

# Esotericism and the Profession of an Architect\*

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**Abstract**—The education system in architecture will undergo serious changes in the near future. The process of restructuring the whole body of architecture will take over one century, and in this process, the profession itself will face the restructuring of habits gained by architecture. These processes will require a sharp increase in moral reflection inside and outside the profession. All this will put architecture and architectural education in a fundamentally new position, to which architecture is not ready today. The article outlines the points of the renewal of the power of architectural thinking, which are revealed with the help of the principle of individuation and within the esoteric worldview.

**Keywords**—*architecture; architectural thinking; Rene Guenon; Esotericism; Carl Gustav Jung; the principle of individuation; the reflection of the architectural profession*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Architecture, which is now experiencing a systemic crisis, is paying the price for the period of the highest intellectual status which lasted for thousands of years. The difficulty of overcoming this crisis lies precisely in the fact that the history of architectural thought is the history of concepts and practices, which today are most convenient to describe as illusions, not only in the usual but also in a new sense of the word, admitting that illusions under certain conditions can become a unique life-building force.

One direction of the restoration of the architecture's self-consciousness, liberation from the functions of almost a household service assigned to it nowadays, could be, in my opinion, the work to overcome these innate illusions, which is especially difficult just because having lost all the secrets of archaic organics, architecture, as a profession, kept these illusions as its only refuge and treasure.

The work on the restoration is to be started from the inside of the profession. The awakened architecture will be able to find within itself the forces that have been sleeping for a long time.

In November 2017, I have worked on the study of the possibilities of esoteric traditions and methods in

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architectural education, which was caused by deep disappointment in everything concerning the modern theory of architecture and its attempts to find new foundations in contemporary science and philosophy.

In my book "Form in Architecture"[1] I have built a scheme of an architectural form as a theoretical concept based on the synthesis of morphology, symbolism, and phenomenology — leaving aside space and psychology. Philosophical views of M. Heidegger, professional views of L. Kahn seemed the closest to the phenomenology of space to me — which such thinkers as G. Bachelard, Y. Pallasmaa, and several other psychologists and art critics were engaged in in the second half of the XX century. Later I realized that the category of space itself which, along with the category of time, became the alpha and omega of scientific ontology in architecture, still remains the kind of Empedocles substance, in which symbolic and phenomenological properties play a greater role than geometry, while the psychology of perception of space in the early XX century, just relied on geometry, that is, remained in the circle of scientific and technical categorical ideas, and first of all space-time theory of relativity of Einstein-Minkowski. The first departure from the ideology of space, of course, led to the concepts of time and here I found a significant step forward made by A. Gabrichevsky, who within the framework of the Stalin Empire Style failed to take the next steps after A. Bergson.

In the West, the fascination with poststructuralism brought to life several original creative concepts by R. Venturi and P. Eisenman, with an emphasis on the ideas of chaos and rejection of the ideas of order, and then D. Libeskind — in projects where the volume of buildings could be considered as plastic models of various kinds of conflicts and contradictions.

Such successful architects as Rem Koolhaas began to trade ideas of high modernism in countries which have become new centers for economic and technological progress in the early XXI century — including Russia.

And today, in the second decade of the XXI century, this impasse is still hidden in the fog of stunning discoveries and inventions in the field of computers and mass communication. But everything speaks that in the very near future, this impasse will come out of the fog of space flights and the endless memory of the Internet and will pose the main question to humanity of the third Millennium — what

becomes a man of the planetary civilization, what happens to his self-identification, historical memory, and environmental safety. The prospect of a luxurious degeneration does not resemble the heroic era of Renaissance, except, perhaps, one tendency which is the newly awakened a maniacal thirst for the esotericism.

This new view through the prism of the esoteric knowledge of the theory of architecture and architectural propaedeutic would, in my opinion, at least partially overcome the impasse of the humanitarian importance of modern architecture, which modernism and postmodernism have brought it to.

