

GLOBAL ARCHITECTURE AND ALIENATION

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ABSTRACT

Some cities today, for the sake of attracting tourism and more foreign investment, are competing to construct more iconic buildings, which is leading today's trend in architecture. Such architecture is not willing to consider the existing language of local architecture in most cases, but when it does it only makes a reference to help promote its own status. So the individual who believed or still believes in a homogenous community will find him/herself alienated again in the new environment. As such architecture has left the arena that was once open to the newly celebrated ordinary life and dwelling and joined the one that is led by financial powers and consumerism, at the cost of alienating more people.

Keywords: Iconic architecture, alienation, authenticity, ordinary, modernity, post modernity

1 INTRODUCTION

The condition for the subject's objectivity is the unity of the self, without which no reasonable outcome is possible. This self unity is expressed in modernity through the concepts of self-understanding and self-consciousness or in Heideggerian terms self-assertion, which collapses the twin concepts as Henrich explains, but he adds that self-assertion includes judgment, which is necessary for bringing the different parts or fragments of life in one peaceful horizons, and that the revelation of the self happens when the self is in a relation with another person, and it has to be a relation in trust. Those conditions will be difficult for the alienated to comply with to get to a reasonable comprehensive and orientated life, where objectivity can assume its role. Also for self-assertion, mere survivalism is not enough, because it means the suspension of judgment which will cause alienation.(Henrich, 1999, p.313) So when Allan Bloom writes that: "survivalism has taken the place of heroism as the admired quality,"(Taylor, 1992, p.16) he is referring to the alienated state of existence.

For modern thinking, self-fulfilment is being authentic and true to one's self. And authenticity is linked to our judgment that unites us with our horizon, feeling of security and personal worldview. The judgment of the modern individual in the process of self-fulfilment is ideally taken in freedom, but because it is linked to personal worldview, which is linked to a culture and social system, it becomes a dependent freedom.

As Taylor explains,

Only if I exist in a world in which history, or the demands of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God, or something else of this order matters crucially, can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial. Authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self, it supposes such demands. (Taylor, 1992, pp.40-41)

This worldview involves also judgment that is linked to our ethics and morality, because we assume that our self-realization is moving through what we conceive as good for us. Thus our self-fulfilment is not only authentic but also moral and it is in relation to our worldview. But this moral authenticity is subjective in a relative sense, because there is no one final ethical relation that makes self-realization concrete. *So to summarize the above in a sentence, one can say that the authentic self-assertion is morally articulated and happens only in relation of trust within a community and cultural activities that provides the secure horizons.*

2 THE ORDINARY, THE AUTHENTIC, AND THE ALIENATED

Most of avant garde movements regarded authenticity in the Nietzschean sense, which promote self-assertion despite the existing horizon, and much in accordance to the power of one's will. Such an outlook does not share the Christian ethical outlook of benevolence and empathy.(Taylor, 1992, pp.56-66) For sure what Nietzsche is explaining is meant for the ordinary people, as do Taylor in his reference to the

importance of the horizons and Henrich in his reference to the importance of trust.

The importance given to ordinary life and the individual is an important part of the structures of the new modern society and requires that the individual be educated on issues that concern the nation. Hence a form of social engineering is always in place to check on not only issues affecting national identity but also on individual and particular identity according to people's own self-understanding and in context of local horizons. But in today's world such context is very much thought of as in relation to global context.

Henri Lefebvre, in 1947, argued that everyday life suffers from very powerful forms of alienation, because people are not experiencing the real life in its entirety. Instead life has disintegrated into disconnected and unrelated moments. Hence individuals are alienated from their own "past" identity and don't seem to be able to recover it in their leisure, public, and work times. (Heynen, 1999, p.156) Hilde Heynen explains that for Debord the real life has become nothing more than images that have acquired the power of reality, which are acting as motors of hypnotic behaviour.

Debord proposes the thesis that capitalist society is essentially different from what it was in the nineteenth century. Instead of the dominance of the commodity, one now has the dominance of the spectacle ...

Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation. (Heynen, 1999, p.156)

So the spectacle of architecture acts as the cause but it also is the result of the loss of unity. Modern movement in architecture wanted to project "the spirit of the age" signalling such unity as it evolved in the new technology, the new projected minimum living standards, new social and political systems, new stratification of communities, new relations between the private and the public, in short through the new industrial and mass media culture. This self-assertion or self realization as we have said is seen as living *authentically*. Hence any link to the past was viewed as a betrayal of the authentic modern self. But how can an alienated individual live authentically?

