athens
two hundred years
two hundred buildings
editor: manolis anastasakis
## introductory texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.1</td>
<td>Athens: the first period under King Otto</td>
<td>Manos Biris</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.2</td>
<td>French in Greece, Greeks in France</td>
<td>François Loyer</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.3</td>
<td>Christian Hansen-Theophilus Hansen-Ernst Ziller; their activities in 19th century Athens</td>
<td>Marilena Z. Cassimatis</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.4</td>
<td>The Europeanization of Athenian Architecture from the late 19th century to 1930</td>
<td>Helen Fessas-Emmanouil</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.5</td>
<td>The Contribution of the Municipality of Athens to the Establishment of Modern Athens 1835-1912</td>
<td>Maria Daniil</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.6</td>
<td>Positivism in Greek Architectural Press (1930-1980)</td>
<td>Kostas Tsiambaos</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.7</td>
<td>The Obscure 1980s, or the Postmodern Ferment of Architecture in Greece</td>
<td>Stylianos Giamarelos</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.8</td>
<td>Greek Architecture 1980-2020</td>
<td>Yannis A. Aesopos</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the obscure 1980s, or the postmodern ferment of architecture in greece

Dr STYLIANOS GIAMARELOS
The Bartlett School of Architecture UCL.
Executive Editor, The Journal of Architecture
For historians of the recent past, postmodern architecture represents the dominant trend of the 1980s, following the international impact of the first Biennale of Architecture exhibition in Venice. Postmodern architecture emerged as a reaction to the large-scale postwar projects of Western European reconstruction. It was a revolt against the sterile environments of modern urban environments that alienated local communities. Postmodern architects focused instead on the public face of buildings and the ways in which these communicate with the people on the street to give them a sense of belonging and identity. This architecture of a pluralist postwar society needed an inventive language to go with it; a language that could profit from the rich architectural past to develop playfully and freely towards the future. In so doing, it would also escape from the austere dictates of the modern language of early postwar architecture.

In Greece, postmodern architecture did not consistently follow these Western European and North American trends. Greek architectural practices were of course inclined to understand and discuss recent international developments, especially after the seven insular years of military junta in the country (1967–1974). In the decade of growing European integration that followed, postmodern architecture was decisively shaped by the specificities of local contexts. Postmodern design practices developed almost schizophrenically. They encountered resistance at the same time that they were practically adopted by architects who rejected them in theory. This ambiguity was reflected in the subsequent historiography of postmodern architecture. Even the most recent histories of postwar architecture in Greece avoid to address the great debate between the moderns and the postmoderns as the central event that decisively marked the 1980s. As a result, the postmodern ferment of architecture in Greece remains obscure, if not practically invisible, to this day. With this article, I attempt to fight against this obscurity of the 1980s. I aim to render at least some of the most important aspects of the history of postmodern architecture in Greece more visible. Having said that, this is clearly a history that still awaits its authors.

The postmodern ferment of architecture in Greece did not historically unfold within a single, homogeneous and coherent public sphere. Each institution and agent of production of architectural discourse and practice addressed a different constituency. One side of the debate generated the impression that conservative postmodern architecture prevailed. Having displaced progressive modern architecture, they argued, postmodernism was a menace that had to be subverted. The other side of the debate created the impression that the conservative establishment of modern architects was excluding a new generation of architects. The modernists’ critique of alternative approaches practically hindered the development of an architecture that aspired to transcend the impersonal grey boxes of postwar apartment buildings. The postmodern ferment of architecture in Greece unfolded within the spectrum of these two extreme positions, in public spheres that historically accommodated their clashes and partial overlaps.

2. See the event organised by the Association of Greek Architects in Athens on 25 and 26 June 1981.
Postmodern discourses

Shaping the new generation of architects in Greece, schools of architecture represent the most important public spheres of discourse and practice. During the 1980s, the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) School of Architecture was more outward-looking than the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA) School of Architecture. The School of Thessaloniki was consistently up to date, as it followed and debated contemporaneous architectural developments outside of Greece. In addition, the buildings that Anastasios M. Kotsiopoulos Architects designed for the AUTH campus, such as the new central library building, were clearly influenced by some of the most famous international works of postmodern architecture, such as the Neue Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart by James Stirling. Hence, the architecture of the AUTH university campus itself offered students a direct, lived experience of postmodern space. Postmodern architectural developments became a means for the School of Thessaloniki to significantly differ from that of Athens. Through them, AUTH claimed its own distinct identity as a school of architecture that developed an alternative approach to that of the NTUA.

