

Urban Environment: in Search for New Imagery*

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Architecture should not be easy. An architect may permit himself to create unique conceptions.

Thom Mayne [1]

Abstract—Today’s urban environment is full of and in many cases overburdened with manifestations of modern civilization with its velocities and uncontrolled requirements. Anyhow, one continues to spend much of the time in the city, looking not only for dwelling, food and job, but also for cultural and spiritual fundamentals of his existence. To solve such a contradictory situation, it is suggested to ponder on a possibility to return the imagery basis in some leading characteristics of new architecture as the environment of the socium’s everyday life. The necessity of studying and fixing up the new imagery is justified by a growing relevance of architectural-artistic approaches connected with the increasing role of the playing, theatrical, designing, socially oriented and ecological aspects in the actual professional field and beyond its boundaries. Interaction with other actual kinds of creative activities is of special importance, since it defines formation of artistic unity of architecture, design and art.

Keywords—*architectural concept; context; field of art integration; architectural environment; integrative approach; contemporary art; theatricality; social dialogue*

I. INTRODUCTION

Determination of the architecture’s place in the system of art is still not an easy task: architecture belongs to the socium’s culture and conditioned by its numerous manifestations, including intersystem ones. Taking it into account, one should accept the ambiguity of positions: in one meaning, the architecture, without any doubt, is an art and the most ancient art reflecting the spiritual resource of society, that, perhaps, crowns the original artistic hierarchy; and in the other, architecture’s constituencies extend beyond the boundaries of this sphere, coordinating with philosophic, scientific, social, economic, technical and other disciplines. Herewith, throughout history, including the contemporary period, the entire circle of arts has been connected with architecture, often influencing its priorities, while common

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fundamentals and impulses of lively creativity in art have been setting certain epicenters of integral feeling, vision and thinking of an artist and an architect.

The present is characterized by the existence, and sometimes opposition, of at least two alternative opinions with regard to the “artistic” in architecture, design, visual art and culture as a whole. Opinions, which are considered to be more traditional, retain succession and are guided by the figurative nature of the Universe. In this respect, belonging to the art and the motive of artistic-aesthetic feeling becomes an issue of the high flight of spirit, empathy, author’s skills and plastic perfection of the work. A conceptual approach approves the artistic as the author’s statement, a process or a scenario of events taking place in time. Today both approaches are inscribed in the history of the art, they have become links of its evolutionary development, regardless the revolution nature of its individual periods. It would seem that such a many-sided picture of artistic reality should promote flourishing of all forms of creative activities, their fast rooting into everyday life, and spreading their influence on all aspects of life. But such a supposition would be too promising. In reality, the situation turns out to be more complicated, critical and far from being “transparent”.

II. NEW ARTISTIC DIMENSION OF ARCHITECTURE

Strong differences in understanding the goals and meanings of artistic creative activity have led to an obvious distrust between various oppositions, if not to the entire unbelief in the power of art. Instead of expected synthesis of expressive languages, “anti-artistic” hybrid forms, link “disruptions” and obvious failure to identify the recipient often occur. But one should not exaggerate — the world of art and architecture, as our world in the whole, has to live through this stage, overcome difficulties of the transit period and revive in a new quality! What will mean a new “quality” and what will it be? Will it be a new level of intersystem interactions or will it be new understanding of the existing ones? Everyone tries to answer these delicate questions in one’s own way...

It should be noted that evident problems today suggest ways of their solution that are far from a univocal agreement with this or that viewpoint. First of all, this is a question of definitions. “Beauty” is an eternal mystery, with which the harmony of measures and imaginative perfection is still associated. However, today this meaning cannot be always applicable, for nowadays the ideals of beauty diverge too wide. Another support, the term “conception”, more often begins to sound lightweight due to the abundance of “forgeries” and empty manifestations. The situation is difficult. Nevertheless, besides regrets, one can view this context as a possibility to revise the very bases of art and architecture comprehension.

