

Study on the Question of the Degree of Innovation in Architecture

Igor Bondarenko

Moscow Architectural Institute (State Academy)

Moscow, Russia

E-mail: igor.bondarenko.54@mail.ru

Abstract—The article considers the question of expression of creative innovation in traditional, mainly medieval, Russian architecture. Various degrees of liberties taken in relation to reproduction of architectural models are identified. The attention is drawn to the rare cases of emergence of new models surpassing the previous ones. The description is given to the radical changes concerning the architectural models and styles that came about with the arrival of modern, and then contemporary, times, when the desire for complete creative emancipation and permanent innovation prevailed. The author comes to the conclusion that the current difficulties of creating and comprehending the innovative pieces of architecture are connected with the breakdown of once-coherent system of cultural values and guidance points by conscious lowering of the overall level of evaluation of the architectural and artistic achievements and spreading of excessive subjectivism and demoralizing creative all-permissiveness in the name of equality and freedom.

Keywords—architectural models; types; traditions; innovation; creative work; subordination; regulation; freedom

I. INTRODUCTION

Avant-garde art often remains alien to the general public. The admirers explain this by deep conceptuality of such art and the spectators' unpreparedness for comprehension of it. They call on the spectators to adhere to the presumption of aprioristic artistry of innovative works of art. There are calls for holding off judgments as to whether the author is talented or not — the talent will certainly be revealed over time. But how can we stop people from judging the art at first view? It is so important. And it has always been. But are there only architectural revelations and masterpieces that can emerge permanently within the framework of once-discovered innovative trend? And how shall we evaluate the innovation with regard to innovativeness?

The avant-garde as a protest movement opened up fascinating prospects, but later, naturally, started turning into tradition with its rules and dogmata. And this tradition, in fairness, appeared to be quite rigid and aggressive, the one that could be called anti-tradition — according to A.V. Ikonnikov [1], our counter-tradition — according to I.O. Bembel [2]. Today, we see the attempts to reproduce the edifices and the projects of the Soviet avant-garde or the world contemporary movement, but there has been no

consistent development of some kind of great and conceptually new architectural language. As with the infamous artificial Esperanto language for all humankind, it is being rejected and transformed into something entirely different — the exclusive experiments with multitude of forms, compositions, styles and their hybrids. More often than not, those are futile and destructive experiments [3]. At the same time, anti-globalization attitudes heighten people's fairly strong interest in heritage, regional and local traditions, however, when it comes to practice, in such playful atmosphere of the mass culture we get the obscure, and sometimes intentionally outrageous, mixture of the ancient and the modern, the habitual and the intimidating, the native and the foreign.

To gain at least a little bit of insight into the outlined range of issues, it may be helpful to take a plunge into history filled with both conservative customs, and revolutionary impulses.

II. MAKING ART ON THE EXISTING MODELS

Since ancient times, the construction based on known standards or the image and likeness, as people said in Russia, was in practice almost everywhere. The term "artisanship" is particularly relevant to describe such kind of creative activities dependent on the pre-established rules and models. Generally, the medieval artisans positioned themselves accordingly, fearing of self-intellection and pride. The major architectural models were in the possession of princes, tsars and chief priests. Taking their cue from them, local authorities and builders' artels went in full consciousness for simplification of forms and decoration, reducing sizes, cutting costs of construction materials etc. Everyone had to know his place and never claim "to graft higher than his rank". It gave rise to the sustained traditionalism of the art and culture appearing in the patriarchal society, which persisted in the context of establishment of the statehood and monotheistic religions.

Due to the mentioned hierarchical orderliness, following the same models never resulted in mechanistic reproduction of typical solutions. Besides, every traditional edifice necessarily had to possess its own unique identity. Why was that, if the architects had no authorial ambitions? The answer to this question resides in the essence of the prevailing religion-based objective-idealist consciousness. It

was inconceivable to people that even quite small building could be built without God's help. Forms and structures of a reference building not only showed the artisans what to do and how to do it, but also helped them catch the spiritual power of the everlasting great image which was behind them, initiate themselves into it, draw the life-giving element from this power and put it into a new creation. That is why, when talking about any traditional edifice, it can be said that it had its soul, name and identity. Construction, as well as any other serious artisanry, was related to inspiration, and therefore, creativity in the finest sense of the word [4].