## II. THE REASON FOR ARCHITECT'S NEED OF ESOTERICISM

Esotericism, its real role deserves an in-depth and detailed historical and philosophical study, without which, it is impossible to understand not only the architecture of antiquity but also the architecture of XX and XXI centuries. And without which it is difficult to assess and build a program for the development of architecture and its theory for the next century.

Rene Guenon — a French thinker of the XX century, known as an esotericist, writes that the mentality of the modern world as a whole is formed precisely as a result of extensive collective suggestion, which has not ceased for many centuries [2]. Guenon argues that sacred science comes from an intellectual intuition, which is the most immediate and the highest form of knowledge because it does not depend on any kind of sensory perception, as well as on purely rational thinking [3].

It seems that the real influence of esoteric ideas in the near future will have an impact not so much on the proportions and forms of projects, but on the methods of architectural education or propaedeutic, in which formal and scientific principles will gradually be supplemented by a kind of individual development of psychotechnics, ethics and intuition of architectural creativity. Thus, the nearest field of application of esotericism will not be the design, but the training of architects.

The profession of an architect is still an uncertain spot in the history of the professionalization of culture — a spot in which rational and irrational moments, cultural and individual properties of activities and many other contrasting moments which do not fit into the Procrustean bed of new pedagogical systems and programs are eclectic mixed.

One of the paradoxical points of contact between esotericism and modern science is the phenomenon of Miracle. The fact that esotericism is the science of secrets, of the hidden and wonderful, is not reflected in our philosophical system in any way. This is what we expect from the latest achievements of science — a miracle, the disclosure of secrets and something almost unthinkable — immortality. The paradox is that in science, in which ideas arise and die with overwhelming speed, lives and thrives the hope on achieved immortality and miracle. That is something that metaphor and passion alone can't explain.

Historians of culture can find here new endless horizons of work on the translations of half-forgotten texts, their interpretation, collecting crumbled in the modern time bits and pieces of magic, alchemy, witchcraft, healing and other miracles that science has long-buried. The exception is the art of the avant-garde, the pillars of which, such as V. Khlebnikov, V. Kruchenykh, or even V. Kandinsky, dared diving into the maelstrom of prehistoric sensitivity to extract something that brought them in delight.

New to me was the understanding of individuality and individuation discovered in esotericism and unexpectedly coinciding with my hypotheses. In architecture, we are used to seeing esotericism in all sorts of shapes, proportions, compositions, and forms — although, in fact, the actual subject of esotericism is a change in lifestyle, thoughts, and activities. Esotericist does not give specific advice, but moves a person to a new scheme of life, sometimes revealing his magical nature or the secret meaning of numbers and dates.

Here lies a whole bunch of issues completely new for modernity. The first one is related to the foresight of the future. The second — to the inheritance and inevitability. The third — to the nature of talent and genius as the ability to make a step into the unknown. Why is J.S. Bach so successful in writing polyphonic music? Our dim categories of intuition, talent, genius say nothing about it. There is a mystery before us. The mystery is the real object of esotericism.

### A. *Esotericism and Cybernetics*

The purpose of the esoteric system can be seen as a set of actions in the rehabilitation and construction of the activities in systems and organisms, caught in the situation of a break of the conditions of the external environment (the breakdown of traditional myths, religions, and ideologies).

Analogies and metaphors, including metaphors of fantastic pictures, dreams, signs, external similarities or properties of numbers and figures accepted for norms, are used as the means for the restoration of systems in an esoteric system — as well as in poetics.

In this case, we will deal with the schemes of restoration of work and processes based on parts of these systems themselves, with the schemes of recovery of balance and stability of systems that began to experience crises of disintegration and internal inconsistencies.

Today we can find examples of this kind in astrophysics with its inexplicable and dark energies, and in the history of science, when new sciences — chemistry, medicine, and psychology-grew out of esoteric and hermetic systems.