Finding common bases of the architectural-artistic interaction is connected with the logic of total interrelation and interconditionality, with a network of volumetric links existing through the entire world culture in space and time. The way to the sought integrity is in line with the study “Conception of artistic integration in contemporary architecture”¹, in which the idea of a “field” as a metaphor for complex interactions and mutual influences, variability and instability of architectural phenomena was presented as a binding one [2]. According to the conception, a system of “fields” of artistic integration was introduced: spatial-time, artistic, and personal-individual. The artistic integration in architecture is understood as a totality of multidimensional processes of creation and recreation of architectural-artistic integrity considering aesthetic values and orientations.

Stated in the author’s conception principle of free artistic interpretation and transformation, that helps convey artistic quality in architecture, has acquired a special significance [3]. The principle is based on the existence of certain “responses” in the system of various “fields”, basic mutual penetration of heterogeneous bases, and it demonstrates existence of the factors of one “field” in the system of another field in new artistic quality. Reconsidering, interpreting, transforming, an architect uses techniques of universal and special analogies, which may be obvious and concealed. This principle at each stage governs mutual penetration of actual requirements of architecture and newly emerging impulses of the cultural field: science, philosophy, art, and engineering.

III. “ARTISTIC” FACETS OF THE CONCEPTION OF CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE

The following shows the manifestations of actual artistic motives and processes in new architectural realities, characterized by the following basic directions.

- Reintegration of the languages of art.
- Personal artistic methods and technique of architects.
- Co-authorship of architects and artists.
- Intervention of art in the environment.
- Virtual forms of architectural-artistic interaction.

Noteworthy, that emergence and realization of the above mentioned directions are conditioned by a joint action of the “artistic-aesthetic” and “conceptual” principles, as well as objective conditions of modern consumption society — inclusiveness of the society, dynamics of the systems, and speed of change of priorities. Herewith, transformation of artistic-plastic codes of architectural meanings and forms (morphogenesis) may present a special interest. Roughly, evolution of the mutual influence of architecture and art may be presented in the form of a non-hierarchical branchy system with branches intertwining and rooting in each other:

- geometric language of the avant-garde (refusal from image depiction in favor of abstraction), that caused a canon of matured modernism and a vocabulary of modern architectural forms;
- organics of the avant-garde as a synthetic experiment of color, form and perception;
- curvilinear “order” in evolution of spatial concepts, marking the foreboding and acceptance of non-linear systems and their intuitive sensations and description;
- orientation toward the direct perception of the phenomenon by a man, that in many cases generates a line of organic approach;
- natural motives and “the art of elements”;
- “flickering” nature of architecture, its illusiveness and immateriality;
- theatrical interpretation of the architectural space and the city;
- social turn, entering the dialogue with a recipient, coming out to the urbanism;
- enlargement of structures, perception of an object from the position of the scenario of use;
- “design” of architectural objects and environment;
- “artistic” as collaboration with real life, image living in the environment.

The above mentioned approaches fill in the unified field of artistic integration of the modern architecture which is controlled today, primarily, by several references — “conception”, “theatre”, “design” and natural origin. All of them in a certain sense break the order described by a classic triad, and are unusual for the contemporary recipient of architecture [4]. On the other hand, their emergence is strongly connected with the civilization processes, including tendencies to the openness and interactivity of the human environment. We see that architecture not only has advanced far into the interdisciplinary general science field, but also has approached the boundaries of artistic practices. Another step — a step towards architecture — is a real artistic intervention into the environment, urban art and festival culture.

¹ A doctoral dissertation in architecture defended by the author of the article in 2014.

IV. TOWARD NEW TECTONICS AND SPACE IMAGES

A. The Nature of Imagination — a Fascinating Dialogue

Works by S. Calatrava demonstrate one of the most liberal versions of the authorial architecture — manifestation of individual style, recognizable and demanded. This is the creativity of a “free” artist — an architect, a sculptor and an engineer. Today the creative path of the master is well known, same as his orientation toward anthropomorphic and biomorphic sculptural forms, natural metaphors. Perhaps, just the fact itself of emergence of such a fusion so favorite practically everywhere still remains a mystery. Is it the author’s genius or there are other reasons and conditions. Quite often we observe an opposite situation, when a vivid individuality frightens and shocks the public...