To assert such authenticity post-modernity has argued for the importance of communication with the existing built form that it is part of our collective memory and language and hence part of our worldview and our identity, which meant that it cannot be separated from our self-understanding process. And because self-assertion is always individual and particular, therefore cultural frame of reference will always be present, because the universality of human self which is promoted by modernism cannot be "different" and hence cannot assume any identity.

Through its attempt to be more particular and avoid the universality of modern rationalism, post-modernity set off to multiculturalism and then progressed in its openness (to the other) towards globalism with decreasing attention to local identities. So what was a formal language of a particular culture is juxtaposed with another particular to become part of the elite global language who advocates global citizenship.

Hence communication and articulation become important and central to post-modern theory, which needed to immerse itself into interpretation and reinterpretation in search for what can be part of this new cultural outlook, to engage architecture in the process of self realization without being exclusive as it was promoted by the modern avant garde movements such as futurism or the modern movement. So the modern phenomenon of alienation continues to live in post-modernity. Lebbeus Woods declares in his 1993 Manifesto:

Architecture and war are not incompatible. Architecture is war. War is architecture. I am at war with my time, with my history, with all authority that resides in fixed and frightened forms. I am one of millions who do not fit in, who have no home, no family, no doctrine, nor firm place to call my own, no known beginning or end, no 'sacred and primordial site'. (Jencks, 2006, p.304)

Post-modernity in its early stages attempted to solve the problem of alienation presumably by enhancing architecture relation to culture, the public, and the ordinary, and hence Venturi attempted the use of the street existing architecture language whether it is traditional or historical or modern or pop art. Rossi and other neo-rationalist argued for restoring the language that holds the collective memory of the city. But post modernity has gradually shifted its attention from the ordinary to the celebrity and iconic and from

the person as a dweller to the individual as a consumer. Massimo Cacciari writes in 1980:

There is no doubt that Heidegger keeps listening for the call to dwell. But this listening is just silence. What speaks is not dwelling but the crisis of dwelling. And its language is critical: to be exact, division, detachment, difference... Dwelling is being in peace; it is not a passive protection, but rather a causing of the fourfold to appear where mortals dwell... the subject is manifest solely in its relation with the will to power over the earth. In defining dwelling, Heidegger describes the possible conditions of a mode of living that today is impossible. (Hays, 1998, pp.396-397)

In 1988 deconstruction was embraced by MOMA to celebrate the new formal language of architecture and the power of its iconic qualities, mostly at the cost of architecture relation to culture and nature. So what was presented in the international style as a direct economical and rational style of a neighbourhood in 1927, developed in 1990's as a search for celebrated iconic architecture that resent style and seeks change for its own sake. The emerging architecture embraced art with the help of the new technology that brought the cyber space and virtual reality closer to the real world.

What is critical in deconstruction technique is the use of architecture, whose physical impact last for generations, as a possible expressive language of a process that can be seen as transitional and in flux on such a scale of practice instead of letting it to be part of the secured horizon. Still one might argue that juxtaposing symbols or using some abstract formal language will help the new civil society that is composed of several cultures feel not only stretched between presence in case of cultural mix of symbols and absence in case of abstract language, but also feel that all such processes of identity promotion or formation are transitional. Thus architecture language becomes a matter of subjectivity in the relative sense.

Post-modern cry was loud and clear against international style use in both business districts and neighbourhoods, but today the new trend in architecture is asserting a kind of global ground that will allow variation but only to include the particular culture in the global fabric instead of defining itself with the local culture. This new globally related architecture evolved through a series of iconic buildings that are in most cases designed by celebrity architects, which leaves the masses of people at a distance, where it will be impossible for the majority of them to consider it as part of their intimate horizons. And it will be difficult to see how such architecture can be considered for application on a wider scale, without producing a confused skyline and mixed built form.

Hence the practice of architecture itself has left the arena that was once open to the newly celebrated ordinary life and dweller and joined the one led by financial powers and consumerism. "Postmodernism itself became subject to the forces of consumption and commodification."(Hays, 1998, pp.689-690) Architects as a group of elites and probably celebrity architects are more effective should advocate change to promote the progress of the community, but time is always needed for others to evaluate and differentiate the suggested changes to choose afterwards to object or integrate. Without such span of time many people of older generations or sometimes even younger ones, of may be a different education or who are living in peace with the existing environment, will be left *alienated*.

