
ISRAELI ARCHITECTURE, 1970s-1980s

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Studio 164 casts a retrospective gaze upon post-1967 construction in Israel, and examines a continuum of images culled from an archive-in-process of Israeli architecture. This issue constitutes a partial, almost arbitrary visual sketch for a future study of both the known and the hidden origins of contemporary Israeli architecture; it looks back upon postmodern developments in the 1970s and 80s – an uncharted body of knowledge that has yet to be academically or publicly validated in the canon of Israeli architectural history.

The discourse about 1970s Israeli architecture as a period of crisis is no longer valid. The Israeli architectural project during the 70s was no less national and international than it was during the national and international Israeli architecture in the 1950s and 60s. Yet a necessary blurring of the artificial turning point 1948 may sift the national architectural ethos from the 50s and 60s and see them as no more than a continuation of the modernist 30s and 40s – a local form of a late international style and of postwar architectural culture. "Israeli architecture" started developing in the aftermath of the 1967 war and continued to evolve in the period that followed, between the wars of 1970, 1973 and 1982. It is a postmodern project more than a modern one, and research into the roots of its postmodernism is necessary in order to understand contemporary Israeli architecture.

Nationalist authority, apocalypse, farce, a collapse of values, bureaucratic disarray, sectorial urges, folkloric tastes and Brutalist practice are among the characteristics of the formless era, during which "the entire country," to quote from Zvi Efrat's book *The Israeli Project*, "was filled within a decade with a jumble of terraced, cantilevered, multi-angled-and-corniced structures, truncated and coated with decorative elements" (2005, p. 935). The early phase of Israeli architectural postmodernism was too quickly judged – paradoxically, by postmodernist critics, who did not perceive this period as a critical instant for an understanding of

contemporary Israeli architecture; an instant prior to a local and international reevaluation of postmodern design.

Those who are still considered "the lost generation" of Israeli architects – educated at the Israeli Institute of Technology (Technion) during the post-1967 decade by the 1948 architects and developing in their shadow – were moved by the critical, democratic, international spirit of the late 60s and were influenced by late modernist, Brutalist formalism. Influenced by the progressive and technologically advanced architecture of the early 70s, they reformulated Israel as a place as well as places in Israel. The year 1967 was merely a catalyst, or an excuse, for what would have taken place in Israeli architecture sooner or later. Sharp angles and cornices, arches, terraced structures and fortress-like features were also characteristic of late modernist architecture in the 60s and early 70s in France, Switzerland, Scandinavia, Italy, England and the USA. A security-oriented, defensive or aggressive reading of 70s architecture in Israel cannot but be superficial.

The quarter designed by Salo Hershman in the Gilo neighborhood of Jerusalem, for instance, presented in this issue, was perceived as one of the icons of a new local architecture in the early 70s; it is a quintessential example of a transitional historical object, modernist at heart, whose language is postmodern (a complex of interrelated structures rather than autonomous buildings; the quarter as a micro-city; pseudo-historical façades) but which was copied and reproduced according to a modernist paradigm in other cities in Israel such as Lod and Tira; in a proposal for a national library in Iran; or in the stone building of the Tel Aviv Cinematheque, built in the 80s. No *genius loci* replaced the international *Zeitgeist* of the time in Israeli architecture of the 70s, and the concept of "place" remained as artificial, neutral and mobile as it was during the 50s and 60s; the arches and stone of Gilo are as absurd as a stone building in Tel Aviv or new arches in Iran.

The recession of the mid-60s was replaced after 1967 by a euphoric wave of new construction, no less intensive than the post-1948 construction project; Ram Carmi, then a senior and influential teacher at the Technion, assumed a key position as the chief architect of the Ministry of Housing, where he advanced the implementation of some of the Brutalist morphological experiments of the 60s (the avant guard formalism of the 60s was given concrete form in Zvi Hecker's "beehive" buildings in

the Ramot neighborhood of Jerusalem, for instance); a group of architects who had built in Tel Aviv during the 60s (Yaski, Rechter, Sharon, Eitan, Zolotov, Hershman, Nadler and others) rediscovered Jerusalem and filled it with towers, hotels and concentric rings of buildings in the city's new neighborhoods; concurrently, they were involved in planning and building multifunctional complexes in the heart of big cities, local versions of the international mega-structures of the 60s – including the complex of high-rise office buildings in the Manshiya neighborhood, Dizengoff Center and the new central bus station in Tel Aviv, the Clal Center and Wolfson Towers in Jerusalem, and the auditorium complex, Panorama Center and central bus station in Haifa; The 70s were the Jerusalem decade, a time of obsessive public delegitimization of the historical center of Tel Aviv, the declining, "foreign," modernist city – prior to its "Bauhausian" rediscovery in the 80s and 90s.

The 70s were also years of industrialized building. Moshe Safdie planned versions of his Montreal "Habitat" in Jerusalem and designed the famous IDF's Merkava tank (a commission from Reserve Major General Israel Tal); this was the period of corporate buildings and office towers; of the ongoing rehabilitation of historical urban neighborhoods; of the beginning of the political settlement in Gaza, the West Bank, the Sinai Desert and the Golan Heights; of continuing the policy of population dispersal from the center of the country to semi-rural towns and villages; of the ascendance of the political Right in 1977, which was followed by suburban development projects and the rehabilitation of modernist neighborhoods; of the building of Yamit in 1975, an urban exercise in planning a postmodern settlement for 2,000 residents in northwestern Sinai, and its dismantling in 1982 following the peace agreement with Egypt; of rising standards of living in Israel and the upgrading of construction standards; of the beginning of the death of the street and the rise of shopping centers and malls; of wall-to-wall interior design, and exterior design with new raw materials – ceramic mosaics, granolite and curtain walls made of metal and glass; and of processing plaster into stucco, en route to the "rediscovery" of stone, which abounds in Israeli architecture in the past few years.