It is presumed that this invisible point, where author’s images and people’s tastes meet, is the organic truth (and untruth) itself of his architecture. The world created by Calatrava is almost not architecture, lying in many aspects beyond the limits of triad, reasonability and, more so, styles and contexts. The author applies to a man’s dream, his fantasy and certain “naive” interpretations of the possibilities of architecture (it’s about unique complexes designed in the spirit of iconic architecture), and further we make our choice: either to accept this message and the rules of the game or respectfully step aside...

In the City of Arts and Sciences in Valencia (S. Calatrava, 1993-1998-Now) addressing to the imagination of a man and a dialogue on the level of speaking metaphors take place, and the architectural space works as attraction and entertainment: overloaded imagery, recognition of metaphors and “speaking” forms (“Fig. 1”). Persistent dialogue of architecture is in the best traditions of postmodernism! Traveling around the ensemble, one gradually comes to understanding that the given architecture is of a special genre — “an entertaining show” communicating well with its spectators. Visitors of any age are carried away by the game and become active participants of the performance. Precisely for this reason, the audience flow does not stop, and the complex, regardless some legislative problems, continues to be constructed. Anyhow, a sensation still remains that the ensemble’s most natural element is the greenhouse with a palm grove decorated with special elegant constructions designed by the master without straight allusions.



Fig. 1. City of arts and sciences in Valencia. S. Calatrava (1993-1998-Now).

B. Curvature of Space — a Plastic Tradition or a Virus

Curvature of contours, fluidity of form, non-linearity of structures have become a sustainable idea of plastic culture, which may be taken as a mirroring of uncertainty of a modern man and an action of a synergetic model of the world outlook. Another interpretation is possible, which is based on the acceptance of the value of the living world, bionic motives and capabilities of the constantly developing form. Not once both approaches intersected and formed one line, every time characterized by an addressable artistic language and certain fixed methods. It is noteworthy, that denying canons of previous tectonics, each “new” art and architecture try to work out and accept certain rules. The sui generis “organic order”, a sign of refusal from the pressure of the three-dimensional space logic may be ranked among them. The origins of canonization are found in the “line of beauty” by W. Hogarth, in the “spherical perspective” by K. Petrov-Vodkin, in the organic experiments of the department headed by M. Matyushin, in the spiritually-meaningful researches of the followers of K. Malevich, P. Kondratev and V. Sterligov [5]. The strongest statement of today has become the parametric doctrine of P. Schumacher and creative works of Z. Hadid (“Fig. 2”), starting from her graphic series. The plasticity has its rich history and theory. This way for interpretation of architectural spaces — simultaneously organic, soft, and “responsive” (in the parametrisation’s terms) and as if infected by the virus of transformation: spatial and time dimensions, recipient’s sensations or even consciousness.



Fig. 2. National Museum of 21st century art “MAXXI” in Rome. Z. Hadid, 2010.

C. From the Theatre of Form to the “Plays of Mind”

Contextual dematerialization accompanies most of the master’s works and forms a concept of consciousness transition from the visual sphere to the area of direct sensation or research. Aesthetics of miracle brings the creative style of the master near cinematography. In Nouvel’s works the “beauty” of architectural form and material dissolves itself, still remaining an example of refine elegancy.

Probably, such a programme outcome “beyond the boundaries of architecture” in many aspects is inspired by J.

Baudrillard's conception of "hyperreality". As M. Nevlyutov, researcher, notes [6], the architect had an experience of fruitful co-operation with the philosopher, including their joint publication of theoretic works, such as the well-known book "Louisiana Manifesto". The "hyper real" addresses to something mysterious that lies beyond the boundaries of visibility. In this context, the conceptualization perspective of J. Nouvel's creative activity is quite understandable: "We no longer experience pleasure through the eye, but through the mind". M. Nevlyutov gives another statement that shows master's attitude to the arts in general: "Any contemporary art is abstract in the sense that it is imbued with the idea of much more than the imagination of forms and substances".