But architecture as part of people's collective memory will make it difficult to argue for any possible future that does not consider those who still want to see themselves related to their city and want to live with its heritage as it is, without seeking another alternative for the near future. The emerging abstract language of architecture ignores the relation with the community and lives up to its own pace of change as part of architect's self-articulation. This argument is very much similar to the initial argument given by post-modernity itself against modern movement.

One might also argue that going global is part of the spirit of this age, which has been advocated by many as the destination of the new world order that brings all nations in a net of interconnected interests. The advanced electronic technology has left little doubt that such global net is reality. Hence it is safe to assume that there is part of our communities that is moving closer to such global culture and many thinkers are arguing for the importance of global citizen and the importance of the *newly created global horizon*. This part of the community at least for the time being is not what we call the masses of ordinary

people who are mostly concerned with culture and identity formation on both levels: personal and national, as the latest Olympics in China proves despite its few global iconic architecture.

Capitalism and its consumerism have helped “survivalism” to replace pre-modern “heroism” as the admired quality of life, which, as Henrich explains, is not enough for any self-assertion. Also Taylor explains that the better and the higher for moral ideals are defined in terms of what we ought to desire. Hence any promotion for what we ought to desire has to start on the ground that survivalism is granted for people as part of their basic right. And architecture by its nature is not part of human basic needs. So it has to give what is more significant to their self-assertion, otherwise it will rule out itself from their self-understanding and self-consciousness processes.

With the continuous advocacy of change and newness and thus the promotion of continuously changing horizons, the majority of any community will be threatened by alienation and thus even survivalism will be doubtful. In parallel, we see a shift in the ethical theory towards virtue ethics which support the individual and his/her judgment, and that creates yet another dilemma for modern communities. The obsession with individuality in these critical times of change and the trust in his/her goodness will eventually destabilize the local social system. The *relation to the new* is becoming the symbol of being in the world, and people in general and architects in particular cannot but assume that this new is good for the majority not in the sense of what exist—the present, but in the sense of what is coming: the future—or assumed to becoming by the leaders of change starting from the politicians and not ending with the architects.

3 THE PRACTICE OF ARCHITECTURE

The problem is not limited to iconic projects but it is also present in the practice of the followers who feel safe in their practice when they advocate the newly celebrated formal language, especially those who are affiliated with large construction firms. Those architects are giving the practice of the pioneers the legitimacy they need to go on designing without much attention is paid to the local except for the elements they choose to include mostly for their own aesthetical purposes.

The practices of the architect’s followers differentiate and integrate the newly emerging architecture with their immediate collective horizon, which can help bringing any new style closer to the horizons of the ordinary people. As a result the new “style” will gradually become part of their worldview. Without such navigation the new modern global architecture will stay alien and will alienate its viewers and users. Though many such practice use the importance of uniqueness to tourism and commerce as an excuse, but the importance of integration is essential to the *spontaneity and consistency of life*.

Advocating complexity and contradiction is another strong post-modern message in its early stage that left modern purism and utopian thinking to come closer to the public as they are and as their established horizons suggest. But some were arguing for the autonomy of architecture that is free from any relation to other discourses including culture. Such stand complicated the dynamic of differentiation and integration that the architect’s followers undertook to stabilize the effect of post-modern proposed changes.

Post-modernity in general in its early stages worked on bringing back what was alienated, and argued for strengthening the relation with the contextual language. But the recent development of post-modernity has ignored such engagement with the public. In case of Eisenman’s projects such realization takes the form of rejecting any concrete frame of reference, which means promoting relative subjectivity. In Jencks words, “Eisenman is an example of this restless self-transformation.” (Jencks, 2006, p.5) It is a message of negation of what exist, and continuous search for new forms even in what relates to his own creations. In this case that means that he is *against any differentiation and integration with, or stability of the horizon*.

The practice of a self-centred architect cannot be trusted for a stable relation with the community, though the trust might be given to their creativity, because by changing the physical horizon the architect in effect is setting the agenda for a different culture from the one that existed, and in those days it does not seem that it is any other from Globalization. In a sense the pioneers are seeking their self-assertion in delivering

architecture that comes from their own self-understanding as global architects. In fact most architects, given the type of ego that is inherent in their education, would easily take the challenge to become global architects if they are given the chance.

Ignoring the ordinary people's need for self-realization through their own fathomable environment, will result in a gradual slide to alienating not only few individuals but also the community, though it might result in a more successful practical careers for the architects who promote what powerful clients are investing in, and hence gain power, which given Nietzsche's philosophy should be the right path to support individual's authenticity.