### B. *Architecture in Its Own Shadow*

In most cases, the appeal of the theorists of architecture to the subjects of sociology, psychology, semiotics, ecology, and post-structuralist criticism external to architecture was aimed, at the update and revival of the subject of the theory of architecture, but this update was understood as the involvement to the theory of architecture of the latest

intellectual resources of science, technology, and philosophy. The result was just the opposite. All these theories did not enrich architectural thought as they were meant to but carried out the expansion of their own paradigms into the architecture.

On the other hand, it is clear that self-seclusion would only increase the destruction of one's own object. That is why a middle way though not a compromise is needed here. It is necessary to take into account the events of the development of philosophy and science, and at the same time reflexively limit the penetration of foreign concepts and methods into the bosom of the one's own subject.

The emergence of new technical methods in construction, design, and humanitarian and philosophical concepts of culture confuses the theory of architecture, so deeply that it eventually loses its specific subject and at the same time loses its predictive or normative power. Attempts of the transfer of this kind, however, have been conducted in the XX century with surprising persistence and lack of critical reflection.

### *C. Architecture as a Process*

I propose to look at architecture from another point of view, from the point of view of the processes of human consciousness. This trend since the beginning of the XX century — that is, since the avant-garde, is continuously growing and expanding — but... has given nothing special except for the idea of human orientation in space and time of the environment.

But there is also another phenomenon — architecture acts as a kind of reference point in changing the man's perception of not only the outside world but also his place in this world, that is, the world of human ideas, ideals, hopes, and memory is reflected in architecture. And at the same time, we are not talking about axiomatic reflection or the fate of humanity and culture but about simple everyday experiences — sadness, joy, boredom, hope, etc.

This type of perception has nothing to do with the reflection of the history of culture — it is not the school remembering of facts. This is a living existential process, and architecture fits into it on a par with nature and weather — without special knowledge and without aesthetic admiration for styles or imitations of styles - that is, without any artistic and philosophical ground. It even blends sometimes with any artifacts of the environment, far from architecture. But it is this role of architecture in everyday life and which leads to its special existence.

The forms of architecture are not created for the sake of the forms themselves and not for their history and evolution, and not even in favor of an ideology of any kind — Christian or Communist. They are included in everyday life on very different principles of almost imperceptible penetration into consciousness and some influences on this consciousness within the most living, moving experience of life, not reflected in concepts. Just as we do not notice the air we breathe and the light in which we see the world of objects and landscapes.

But it is in this light of the phenomenon we are not fully aware of; all our architecture acquires its own meaning and basis. Once it has grown to the size of giant pyramids, today it is embedded in the ordinary steps of the staircase of a residential house, the balcony, while dwelling at the same time in the shadows of the unconscious. This dark matter of the unconscious is perhaps the "dark space" in which architecture keeps 99% of its meanings. The space behind the crown of the head and the bottom of the soul.

It is possible that the discovery of these roots of architecture will turn our understanding of architecture almost 180 degrees. And in the XXI century or later we will understand how much it means to a man and where architecture actually grows from in this terrible and passionate, "beautiful and furious world" of Being.

According to its semantic nature architecture forms a symbolic order of self-consciousness of the man and the universe in the form of complex forms and categories of experience and thinking. These forms are still not sufficiently understood because architecture is considered as a form of art and technology — and in both these spheres of culture, this new synthesis of meanings is not obvious.

And in the "symbolic function", as E. Cassirer believes, the very essence of human consciousness is revealed. It can be expressed sensually. He wrote that they forget that there is an activity of sensuality itself, or — using the expression of Goethe — "an exact sensual fantasy", which manifests itself in various fields of spiritual creativity [4].

The main task of the current stage is to abandon the habitually parallel consideration of physical, semiotic, psychological, phenomenological and other scientific and philosophical aspects, and their setup for the symbiosis and systematic consideration.

