THE ECHO OF REALITY IN A CREATIVE ACT

Today’s architecture is marked by universalism – this feature exists regardless of a period of time; by reflection of a wide palette of phenomena that are the essence of the surrounding reality as well as the echo of phenomena from the past. Contemporariness imprints its codes of civilization upon architecture, whereby the past – the echoes of an archetypal form as well as striving for perfection and a mark of the personality of a creator – an architect. Architecture of the 21st century is undoubtedly heterogenic, cosmopolitan and competition-like. As in the other disciplines of art, it is difficult to discern one style.

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A reflection of reality in works of any kind – the effects of man’s creativity – has been a sign of contemporariness since the dawn of civilization. Up to this day, this mirror reflects the whole complexity of phenomena resulting from man’s drive at solving problems which seem to be an utopia, a labyrinth. At the end of this chain of creativity, the impossible becomes a work – the realization of human ideas.

The beginning is always the source. The beginning of what? Here, we may refer to the germs of human thought – the birth of logic before it was commenced by the Pythagoreans and defined by Socrates.

The archetype of architecture in a timeless dimension is geometry – its creations – elementary bodies. The 20th century, especially its decline, offered a contesting trend in every discipline, searching and shocking, sometimes it seems to be a symptom of creative powerlessness although such an attitude can give birth to a masterpiece. The questions remains: who has the right to state its timelessness? However, the principal question is: when is this work a work of art which a recipient would like to see in a timeless dimension?

Not everything that history and contemporariness offer deserves this name, nevertheless man – a passer-by in this world is stopped by the power of the existence of this work which – in spite of all that rush of civilization – inspires him. He is stopped by admiration whose elements are: surprise, agitation, fear, sometimes indignation – a whole gamut of emotions aroused in the presence of a thing derived from a thought, from imagination creating a work.

Civilization asks homo sapiens more and more complicated questions. He has been trying to answer them since he learnt to walk and he usually succeeds, at diverse paces though.

Man’s imagination and will to improve his existence had moments of less or more magnified aggression – a strength which intensifies creativity. The dizzying pace of search, which we might call a race towards a nonexistent borderline, is a sign of the times. In a way, the civilization of consumption is a creativity eater. There is a danger that it will eat...
its own tail. It is not easy to judge from such a short perspective whether the will to shock people with originality, innovativeness and the stamp of futurism are dangerous. Or rather getting lost in globalization – the loss of cultural identity? Or simply neither of them – the contemporary world, full of tolerance in its positive, sought-after meaning, enables us to accept every challenge; the criteria of assessment are ambiguous; maybe time will verify the durability of a work.

A sign of our times is the lack of limits in the space where a creator-architect works. It is an unavoidable consequence of globalization. Architects travel around the world, while the implementation of their nearly utopian ideas is possible in places loaded with capital.

What is the affinity between TVCC Television Cultural Center in Beijing, China, designed by OMA and Rem Koolhaas, and the Museum of Architecture and Art in Nanjing or Knut Hamsun Center by Steven Hall?

Both forms are united by geometry and divided by the rest: the scale, the colour, the structure and the context – the location. We can hear some echoes of modernism in the abovementioned examples but only on account of their geometrical code. Must the notion of modernism be eternal just because geometry is omnipresent in civilization?

With respect to R. Koolhaas and Steven Holl, the term dynamic modernism seems accurate as both of them create dynamic works. On the other hand, Zaha Hadid’s works are characterized by another kind of dynamics. However, her designs strongly resist the principles of geometrical repetitions. It would be difficult to attribute the denomination of modernism to her works, too.

We could also ask architects what Hause H, Sou Fujimoto, an archetypical detached house of concrete, is. It does not repeat anything, it is an echo of pure geometry which strikes us with its simple beauty. Geometry lasts forever but is not always unfailing!

In opposition to this example stands Naoshima Public Bath in Japan, designed by Shiniro Ohtake. This object represents typical kitsch. However, we may hope that this kind of cosmopolitan contemporary architecture will not last longer than Milwaukee Street in Chicago!

The phenomenon of echo crosses spatial barriers, does not reflect any isolated cultural circles, intermingles with multiplied and modified archetypical sources of this heritage. Thus, an echo circles like in a chamber of mirrors giving countless reflections which are sometimes caricatural but gain temporary recognition from some recipients.

Science in the service of art.

One of the unusually significant factors shaping the character of today’s architecture is the richness and dynamic development of technologies, the simultaneous work of specialists in numerous disciplines of science. Its representatives eagerly cooperate with architects. The mutual stimulation of architects’ partners – constructors, chemists, physicists, biotechnologists – in their pursuit of solutions has a powerful impact on the image of contemporariness whose visual core is architecture omnipresent in civilization. Science makes fiction real.

Steel constructions reach the clouds, concrete is more and more durable and much finer, the structure of glass makes it possible to remove visual barriers and implement genuine glass houses, the quality of vertical movement does not cause an extra problem with overcoming heights. The technology of glued wood facilitates the construction of objects in an unheard-of scale. High technologies enable us to build high-risers in seismic areas.
1. Steven Holl, *Knut Hamsun Center*, Norway  
2. Remi Kollhas, *Television Cultural Center*, Beijing, China  
3. Zaha Hadid, *Spittelau viaducts*, Vienna, Austria  
4. Sou Fujimoto, *Hause H*, Japan  
5. Shiniro Ohtake, *Naoshima Public Bath*, Japan
Seemingly, everything is great but the images of cities change like lightning, the housing environment of metropolises is degraded in terms of civilization, cities are turning into dwelling machines.

Here and then, an architectural pearl is growing in this spatial magma. We should stop in front of it and bow at the waist to the power of human mind. This pearl need not be monumental… it is enough to be beautiful!

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