The understanding that each new piece of architecture emerging from the depths of the sacred tradition is principally unique justified the liberty, with which the customers and the artisans treated forms, structures and proportions of a model. Strict canons and petty regulations, "the stylistic taboos" — in the words of V.P. Orfinsky — simply did not exist [5]. And thus, the local architecture schools, that we appreciate so much, started to appear in the Middle Ages. These schools were far from the architectural trends and styles of the modern period due to their naturalness and un-intentionality. They emerged by the force of circumstances, due to availability of particular construction materials and more or less skillful bricklayers and carpenters. Some of them gained fame over time and spread their influence through other lands.

Recognition of local architects' merits was indicative of the attitude of the contemporaries towards their talent and inventive faculties, which was not lacking in excitement. Certainly, they can't be seen as anonymous and inglorious. On the contrary, such vitally-important work as building houses, cities and, moreover, temples, couldn't be entrusted on the random people, with no authority or undertaking. Sometimes, the names of highly respected medieval architects also left a mark in history. Still, there is no need to reconsider the conventional belief concerning the predominant anonymity of the works of art that appeared and became current in the traditional culture.

In fact, the talents were being revealed, however, not as sources of original works of art, but as successful conductors and interpreters of the celestial beings, that were being sent from above. Besides, the artisans followed the will of their customers. This will depended on many things, because it had to correspond to the social subordination in family, society and state settings.

At the lower levels of such subordination, the uniformity prevailed; there were almost no signs of human individualities. The family elders had a lot more legitimate opportunities to make a name for themselves. There is a telling expression: "a man is the king in his house". It refers to the right of a household head to keep the law in his own hands and look like a boyar prince, if not like Father the Tsar. The great noblemen and the country's dignitaries were not only allowed, but also entitled, to stand out against the general background, wear rich clothing, have family crests and live in easily recognizable palaces located in plain sight.

III. CREATING NEW MODELS

Despite the firmness of the principles of the traditional culture, quite uncommon, very innovative pieces of architecture appeared sometimes within its framework. They stood out from the rest due to their bright individual expressiveness, which proclaimed their special status and marking of some kind of new milestone in the course of the history. These distinguished works became new models and sources of inspiration for the following imitators. Their arrival could not be accidental. It had to happen by God's will and, of course, by commandment of the chiefs of Church and State.

The workmen summoned to such great cause used well-known models too but, at that point, with the aim of surpassing their magnitude and beauty. It was no longer a question of resemblance to a model but the question was how to use this model as an asset. The architects had to be particularly gifted people, worthy of insight into higher realms. This being said, the hierarchic picture of the world stayed the same, only the movement of spirit therein was oriented not in a normal downward way, but vice versa — upwards.

This was how, under Ivan the Terrible, the Cathedral of the Intercession of the Most Holy Theotokos on the Moat was being built. Faith in creation as the Revelation was so strong that the failure to fulfill the Tsar's order to put eight, but not nine altars was forgiven the workmen [6]. The contemporaries praised "the ingenuity and marvelousness" of the new Moscow temple, which had been designed on the basis of many models and "renditions" [7]. No one could think that this inimitable masterpiece of architecture appeared thanks to plain borrowings or the architect's western schooling. The saying that, upon completion of work, the Tsar ordered to blind the architects so that they wouldn't be able to create anything of that kind sounds true, because it corresponds to the mentality of that time. The artisans witnessed the beauty of the heavenly world, which was beyond contemplation by the mortals. That was why they had to lose their eyesight.

The next similar example from the history of the Russian architecture is "the Holy of Holies" temple that failed to be erected in the middle of the Moscow Kremlin; the said temple had to place Tsar Boris on the same footing as Bible Tsar Solomon [8]. It was clear that this new major temple of the newly-established Moscow Patriarchate could not be a simple replica of the ancient Israeli shrine. It is quite reminiscent of the erection in the sixth century of a new major cathedral in Constantinople — Hagia Sofia. As the saying goes, when the work was finished, Emperor Justinian proclaimed: "Solomon, I have outdone thee!"

