Description of permanent/unlimited and changing/temporary architecture. The present must go through the past in order to get permanent state.

Keywords: duration and transitoriness as philosophical aspect of time

In the creation of architecture, the factor of time is of high pragmatic importance even though this notion is always expressed and treated subjectively. In the evaluation of good architecture, timelessness was decisive for a long time, while durability was equally valued in cultural and historical recognition. However, a certain quality was not acknowledged until it developed in time.

Durability and fleetingness – two philosophical aspects of time. Let us describe them briefly from the metaphysical point of view. In metaphysics, the aspect of time is expressed negatively as forming and passing, i.e. as impermanence and minuteness. According to Plato, we perceive genuine durability, which always includes a spiritual principle, as forming and passing. In St Augustine’s opinion, time is an extension of the human spirit which recalls the past, perceives the present and awaits the future. Henri Bergson thinks that free activity is marked in durability as something transferred to the old days. This short description establishes a thesis that the present must traverse the past in order to attain durability! Let us analyze fleetingness as recollection, transience, farewell, a “soap bubble”, a metaphor, a moment.

Fleetingness appears as a temporary event which only remains in recollections and becomes valueless.

The world we live in changes faster and faster. Today, as we can notice, it leads to the trashy disorder of rising buildings. Something similar could be seen at the end of the 19th century. Then a new opposite movement sprang up which tried to develop radically. It took new economic, ethical and esthetical principles of simple expression into consideration and applied them in its activities. It was the beginning of modernism which developed intensively in the 1920s and reached its peak in the so-called new reality (Neue Sachlichkeit). Can we notice anything like that at the dawn of a new millennium? (V. M. Lampugnani) There is a lot of talk about an economic and financial crisis as well as a crisis in architecture. A crisis happens when the past dies but nothing new is born. In my opinion, timeless architecture, which still shapes our surroundings, persists.

Studying the history of architecture with some uniform structures, we can find primal forms and archetypes. Let us have a look at the very beginnings: human shelters and volumes – architecture which persists up to this day. The history of architecture...
distinguishes its characteristic features or styles: Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, baroque, classicism, modernism etc. They are constructs dating individual works of architecture which survive till now. Architecture includes certain elementary structures. My university teacher Prof. O. M. Ungers distinguishes three types of them: the Parthenon, the Pantheon etc.; the first stages of the creation of architecture, e.g. a tent or a cave; a monolith as the basic element. He thinks that it all began like that and they all describe architecture (O. M. Ungers). We encounter durability as a cultural and physical quality in the presentation of the existing buildings in our cities and landscapes where it opposed various changes and the increasing uncertainty of our spiritual values. (V. M. Lampugnani) It protected itself from periodically appearing transformations as well as various tastes and fashions. Durable architecture has got its independent language and expression – it is independent of time, of random social events, of political systems... Obviously, it was sometimes modified, politically abused or interpreted but it has never served anything!

Architecture is architecture, whereas everything else is everything else! (O. M. Ungers).

Ungers thinks that architecture knows two basic types: a house and an ark of the covenant (a feretory). The former symbolizes invariability and stability. A house is durable and related to the place where it stands. The latter is portable, it includes something temporal and changeable. An ark often changes places and has not got a permanent stopping space. It does not need any foundations because it is impermanent. A house (a building) reflects durability, while an ark is a reflection of fleetingness. A house is built of stone; an ark is constructed of acacia wood. A house (a building) of stone is a cave and a shelter; an ark (a feretory) is a provisional “tent”. A shelter, a wall and a stone are warm and passive; a tent and a framework are cold and active. Stones are living materials – they breathe in the atmosphere and with the four seasons, they chill in the summertime and warm up in the wintertime; a framework of bars is dead, featureless and cold. Stones suggest warmth; a steel framework is a cold metal. Stone buildings are respectably beautiful; a glass framework glitters coldly. Stone buildings have got character and personality; framework buildings are anonymous. The construction of stone buildings includes a lining and a homogenous form; the construction of framework buildings is separated from the lining and the façade. Reading the Bible, we pay attention to Saint Matthew’s prophecy (K24 V2): “Not a stone will be left standing.” Thus, “…no stones will be left standing as witnesses of the epoch of modern architecture which will remain insignificant for the new culture of construction” (Baukunst) because new buildings are not made of stone anymore but of slabs and glass. Stone will not tell any stories, give any impulses, preserve wisdom or meanings. In O.M. Ungers’s opinion, architecture is durable and permanent, it is not everyday but eternal, it is not craftsmanship but higher art!

For some time, we have been able to observe a new beginning. Buildings have been reused for years. Many of them, with their preserved material cover, became problematic so they had to be demolished. We have been observing the practice of constructing buildings for a new function or manner of exploitation since the 1950s. This practice of raising new buildings for a new use and then demolishing them shows us something unstable – we can talk about so-called temporary architecture, about fleetingness in architecture. Its use is limited, whereas its existence is unstable. It can be also defined as mobile architecture which lasts for a proper time. It can be dismantled and situated in a different place (Infobox in Berlin, Expo pavilions
Art Gallery “Schirn” in Frankfurt am Main, arch. Bangert, Jansen, Scholz, Schultes/BJSS Berlin
etc.). Sometimes we talk of containers which symbolize our times, reflect radical efficiency and the networks and connections of global economy. Obviously, these boxes are located as freestanding objects. Sometimes they are nicely designed and present their identity as a mass product. Certainly, they can be shaped and arranged in a suitable manner – then they attain an architectural expression. Is it genuine architecture? No, it isn’t. They represent the brutality of our fast life as well as the global economic market!

We have the impression that we are living in a time of the total terror of design. This allegedly good taste can be seen everywhere. As a result of this mania or delusion of contemporary design, things and their places lose their significance and functions in order to be saved in the form. So… function will replace fiction in history which expresses a certain lifestyle or simply suggests it. Design is becoming new opium for the masses. Finally, I will take the liberty to ask: where does this journey of new design and apparently new architecture lead us? No matter what we mean: streets, cities et cetera – they are all carefully designed. We regard them as attractive but superficial contentment can make us blind to the crux of the matter!

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