The School of Athens, on the other hand, asserted its adherence to its ”modern tradition”, at least ex cathedra. The postmodern debate infiltrated the NTUA through students’ final year projects and dissertations. Taken together with the debates within the student squats of 1979 and the international publications found in specialised bookstores in Exarcheia, these theses instigated the postmodern ferment in the School of Athens during the 1980s. Among teaching staff, the balance began to shift only after the establishment of the new legal framework for higher education in 1982. This empowered the numerous part-time fellows who carried out the largest share of teaching, as they could now be appointed in academic posts. New staff members were also appointed in new posts by the end of the decade. Many of them had returned to Greece after completing their graduate and doctoral studies in France and Great Britain. Although they were inaccurately stigmatised as “postmodern”, their presence in the School was indeed refreshing. Among others, it ushered in the concerted efforts to reform the School’s curriculum in the mid 1990s. This was when the School of Athens also began to host invited lectures by established figures of European postmodern architecture, such as Aldo Rossi, Léon Krier and others.

The student squats of the NTUA School of Architecture in 1979 and the first residential squat in 1981 served as the originary points of identification for the “countercultural” movement in Exarcheia. Members of this “alternative” movement often cited the ideas of postmodern theorists from France and Italy. Such references abounded in ephemeral publications of groups of the wider Left and the rising ecological movement that were to be found in specialised bookstores in the vicinity of Exarcheia Square at the time. The short-lived journal Εφημερις Πόλη [Ephemeral City] (1983–1986) formed part of this broader context.
It was published by leading members of the student squats of 1979 who introduced the postmodern debate to the School of Athens. *Εφήμερη Πόλη* experimented with alternative approaches to the Greek built environment through concepts and practices inspired by postmodern understandings of architecture and the city. Similar “countercultural” publications such as *Convoy, AutonoMEDIA* and *Πρίζη (Rupture)* also accommodated related discussions of the built environment in Greece.7

Although they were disseminated at the School of Athens, these “countercultural” journals and ephemeral publications were virtually unnoticed by the established annual reviews of architecture and art in Greece. Published regularly by Orestis Doumanis since 1967, the annual *Architecture in Greece and Design + Art in Greece* gradually cultivated close ties with the country’s schools of architecture. It was not uncommon for specific publications in these annual reviews to play a decisive role in the elections or promotions of teaching staff. Although these reviews have now been established in the minds of many scholars as a comprehensive record of architecture in Greece at the time, they followed the “modern” agenda of their publisher. As a result, less well-known publications, such as *Αρινθοστος + Χώρος (Human + Space)*, were quicker to accommodate early discussions of postmodern architecture in Greece and abroad.8

Such discussions were also instigated by public events, conferences and exhibitions organised by institutions such as the *Institut Français de Grèce*, the Italian Institute of Education in Athens, the Technical Chamber of Greece, the National Gallery and the Association of Greek Architects. The 1980s witnessed the flourishing of such institutions, since these were now able to turn to European Community funds for their cultural activities. Organised by a multitude of different institutions, these events were not centrally orchestrated. They were rather sporadic and, as a result, connections between remained loose. Nonetheless, they constitute an integral part of the history of the postmodern ferment in Greece. As these institutions were not consistently oriented towards architecture, the events they organised capture a snapshot of the wider cultural sphere of the period in Greece, including its connections with the postmodern debate in architecture.9

**Postmodern practices**

In the field of practice, architectural competitions served as stepping stones for young architects’ dynamic entry to the professional arena in the early 1980s. In such cases, postmodern architecture often served as a language that distinguished the design practices of this generation from those of their predecessors. Although many of these competition entries did not materialise, municipal and other public buildings that served the 1980s vision of decentralised administration are an integral part of the unwritten history of postmodern architecture in Greece. At the end of the decade, the international competition for the New Acropolis Museum also prompted Aris Konstantinidis to launch his most aggressive critique of postmodern architecture.10 Already established as a founding figure of modern Greek
architecture, Konstantinidis decisively shaped the vision of succeeding generations of local architects. As such, his influential stand on the divisive debate cannot be left out of a broader understanding of the postmodern ferment of architecture in 1980s Greece.