Half a century later, Patriarch Nikon returned to the idea of bringing the great glory of the temple of Jerusalem to the Russian land. However, the Kremlin was left unchanged. The unprecedented work deployed, as known, in the Resurrection Monastery near Moscow. The grandest temple complex was erected here not on the model of the Solomon's temple, but in the likeness of the Rotunda of the Church of the Resurrection and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The

actual architectural model was reproduced with a great deal of precision, following the measured drawings of Bernardino Amico, but with intentional magnification of its beauty and grandeur, which was evaluated to comply with the customer's taste [9]. Quite exceptional piece of art was produced, the one that made a significant impact on the development of the Russian architecture and decorative and applied arts of the 17th century. But the disgraced patriarch was accused of going beyond all proportion in this sumptuous undertaking [10].

In its time, the Cathedral of the Dormition constructed by Aristotele Fioravanti used to amaze and enrapture the Russians by its singularity: "how wonderful it is ... with its lightness, sonorousness, spaciousness" [11]. It was said that "there had never been a thing like this before in Rus," however, with one significant reservation: "apart from Vladimirskaya Church" [12]. This reservation suggests that there has been a strong apprehension of calling down the wrath of God by ambitious claims and acts. For then people remembered how badly it turned out when an attempt was made to build a cathedral in Moscow surpassing the ancient St. Vladimir's Cathedral by 1.5 sazhen in length, width and height [13].

This example shows well how easily all kinds of novelties could be allowed subject to commitment to the immutable grandfather's tradition. Radical, in our opinion, architectural transformation of the center of Moscow under Ivan III was understood at that time only as a new impetus for reaching something long-awaited and much desired. All Italianisms of the Kremlin appeared to be fitting there, because by no means did that imply the rejection of what was "ours" in favor of what was "theirs". The outlanders fulfilled the Russian order assiduously [14].

Thus, innovations within the tradition could be quite remarkable, owing to the borrowings and whimsical liberties. Thanks to these innovations, the tradition lived, was reproduced and bore diverse fruits, from very ordinary ones, to the unique and exotic ones.

There is another thing — the novelties that are destructive with regard to the traditional life foundations. In Russia, they were associated with setting of absolutism. It was preceded by the Church dissent caused by reforms arising from official declaration of wrongfulness of the native Russian faith. And the pro-Western reformations of Peter the Great that followed had been so hurtful that they afforded the ground for the adherents of olden time to talk about the enthronement of Antichrist.

IV. FROM GRAND STYLES TO NO-STYLE ARCHITECTURE

A first glance, when choosing the European architects, Ivan III did the same as, afterwards, Peter I would be doing. However, in fact, he was creating new Russian architecture through the artisanship of the outlanders, which, by the way, was compliant with the medieval tradition [15]. And Tsar Peter deployed the country and made it subject to foreign culture, which had be the aid for separation from the Russian Middle Ages. He acted as if he were a mythological ruler "not of this world," who was free to impose any new models

and arrangements. Such image of a tsar — a God's Vicegerent on Earth — was proper to the ancient tradition [16]. But in this case, Peter disrupted severely the foundations of the medieval communal etiquette and became a person of a different era.

The architects started to work according to the European styles. Certainly, they continued to modify the standard forms, but, at that point, there was a necessity to bring the final results of their creation in accordance to the external characteristics of the known style. Whereas in the past such external characteristics in the models were enveloped and diluted by some kind of spiritual aura, in modern times they started to be perceived very definitely, in a manner of speaking, realistically. The religious mysticism started to disappear quickly from the architecture and the art. Masonry tried to replace this trend, but, it came out, basically, in a way of metaphor.

The monopoly of the grand style, which accepted only occasional architectural novelties, was possible as long as the emperor wanted it so, as long as he had enough power to impose a unified architectural and town-planning order throughout Russia. By the middle of the 19th century, the emancipation of architecture occurred. Once again, the model-based method prevailed, though, at that point, this method was by no means anonymous, but purely original and aesthetic one.