## III. ESOTERICISM AND THE THEORY OF ARCHITECTURE

### *A. Esotericism as an Irrational Addition to Architectural Thought*

Esotericism, creating religions and sciences, immediately became the subject of persecution from their side — and even today — when interest in esotericism is already not being discredited as quackery. On the other hand, it is interesting that no attempt to generalize and analyze is made in esotericism itself as if there is a danger that such steps will lead if not to its exposure but to the impoverishment of its initiative forces and energy, the emasculation of its meaning.

Nowadays, bureaucratic ideology builds its power in the system of law, where there is no room for discrepancies. Esotericism is built on an individual interpretation of its schemes. Therefore, in a bureaucratic society, esotericism is removed and drags a marginal existence, and even if it is used, that is only for propaganda and surreptitiously. Therefore, it would be appropriate to look at the prospects of esotericism as a new phase of the oscillatory process — where rational principles do not give way to it but retain at the same time their positions, including the grounds for critical reflection of intuition. As an instrument of criticism,

science, for the most part, remains a reliable basis (except when science itself begins to revise these principles), while its synthetic functions remain in the field of technology and inventive revelations-discoveries.

### *B. The Mystery of the Esoteric Time*

Esotericism usually seems timeless — atemporal. But what is the meaning of esoteric atemporality? First of all, it seems that it is in the removal of esotericist's actions from the flow of historical time with its accidents. Esotericism tends to think in probabilities and sets but does not accept accidents. This brings esotericism close to the time of scientific laws, which may include processes, but lie outside of time themselves. Their timelessness is their ideality as a technical condition of thinking. This fact shows that Plato's idealism is connected with both mathematical and esoteric traditions. Mathematics and esotericism do not deal with randomness — and all the paradoxes of time are generally defended by mathematics as devoid of the unreliability of chance. At the same time, the chance is the meeting. Therefore, esoteric atemporality, as well as the scientific absolute, protects people from the randomness, from the incident.

Architecture, like any other art, has never denied the irrational or intuitive side of creativity. Intuition, sometimes coinciding, sometimes not coinciding with the rational logic of some kind, retained its constructive role in architecture. However, when this role was reduced to zero, and all mental activity ideologically turned to science, architecture lost its human and artistic properties. Therefore, we can (at least hypothetically) consider esotericism as a way of returning the irrational side to creativity and thinking.

In the coming theory of architecture and art, the place that is now occupied by a single intuition can turn into a system of different forms of intuitive comprehension and its foundations.

### *C. Esoteric Understanding of Architecture*

If we apply the esoteric concept of three bodies — physical, astral, and mental to the concept of architecture — then we may immediately see that though it is not related to architecture directly, it gives a logical outline for its understanding. Esotericism requires searching in architecture its physical, astral (psychological, psychic) and mental bodies, that are logically triune origins in the organic connection of categories. And they are more significant than the stability — utility — beauty, although don't contradict with them. In this triune understanding of the architecture there are nature — physics, and soul and will, and thinking and logic. Architects still can't learn these three elements no matter how many diplomas they have. Of course, this comparison was not to knock the chair out from under the Vitruvian formula but to try to find the key to an esoteric reading of the state and meaning of the architect's profession.

## IV. PROGRESS AND INDIVIDUATION: INTRODUCTION TO THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

### *A. The Concept of Individuation*

Individuation is one of the basic concepts of the philosopher Carl Gustav Jung. The new is born from direct experience, not in a set of suggestible dogmas. Individuation is the process of cultivating or deploying unique ideas and abilities. Individuation, according to Jung, is a process whose purpose is to become one's own selfhood. Thus, Jung suggests how to withstand the system of universal compulsion [5].

Issues relating to the relationship between individuation and progress can also be addressed from a special angle. Isn't it a personality that makes progress? And then what determines the significance of the artist — the era? Or the significance of an era is defined by personalities? It is clear that Einstein and Bohr could not appear in ancient times, but the appearance of Democritus and Leucippus — the ancient atomists — in my opinion, is no less unlikely. It is impossible to derive the atomistic teaching of these philosophers from the features of the epoch, although it is possible to interpret their teachings in connection with the epoch as one pleases.