The polarised clash of modern and postmodern architecture also affected the production of historical and theoretical texts of the period. Some of them were based on the work of specific practices. The Rhodes branch of the Ionian Bank [image 7.1], which was designed and built by Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis’ Atelier 66, serves as a characteristic example here. Its completion in the mid 1980s historically coincided with the international promotion of their works of the mid 1970s. This is when the apartment building on 118 Benaki Street [image 7.2] is heralded as an exemplar of “critical regionalism” by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre. According to them, the work of Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis combined and further developed the earlier regionalist architectures of Konstantinidis and Pikionis. As such, Antonakakis’ projects both responded to the crisis of modernism and avoided the pitfalls of postmodernism. But the Rhodes Bank building of the mid 1980s could easily be formally associated with postmodern trends. Since it was not entirely in line with the agenda of critical regionalism, this building did not eventually find a place in Kenneth Frampton’s monograph on the work of Atelier 66 in 1985. This highlights the complex and ambiguous relationship between a programmatic discourse and an architectural practice whose independent evolution refuses to be limited by existing theoretical categories. But this ambiguity also obfuscates the work of historians of the recent past, who will certainly encounter numerous similar examples when researching the same period.

Most frequently associated with postmodern architecture in Greece are the shopping malls and office buildings of the 1980s. Yiannis Vikelas Architects designed many of these projects in Athens [image 7.3]. Mapping these
buildings on the urban fabric also traces the history of the gradual decentralisation and expansion of Athens towards its northern and southern suburbs. As such, a history of Kifissias and/or Syngrou Avenues would also cover key aspects of the development of postmodern architecture in Greece. During the 1980s, the expansion of Athens was also associated with the development of new residential areas for the upper and middle classes who left the city centre and settled further north towards Ekali and further south towards Voula. Family houses, villas and other residential buildings across Greece would complete the picture. This postmodern architecture of everyday life has rarely been celebrated in Greece or abroad. But such projects constitute one of the most important aspects of the current built environment. They also form a field in which the postmodern ferment of architecture in Greece was significantly expressed and developed. Many of these small-scale private projects were carried out by architects who returned to Greece after having studied abroad (mainly in Italy) during the 1970s.

Transgressing the postmodern stigma

Architects in Greece today reject their labelling as “postmodern”. Having internalised the “neo-modern” design principles that historically prevailed after the 1980s, they avoid their most “glaring” postmodern works from that period. But as long as the postmodern label persists as a stigma in architects’ minds, the writing of this architectural history will remain obfuscated. A new generation of architectural historians is now called upon to transgress the taboo of their predecessors. The closer one looks at the recent past, as I have tried to do here, the more the “modern” and “postmodern” labels appear as mutually interchangeable taboo words. As one could easily take the place of the other, they both functioned as empty status symbols. The specific positive or negative value that would be attributed to them was determined by the geography and the constituencies that participated in each discussion. The “us and them” division that constantly
shaped the “modern/postmodern” taboo also reinforced the grouping of imaginary communities around these terms.\textsuperscript{13} But for architectural historians of the 2020s, the important question is not whether the work of an architectural practice should be labelled as “modern” or “postmodern”. This debate belongs to the 1980s. It is not as constructive in the twenty-first century. Much more interesting is the cross-cultural relationship behind the stylistic “label”; the evolution of architectural theory and practice through this complex interaction within and beyond the Greek borders from the 1980s onwards. The stigmatisation of the postmodern label as a taboo subject is disorienting and obfuscates the discussion which proves more relevant for architects today. This is why it needs to be transgressed. Taken together, recent culturally specific postmodern studies have already started to show how previously overlooked “peripheral” histories have played their own invisible role in “international” developments of the 1980s.\textsuperscript{14} And this is just the tip of the postmodern iceberg. The proliferation of similar historical studies will gradually allow us to re-examine the multifarious ferment of that period. Abandoning the sterile controversy of stylistic labelling will also allow the more socially and culturally conscious architectural debates of the time to be recovered precisely when they seem increasingly relevant.