Queen Sofia Museum in Madrid (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, J. Nouvel, 2005) has a significant collection of P. Picasso, J. Miro and S. Dali works and a non-simple multi-staged history of establishment ("Fig. 3"). Historically, a block of the San Carlos hospital (F. Sabatini, 1776), several individual buildings and green plantations were located here. The first stage included reconstruction of the hospital from the side of the yard facade — three glass towers with lifts (I. Ritchie, 1989) were attached. At the final stage, some individual buildings were relocated, a new block to accommodate exhibition halls, a library, an auditorium, a cafe and a restaurant was built, which was connected with the historic building by a large visor along the line of the cornice of the 18th century (J. Nouvel, 2005). The formed ensemble became an integral part of the city programme "The boulevard of arts" including all museums of the Spain capital.

It seems that such stepwise and deeply comprehended development of the place was the essence of the concept of the master, who created "vibrating" architectural space and dissolving form. Disappearing architecture! ...but at the same time it is subordinate to the quite material and distinct boundary, which is formed by a "wing" to support a line of cornices of the historic buildings of the complex. Really, there appears a sensation of an abyss, a "black hole", a chaos spreading "behind this border". Both in material, tangible world and insubstantial, "flickering" world have found their balanced simultaneous realization here...



Fig. 3. National Museum Centre of Arts of Queen Sofia (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia) in Madrid. J. Nouvel, 2005.

D. On the Border of Architecture

The coming-out of the architectural solutions to the border of artistic action has become a certain sign of time,

marking convergence of internal aspirations of architecture and arts, a contemporary architect and an actual artist. Indeed, the art's actionism is always based on its inclusion in the flow of real life, more often — on the direct involving of the recipient. Let us recall the Situationists, who put forward as their main promise creation of certain real conditions, meaningful and spatial scenarios influencing a person.

On the other hand, more often architecture itself leaves out functional and other pragmatic constituencies of the profession and relies on pure conception, extreme affectation [7], or fully enters areas of environment design and festival environment with art-objects and objects of design. Today we may with confidence speak about performativity in architecture [8] and creation of performative environment in the urban space supposing maximal participation of the user. It should be noted that the given concept offers not only game communication, which is, undoubtedly, important as a factor of filling up the architectural space with life, but also has an important ethical aspect — increasing everyone's responsibility. A participator of "construction" originally integrated in a joint creational process behaves differently toward his surroundings.

Market Els Encants in Barcelona (b720 Fermín Vázquez Arquitectos, 2013) shows the next turn of architectural aesthetics not only to the environmental design, but, what is more "dangerous", in the direction of value of an effect, an illusion, a contingency ("Fig. 4"). The architectural theme becomes a reflection and a continuation of the life process, of a stream, a mixed, active history made on the market. The market brings together company shops, trade representations and spontaneous trade, traditional for such a place... The golden tint of the mirror makes the picture of the market life even more colorful.



Fig. 4. Market Els Encants in Barcelona. b720 Fermín Vázquez Arquitectos, 2013.

V. CONCLUSION

Modern civilization experiences a constant "crisis of reality" which definitely does not keep pace with people's needs and tastes. Art is an overcoming the reality without its real destruction. However, constructive significance of creation activity today may often be called into question... Actual artistic practices offer not only manifests and challenges of modernity, but also real environmental conditions, which a spectator or a participant of a city event is plunged in. It is important that the border of an art-object, architectural form, and space practically disappears. Perhaps, today this is a needful and demanded resource of the modern

city space. The art gives a possibility to transform the environment into a really living artistic image.

In continuation of the artistic-meaningful line, theatrical interpretation of environmental scenarios, generation of light effects, use of media-images acquire special importance. The “city-theatre” concept forms the world of illusions, kaleidoscopic architectural themes and styles, collage of materials, their properties and texture, play of transparencies and reflections.

The virtual environment in various forms is perceived today as polar but already quite widespread direction that permits to make the bravest breakaway from physical reality. If experiments with the supplement reality imply interaction with life environment, then extreme manifestations of virtuality are focused on creation of new alternative worlds. In fact, this is a continuation of the visionary design or a variety of the “paper” architecture that “stepped over” the last frameworks assigned by graphic material.

The above review shows that today a new socially oriented artistic-aesthetic platform of architecture and environmental design is being actively formed. Artistic integration of plastic languages, natural motives and social demands becomes a required resource. There appear integral works of art that talk with the recipient, reflect dynamics of modern life and at the same time realize author’s statement of an architect-artist.

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