But the teachings of philosophers were addressed to a narrow circle of initiates, while art and architecture are addressed to all. The question is whether there are individuation and progress in perceptual abilities as well. Whether it is possible to speak about "progressive" spectators or outstanding individuals among them. As long as the art was the property of strictly hierarchical societies, this question was not raised. For a democratic society, it takes on a very significant meaning.

Modern architects — since the second half of the XX century, with all the variety of their individual handwriting, can be considered within a fairly stereotypical means defined by the industrial era and new construction techniques and compositional thinking. The progress or spirit of the era, in this case, is again associated with a range of individual characteristics in the work of each architect.

Individuation is also a gift, a talent. It is not enough to have a unique fingerprint, or iris, for physical individuality to become significant in culture, as for the cultural individuation we are talking about here. Even the uniqueness of the biological type must be transformed into the uniqueness of the cultural phenomenon, and this requires talent.

The movement of ideas and values in the body of culture is extremely uneven and its laws are probably hundreds of times more difficult to trace than the laws of the movement of air masses in the atmosphere. No predictions can be made neither here nor there, for quite a considerable period.

The very nature of the movement of elements of the sociocultural sphere and the formation of their aggregates can be likened to both hydrological currents and atmospheric vortices. We take models and representations from hydro- or gas dynamics as examples, but these are only heuristic

techniques. It is possible that at times they are useful, but at times meteorology also used images taken from human passions and intentions, too, to no avail.

Therefore, speaking about progress and individuation, we face the ideas of freedom, creativity, the rights for life and death, for the structural diversity of a family, a state, cultural, economic systems, with a variety of psychological, mythological and ideological images, without which it is impossible to understand the social meaning of progress and individuation.

These mechanisms are so different and the logic of constructive transformations is so unexpected that it is difficult to use even historical analogies. We most likely do not know whether there are many or few mythological relics in the modern sociocultural and political sphere, but we are often ready to assert both with equal enthusiasm. The recent history of architecture and society itself, for example, shows how archaic models were repainted in scientific and technical models and vice versa — when scientific ideas took the form of archaic myths.

### B. *The Ladder of Castes*

"Not everyone will be taken to the future," Ilya Kabakov said. It is reasonable to assume that properly organized progress and individuation must pass the stages of the advancement of the masses. There are people already living in the future at the top of the social pyramid — while at the base — there are masses still languishing in the past. Over time, however, they will move to the place of the current progressive elite. This is the logic of gradual progress, which is based on the fact that instantaneous transformation of the world, no matter how hard philosophers want it, is technically impossible.

## V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to confirm the inevitability of the turn in professional self-awareness and education of the architect. And therefore, I concretize some of the opportunities that arise from the attempt to discover and attract specific forces of esotericism and individuation in the sphere of education. In other words, I will formulate the tasks of esotericism and individuation in architectural education.

Here are some highlights of the common points of esotericism and architecture, supported by the concept of individuation expressed in the article:

- Stimulate the growth of professional self-awareness and cultivate creative individualism;
- Develop an individual incentive to architecture;
- Stimulate individual style type and architecture concept;
- Associate a task with a type of creative individuation;
- Promote the discovery of conception as an intuitive form;

- Activate the splitting of the concept and articulation of its local structures;
- Form a dynamic image of a static structure as the deployment of the internal to the external;
- Reflexively relate the structure of the idea to the landscape and the historical moment;
- Cultivate the individualization of the image and the discovery of its physiognomic dynamics;
- Develop the subordination of different scales and distances of the reading and formation of the composition;
- Transform the work on the project into a methodology of becoming as such;
- Contribute to the invention of a language and the plastic compliance of the project.

It is possible that all these verbal formulations will not be able to convey the desired meaning. The thing is that there is a kind of intuitive impulse towards the project outcome floating on the senses, and all the differences of subjective and objective intentions constantly merge in it. This indistinguishability of intentions and details of the object itself becomes the subject of a kind of passion and excitement.

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