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Off into the Past: The Strada Novissima and the Spielstraße

Abstract

The Strada Novissima at the Venice Architecture Biennale of 1980 is generally seen as a key moment and monument in postmodern architecture. The article takes the Strada's ambition to be a street quite literally, comparing it to the Spielstraße—the German traffic-calming zone, which was implemented the very same year. Such a pairing reveals that both streets share a common focus on the pedestrian, on play, on columns, and on nostalgia. It is possible, then, to conclude that postmodern architecture and street design are characterized by a slowdown that manifested in a walking pace as well as a return to the calmness of tectonics. This can be understood as a criticism of modernism's love affair with speed and the automobile. This deceleration is unique in road history, and it questions the twentieth-century cliché of a continuous increase of the speed of life and culture.

Built of columns and cobblestones, both streets are pre-modern in their architectural forms and in their means of transport. They confront today's historiography with the challenge that in postmodernism, forward-oriented thinking actually meant a turn to the past. This makes it all but impossible to determine what might be seen as innovative and what as conservative, what as progress and what as regression.

Keywords

Traffic calming, Architecture Biennale Venice 1980, Pedestrians, Slowdown, Paolo Portoghesi