was made to rebuild the bastion in order to recreate a strong symbol of national identity, while others argue(d) that such symbol never existed. Tiganea’s subsequent discussion of the controversy was a welcomed illustration of the questions of the interrelationship between (national) memory/history and authenticity.

TILL HILMAR (Vienna, Austria) added to the range of methodological approaches which were present at the conference. In his paper Hilmar illustrated how he analyzed visitor’s photographic practices on the memorial site of Auschwitz-Birkenau and eventually the very pictures taken by them in order to examine how visitors experience the site. Hilmar was especially able to show how the architectural design of the memorial site on the one hand regulated visitor’s behaviour and how on the other hand a certain kind of canonicity seems to emerge about what is appropriate to take pictures of and what is not. His attempt to discover „storyboards of remembrance” is, to my view, certainly worthwhile further investigation, as it provides us with a pretty direct access to the visual representation people have of built environments.

OLGA ALEKSEEVA (Riga, Latvia) briefly touched upon the tragic Jewish history of Latvia and then introduced the Riga Ghetto house, as a museum and memorial site for the heritage and remembrance of Latvian Jewry.¹

The „spatial turn” of the late 1980s reintroduced space as a cultural factor relevant to human action, thought and behaviour and the majority of the papers underlined this no-

tion in their case studies. Yet, it became obvious that space is still addressed and considered from a vast diversity of theoretical and methodological backgrounds – each of them deriving from their respective discipline (social and national history, political sciences, art history, theory of architecture and the like). Needless to say, this multifaceted approach is good and necessary to avoid conceptual and methodological shortcomings. Yet, the methodological and terminological diversity necessarily challenges the interdisciplinary exchange and this conference was not exempted from this. All too often, the subsequent discussions proved somewhat unfruitful since presenter and audience simply did not speak the ‘same language’. Cf. the term ‘reconstruction’: For an art historian ‘reconstruction’ is primarily related to the bringing-back-into-shape of a particular object, whereby the focus will be on ‘material authenticity’; for a social historian on the other hand, ‘reconstruction’ will first of all address the meaning of the object and not so much its material integrity. Sociologist may even strip ‘reconstruction’ of its materialistic aspects completely and discuss the reintroduction of the notion of a certain, maybe even fictional edifice into public consciousness. The same would be true for terms like ‘urban history’, ‘urban planning’, ‘public space’, ‘national history’, ‘narrative’ etc. Thus, as interesting as it was to glimpse into a wide range of different approaches and cases, the more it would have been necessary to accompany the individual presentations by an ongoing debate on methodology and terminology. If this would have been the case, the conference would have been all the more fruitful in order to foster interdisciplinarity, but also to encourage the presenters to think about integrating an attempt or perspective from a discipline being not his or her own. This conclusion is not meant to belittle the individual papers, but to suggest a different conceptual approach for future conferences on the topic.

Conference Overview:

Arnold Bartetzky: Reconstruction as Nation-

¹ For more information on the house cf. <<http://www.rgm.lv>> (03.01.2013).

Building

Joanna Paczos: The Phenomenon of the (Re)construction of Architectural Spaces

Gábor Oláh: Iconic Meaning and the Material Object – Representing the Present Pasts in a Memorial

Felix Schmuck: The Veil of Memory. Vagueness as an Architectural Concept

Maryia Kukharava: City and Psychoanalysis

Slavomíra Ferenčuhová: Using References to „Negative Past“ as a Legitimizing Strategy in Urban Planning

Živilė Mikailienė: Ideology and Memory. Vilnius' Historical Image in Soviet City Guide Books

Felix Ackermann: Inventing a Belarusian Town? The Soviet Perception of Hrodna as a Museum

Anton Kotenko: Hijacking the Monument. Ukrainian National Movement in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

Sebastian Plötzgen: „Let Us Rebuild the Wall of Jerusalem and End this Disgrace“. The Rebuilding of Jerusalem's City Wall as a Recreation of Israelite Identity

Iain Anderson: Eilean Donan Castle – A Very Scottish Reconstruction

Claudine Houbart: Identical Reconstruction and Heritage Authenticity

Daria Khlevnyuk: Performing Authenticity. Reconstruction of Tsaritsyno in Moscow

Oana C. Tiganea: Romanian Post-Socialist City. (Re)constructing the Urban History in Case of Alba Iulia

Till Hilmar: „Storyboards“ of Remembrance. Visitors' Aesthetic Reinvention of the Past at Auschwitz Memorial Site

Olga Alekseeva: Riga Ghetto House. Heritage and Remembrance of Latvian Jewry

Tagungsbericht *Representing the Past in Architecture*. 08.10.2012-10.10.2012, Vilnius, in: H-Soz-u-Kult 18.01.2013.