

Piotr Gajewski*

TORMENT AND HERITAGE

The Architects have been leaving in the past and in the future. The past understood as the heritage or history what has a substantial influence on architecture and his quality.

Keywords: architecture, past, future, heritage, history

The Future

Man, and especially an architect, does not live in the present but either in the past or the future. A profession geared towards the future lives through a world designed not only personally but equally by others' hands. As architects we know how the world will look in a few years for we are acquainted with it through designs, drawings, models, digital presentations. We live within this future world and understand it as something obvious. Consequently the buildings constructed in present time appear banal and dated, for at the moment of their realisation we already know the new future vision of reality. The implementations do not measure up to the world within which we live.

Architecture constructed or not constructed and yet that has arisen in a virtual form, digital or analogical, ages with the passing of time and becomes the past.

The Past

Architecture that has been constructed loses its material value. Stone crumbles, glass becomes matt, devices wear out, soft materials stiffen and crumble. There is no material which gains in value and worth with the passing of time, even concrete which still bonds at the same time corrodes. Architecture also loses its functional value for the dynamics of life result in the arising of new needs which earlier had been unknown. Functions for which designed objects

disappear and new ones arise the object is unable to adopt. They age also morally for expectations in relation to buildings change while an object constructed years ago does not fulfil them today. In aging buildings the solutions applied appear excessive and unnecessary because today we know of others that appear superior and better.

One day, however, a vigilant observer of architecture will perceive that a well-known banal object gains with the passing of time a new value and worth and becomes historic architecture.

History

Historic architecture is a collection not for restoration. Reconstructions restore former atmospheres and arouse within us nostalgia, yet they are not research material for a historian and speak more about those who restored them than about the initial creators. The process whereby new architecture comes into being is constant, while one day it appears that things are being built differently than once they were. The imperceptibility of the epoch for which we were participants passes into history. This happens so at the moment when we stand as witnesses to a transfer into another epoch, historical, economic or aesthetical which may occur in an evolutionary way and not suddenly. This occurred to the architecture of late Modernism. The ways of building evolve and suddenly it appears that the works of

* Gajewski Piotr, Assoc. Prof. D.Sc. Ph.D. Arch., Cracow University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture.

the modernism of the 60s and 70s constitute a closed collection which can now only be reduced and never increased in number. Proof of which is the fact that any building whatsoever in the style and technology of that period would be today a falsification. It is not possible to return to this period and its superseded technology; there is no point in building things in a worse and more expensive way when we have the knowledge to do the job better. The inability to reproduce and increase a set of buildings within a former style and characteristic results in a desire to protect a collection that was witness to its times, system, technology, views. For this reason objects which have more than once lost their utility and material worth become valued and with the course of time increasingly rare. These buildings become a collection of forms i.e. a collection of heritage.

Heritage

Norman Davies has written that heritage is the greatest enemy of history. Here he is referring to the fact that heritage is a collection of forms and not an analysis of processes. The uncritical appliance of forms from the past results in eclecticism and does not favour the construction of good architecture. The Central Square and the old part of Nowa Huta so willingly marvelled at by connoisseurs despairingly demand a subsequent plan of revitalisation, which means the returning of life to somewhere where it never existed. This is the case because a historical plan for the city and the historical forms utilised was uncritically applied, as if it was not possible to learn from history and attempt to trace the historical process. Forms are the result of times, of outlooks but also of human behaviour, fantasy and

education. Therefore the forms of the past are not possible to repeat without falsity. The roof, cornice, column, attic today sound bad and recall the elements of a past architecture, one not for imitation today. In applying the elements of heritage we will be merely imitating forms that are not going to have any technological justification whatsoever and which will not be valid culturally.

This does not mean that we should not draw on the output of the past. We should draw our learning from history and from observations of historical processes. The critical observation of these processes allows us to perceive a group of people and the man standing behind them, to help us understand motivations, sources and origins.

Émile M. Cioran [1] writes that “man’s achievements are nothing when compared to the torment experienced to realise them”. In transferring historic forms to the present we forget about the torment while gaining from an unauthorised legacy.

Poland and Cracow in particular is a place with a specific relationship to the past. In attempting to justify some thesis or other it is enough to show that once it was like this and to obtain its acceptance. It was not always so; there were revolutionary periods of rejecting the past. We have to remember that a critical relationship to the past may be the mainspring for progress and innovation. A total affirmation of the past has not only social effects but equally blocks progress itself.

It follows to reintroduce a pessimism in relation to the past, which would allow us to slowly discard the romantic idealism uncritically accepting the forms of a former heritage.

ENDNOTES

[1] Émile M. Cioran, *Pesymistyczna wizja historii* [A Pessimistic Vision of History] [in:] *Samotność i przeznaczenie* [Solitude and Destiny], Wydawnictwo KR, Warszawa 2008.