The architects' growing ambitions, as these of the advanced customers, soon required the deliverance from the dictatorship of historical styles and models. The time came for inventing a fundamentally new, never-before-seen style, which, in Russia, started to be called modern, and then the time was for overcoming this style as well for the sake of so-called breakthrough to the glorious future. All of this can be understood in line with the logic of development of the traditional culture. The other thing is that, with arrival of the modern European culture, it turned into a bottom-level and moribund culture. And the culture of the high spheres became predominantly secular, rationalistic and utopian at the same time.

Abstractionism, which was nihilistic in relation to historical heritage, with time came to be seen only as one of the left-wing artistic trends, almost a style, which could be followed. It gave rise to modernism. But the root intentions of the futurist innovators lay elsewhere, notably, in destruction of all kinds of bonds caused by styles and models and reaching the total victory of free unconditional non-historical art. As if the course of history stops and eternal world of general welfare comes. And the secret of particular attractiveness of the avant-garde of the first quarter of the 20th century is that its innovative ideas seem inexhaustible, timeless and endlessly flowing, like a horn of plenty.

But no miracles happened and a human did not create a real paradise on Earth by hand. Instead of styleless generation of forms, the game of historical architectural models deployed with renewed vigor, wherein the said models were given exaggerated size and expression. After that, there was a shift towards industrialized mass construction according to the standard designs, which

allowed for avoiding architectural innovations and extravagances. As a main line, a demand was put forward for rationalizing the architecture design as much as possible, while following the scientific and technological progress. Innovative work was set free from fundamental architectural substance in favor of “technical aesthetics”.

Still, the pulse of the professionals kept going, while responding painfully to the impersonal and hideous architecture. Separate original designs and edifices were appearing. But only after the newest radical changes in Russia’s destiny, there was a remarkable burst of creative activity shown by the architects, rewarded by the customers who acquired new wealth. Most various estimations of this phenomenon were given. In any way, a lot of questions arise, and the most important one is: how to ride the whirlwind and find a good balance of tradition and modernity, the classics and the avant-garde?

V. CONCLUSION

A brief historical overview shows that there has always been something new and unique in the genuine architectural art. But adherence to the traditions made the architects strictly dose the introduction of novelties. The greatest power over innovations was with persons of the highest social status. Only they could promote the change of models and ask for something more than what is habitual. And they took responsibility for their decisions. But their freedom of expression was far from being unlimited, it was controlled by the society itself, its cultural norms and customs.

The Town Planning Code currently in force contains a requirement for design decisions to be taken through public hearings. This is a right step towards reviving the traditional order of things. It can’t be underestimated. The profession really needs restoring backward and forward linkages with the society. Not without reason “a participation method” is being cultivated in developed countries that urges the architects and other specialists to work for the benefit of the inhabitants. The other thing is that it is unacceptable to slide into populism. It is necessary to keep a sense of proportion in all respects.

Regrettably, today all achievements and failures made by architects are based, mainly, on their personal managerial capacities and human qualities. Individualism and overblown, so to speak, “groundbreaking”, artistic creativity are encouraged too much. Besides, the levels of talent and skillfulness are not ranked actually. As a result, absolutely unmeritorious phenomena can be passed off as architectural innovations. The cult of innovativeness created by “the Modern Movement” does us a disservice. But can innovation on a massive scale bring a steady increase in quality of architecture? Certainly not. There is a movement in the opposite direction.

Serious difficulties in creating and perceiving the pieces of architecture system of cultural values are connected with the breakdown of once-coherent system of cultural values and guidance points, decrease in the overall level of evaluation of architectural and artistic achievements and spreading of excessive subjectivism and demoralizing

pluralistic all-permissiveness in the name of equality and freedom. Conversely, we would like to suggest shifting the focus of innovative pursuit from all-too-common breakthroughs into the unknown to creating stable and virtuous traditions anew, allowing for emergence of innovations, but moderate and subtle ones. This will make for harmonization of the elements, heterogeneous in time and quality, of urban, suburban, rural and natural environment.

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