Clearly if there are masses of such "successful" architects it will be impossible to speak of a homogenous identity of any sort for our horizons except may be a kind of relative and "chaotic 'constructive' identity". But chaos promotes inconsistency and cannot support a comprehensible language and hence cannot help support any possible communication that is necessary for the creation of a community not only for the assertion of oneself on the part of the speaker, but also getting the *recognition* from the listener that is central to any identity formation process and without which any self-assertion cannot be approved.

The gradual shift of pioneers of post-modern architecture to align themselves more with the financially capable rather than with the local culture was possible through the many iconic architecture they have produced and through the efficient marketing by critics and theoreticians of whom Charles Jencks is the most notable, which gave them extra power to lead in the field. Reidar Due explains that "power becomes authority, that is, becomes effective and binding on individuals only through this semiotic process of inscription." (Due, 2007, p.77) Recently Jencks admitted somewhat indirectly to the emergence of *new global modern architecture* in his book "Critical Modernism" after claiming the death of modern architecture. (Jencks, 2007) A comment written on the book on his website reads:

In a unique analysis ... he reveals the evolutionary, social and economic forces of this new stage of global civilization. Critical Modernism emerges at two levels. As an underground movement, it is the fact that many modernisms compete, quarrel and criticize each other as they seek to become dominant. Secondly, when so many of these movements follow each other today in quick succession, they may reach a 'critical mass,' a Modernism, and become a conscious tradition.

The earlier role that is sought for architecture and urban design represent a mediation role in the form of double coding or juxtaposition, while much later iconic architecture is more of an immediate realization of personal self-taste and interpretation, and many architects have admitted using their own psychological analysis to help in the process of design. Mary Mcleod says:

By the early 1980s, however, post-modern architecture largely abandoned its critical and transgressive culture, one strikingly in accord with the tone of contemporary political life. It was a trajectory traced by the careers of many architects: for Robert Stern, from a critique of public housing in the Roosevelt Island competition to luxury suburban development; for Charles Moore, from a sensitive search for place and regionally responsive vocabulary at Sea Ranch to outlandish walls and amusement parks at New Orleans World fair; ... (Hays, 1998, p689)

4 ARCHITECTURE AND VIRTUAL REALITY

Max Weber used iron cage metaphor to describe modern society's self-imposed captivity to technology and instrumental reason. Today it is possible to process massive information to simulate reality, which will help address some critical problems in architecture such as dealing with the impact of the changing environment. But all results if not judged with some ethical and social sensibility, might prove to be stupid aesthetics or insensible.

The new age of information that Castells celebrates is immersed in promoting virtual reality, which is difficult to see how is it helping our self-realization since realization is meant to be related to the real world. This new virtual reality is proving to be an "Iron Cage", as cases of addiction to the internet increase around the world, especially in younger generations, which is also increasing the generation gap.

This time the iron cage is threatening to turn not only the person into a continuous process of unsettled formation, but also the whole horizon with which individuals identify themselves into a process of change. The significant other is becoming the changing *virtual other* and the property with which we make our place is becoming the changing *virtual property* under the control of some real power. In other words the whole real horizon is gradually getting replaced by changing *virtual horizon*, a process which started with the Radio, the Cinema, and the Television and finally ended in the Internet at least for the time being.

All conceptual thinking in architecture was virtual realities before being executed. Such close relation is critical given today's problems of the cyber space that we have explained above. Trained architects can differentiate between virtual reality and the true real world much easier than the ordinary person because of the nature of their training, but in case of new innovative idea, it is usually difficult for the innovative architect to differentiate between the "virtual" and the "possible" as it is merely conceptual. Most architects wait for responses on their concepts after occupation for some time, which proves that s/he has little or no way of knowing whether what s/he has conceptualized can be successful in reality.

The earlier projects of Zaha Hadid were as much virtual reality as they were architecture. So is the case with many projects of Peter Eisenman. It does not take an additional analysis to see the slippery connection between the two (virtual reality and architecture) in the process of design conception. Such close relation to virtual reality that is enhanced by the computer's cyber space is a challenge for the ethical and moral grounds of architecture, and architects should take good precautions, before adopting new "possible realities". Guarded process of design is essential if we want to include architecture's new practices and forms in publicly acceptable cultural language. The challenge is to design through people's ordinary life and nature, but still should attempt to be aggressive for change to prevent cultural stagnation and probably death.

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