

Reimund Fein\*

## FLEETING ARCHITECTURE IS NO ARCHITECTURE

Architecture endures beyond its material existence. It is the ideas that survive. All ideas have always been there and stand outside of time. Therefore, all architectural solutions have to be found, not invented. The never changing essence, the ideas of architecture, is what counts. Architecture aiming at the moment's effect will rightly fleet.

*Keywords: idea, invention, art, memory, past, present, future, change, boredom*

All architecture fleets materially. Such is the law of all matter. Sometimes, natural disasters accelerate this process. Material destruction of architecture by human hands is also happening all the time, be it for new practical needs or for ideological reasons, or for outbursts of violence. Architecture seems to be constantly threatened by natural or human destructive energies.

Still, one wonders if any one work of architecture can really ever totally fleet. A building can materially disappear. But does its architectural idea disappear with it? Is it possible architecture can live on independently from its physical existence?

Not every building is architecture. In the same way, architecture does not necessarily have to be a real building. Isn't architecture the totality of architectural ideas, principles and concepts, whether they are built, drawn, remembered, imagined or just dreamed? The question is whether ideas, principles and concepts can, by their own nature, ever disappear. After all, they have always been there, they are there and they always will be there. Even when an idea is not being had, when principles are not being applied, when concepts are not being used, this does not mean they do not exist. In turn, this

means that any architectural idea that somebody has, any architectural principle that somebody applies, and any concept that somebody might use, is neither their property nor their invention. They have just been taken from what is there already, from what has been there forever, even in a case when nobody has made use of it before.

If there is one thing that is durable, it is the set of existing and therefore possible architectural principles, concepts and solutions. There is nothing to invent in those; they just have to be found, chosen and wisely applied. Solutions are found, not invented. One looks at what is there and selects what seems best for the case at hand.

Seeing things this way, one really does not have to worry over the fleetingness of architecture at all. In this case, the question of its fleetingness does not even occur.

The essence of art is to reach out and touch something inside the beholder, and if architecture wants to be art, this is exactly what it has to do. If it does not, it is just a dead object, not art, and thus not really architecture. A built object is not yet architecture. Architecture we only have when it does to the user and beholder those effects that are the essence of

\* Fein Reimund, Full Prof. D.Sc. Ph.D. Arch., Lausitz Universität Cottbus.

art. Whenever architecture is art and touches something inside another human being, it will have done an effect that lives on and that cannot disappear any more. It causes a change, even if miniscule, that cannot be made undone. Architecture survives through the effects that it provokes, through the enrichment in human existence that it can cause. Architecture does not live on through its material existence; it lives on through the effects that remain. Those effects can be had by looking at the existing building; this is the most direct way to get its effects; but the same happens when we look at drawings, or when we just imagine architecture.

Imagination is another key word in this context: To imagine is seeing without the object really being there. This alone proves that the material existence is not necessary to see things. Also, we can see things in our memories. When we visually memorize, we see a reality, even if what we see does not really exist anymore. The effects on us remain the same; they might even be stronger than reality.

One could object that a work of architecture has really and definitely disappeared as soon as there is no more memory or documentation of that architecture left. But this happens only in theory. In reality, this case is very unlikely, looking at the ever growing mass of documentation of the past that we have. How many things had been apparently forgotten, particularly in architecture, and all in a sudden, the interest was back, for whatever reason, memory came back into life, and what seemed to be dead and gone was suddenly back in the foreground?

It is the existence of ideas, principles and concepts in the people's heads that will never fleet. This is what architecture is. Buildings can fleet, as can styles and fashions that are defined by their time's conditions outside of architecture. Intellectual and artistic meaning and content cannot fleet. The strong works of architecture, those who radiate

a lot of intellectual and artistic content, will have it easy to continue to emanate their effects, no matter whether they exist physically or just as memories. The weaker ones will of course have it harder to endure, but even they will always leave a trace, as long as they have some intellectual and artistic content. By principle, architecture cannot fleet; only non-architecture can fleet.

As architects, all we have to do is to look at what has been done already, recognize the principles and concepts in what has been done, evaluate the alternatives, select one of them wisely and apply the principle, the concept, in our own creation. The past is our only source of knowledge and inspiration; the future is invisible; future that is visible is already past. The present has no duration; it is just a thin line without "thickness" between the future and the past. How long does present last? In whatever we do as architects, we must not look at the moment of now, not at the validity of the moment. The moment is fleeting. It is just that instant of passage from future to past. There is really no time between future and past. As architects, we form the future from the past, and we transform future into past. Just by working with this simple fact in mind, we will carry on the common knowledge of architecture that has been collected in thousands of years; this is how architecture will endure in time.

We should be much more interested in the things in architecture that do not change, rather than in those that change. Changing for the fun of changing is not interesting at all. The things that never change are the essence of architecture, and the essence of architecture is what we should look for all the time. Changing all the time can be very boring, because it will make you feel like moving in circles and not going ahead. Aren't we really constantly looking for that path towards the knowledge of truth in this fascinating and possibly oldest of arts? It sure is a long,

maybe an endless path. How can walking this path ever be boring? Whoever is looking for changes out of boredom or just search for “newness” is certainly not following this path. Their work is useless for architecture, and it will rightly fleet. Real architecture, architecture that is beyond the restraints of time, can

never fleet; architecture that is only trying to connect to its moment will instead fleet in a second.

Don't invent; don't look for constant change. Look at what is, and you will have everything you need and all there is for shaping the future. Nothing exists that does not exist.