

Type-Design or Subversive Practice?

The Genealogy of the Cube House with Tent Roof in Hungary

Abstract

State housing construction in Socialist Hungary lagged far behind planned expectations, with the result that the relationship between state and private housing construction developed in opposing directions. The so-called „Standard of Living Deal“ of the Kádár era was launched, in which an ideologically paradoxical „second private agricultural economy“ flourished, tolerated by the socialist state, with whose „black“ capital the rural population could build homes of their own: the cube house with a tent roof. Thus in the 1960s and 70s, in the „funniest barrack of the Eastern bloc“, more than half a million cube houses were built, a sort of „rural prefab construction“.

Their uniform sizes and façades created a gigantic empty projection surface that served as a perfect screen for the symbolic return of the repressed within the cultural process. The façade decorations emerged as the most representative cultural technique of goulash communism.

The analysis of the genealogy of this housing type, which can be seen as a key construction form of Hungarian „local modernism“, is intended to investigate the canon of official architectural history, to what extent the cube house with a tent roof was a type-design dictated from above, or was it not instead a spontaneously emerging variant of a private home? Reformulating these narratives between state power and people, between ornamental typology and type, between modernity and folklore, trauma and blind spot, requires a paradigm shift.

Keywords

Goulash Communism, Funniest Barrack, Rural Architecture, Ornament, Folk Culture