

# ANCHORING CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECT PRACTICE IN LIQUID TIMES

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**ABSTRACT:** We try to define the current sociocultural perspective in the field of architecture as postmodern, considering the overcoming of modernity and the establishment of a new pluralistic view, not only in architecture. Through this lens, we aim to fit architectural works into the context of the present. However, this assumes deeper knowledge and a firm conviction regarding the definition of our era. When we stop perceiving our society as postmodern but as a late stage of modernity, as Zygmunt Bauman suggests, we will find a different approach to how we should approach contemporary architectural creation and how to interpret it. The thesis aims to define our time as liquid modernity, and by that open a discourse on anchoring architectural practice in the present. It intends to focus more on changes in interpersonal relationships and their influence on the interpretation of architectural works. Through these steps, we will achieve a deeper understanding of individual sociocultural phenomena. Our perspective will also broaden on how to perceive our society and how to work with the context of the place where architectural work emerges.

**KEYWORDS:** architecture; phenomenology; liquid times; dialog

## INTRODUCTION

World of today is characterized by the concept of post-modernity, which interprets modernity as the "collapse or sudden disintegration of the early modern illusion – the belief that the path we are following has a certain end, an achievable telos<sup>1</sup> of historical change, that there exists a state of perfection to be reached tomorrow, next year, or the next millennium, a kind of just and conflict-free society in all or some of its many presumed aspects: that there will be a stable balance between supply, demand, and the satisfaction of all needs; that there will be a perfect order in which everything is in its right place, where nothing inappropriate persists, and there is no doubt about any place; that human affairs will be entirely transparent because everything worth knowing will be known; that there will be complete control of the future – so complete that all contingencies, all disputes, ambiguities, and unforeseen consequences of human actions will come to an end<sup>2</sup>." So when did postmodernity begin, especially in architecture, we can pinpoint it to a specific date and time. Its beginning is dated as "July 15, 1972, at 3:32 PM in St. Louis, Missouri<sup>3</sup>" when a fourteen-story housing project was demolished. According to Charles Jencks, this symbolic act marked the collapse of modernity. "In other words, when we talk about the 1960s, we are thematizing one of the final phases of the classic period of modern architecture – late modernism; after the 1960s, postmodernity emerged along with deconstructivism as its most radical expression, followed by neo-structuralism, neo- and meta-rationalism, techno- and eco-ism."<sup>4</sup> Architecture today, just like at any other time in our history, serves as a very good mirror reflecting our era, our thinking, and our attitude towards the world, so to speak, it shows what our contemporary horizon is in tangible form. The abandonment of the search for primary ideas that will guide our perspective on the world gives way to the hegemony of fragmented sciences, where one scientific discipline competes with another to ensure the audibility of their theories. We must also not forget the omnipresent imperative of economic growth. Nice example of this is the transition from the seriousness of historical buildings, labeled with demonized assessments of high energy consumption as very uneconomical and impractical due to the absence of elevators and other already automated requirements. On the contrary, we are presented with the instantaneous world.

## THE INSTANTANEOUS WORLD

Desire accompanies our entire lives. As human beings, we are born entirely dependent on the help of

others, without this help we would not survive for long. As child psychologists would say, desire drives us forward, but it is important to describe what we want and, above all, what we latently need, such as satisfying our needs, such as a place, security, stimuli, support, and limits. Even though we may not be aware of it, these basic needs determine our actions in this world and influence our desires. Each of us grows up in some form of home within a house, orients their home to a safe place, craves constant access to information, and the view of recognition is modified to the number of likes on social networks, and our limits are presented to us as ideally unlimited. This is one of the perspectives on how to look at the roots of our behavior, which influences our desires and is, according to Arthur Schopenhauer, determined within the context of the quote. "Man can do what he wants, but man can't want what he wants." To explain – a person is influenced by the fact that they cannot wish anything bad for themselves, and that is our limitation. To these a priori assumptions of human, accepting pluralistic knowledge forced by the context of the postmodernity is a time bomb, where the result of this explosion is a fragmented society that has found its place to relativize everything and turns its gaze towards hedonistic experiences in a postmodern environment. A beautiful example of a postmodern product is the creation of the IKEA retail chain. Whether we realize it or not, the spirit of the times (zeitgeist) is reflected in architectural design. If this is the case, we must address the question of whether we are trying to find a sufficient approach to interpret our horizon, or if architectural design simply responds to the needs of people in the present day.

## UNDERSTANDING

Before any architectural work begins creating a piece ex nihilo begins, it is necessary to grasp the essence of creation. "Birth means here where and through what something is what it is and how it is. In other words, the origin of its essential determination. The question of the birth of an artistic work inquires into the origin of the essential determination of this work. In the common conception, a work arises from the activity and through the activity of the artist. But through what and from where is the artist what they are? Through the work, for the fact that the work of the master is praised indicates that it is only through the work that the artist becomes a master of art. In the artist, the work is born. In the work, the artist is born. One does not exist without the other."<sup>5</sup> Realizing this synthesis is a step that imposes significant responsibility on the creator of the work, who identifies with the existence of the work and vice versa. This step is a response to

<sup>1</sup> telos = meaning of life

<sup>2</sup> HOGENOVÁ, Anna. Fluid Era and Task of Thinking. Prague: Charles University, Faculty of Education, 2017. ISBN 978-80-7290-968-1. pp. 95

<sup>3</sup> GRENZ, S. A Primer on Postmodernism. Prague: Return Home, 1997, pp. 20. ISBN: 80-85495-74-0.

<sup>4</sup> ŠEVČÍK, O. - BENEŠ, O. Architecture of 1960s: "Golden Sixties" in the Czech Architecture of the 20th Century. Prague: Grada, 2009, pp. 12. ISBN: 978-80-247-1372-4.

<sup>5</sup> HEIDEGGER, Martin. Origin of the Work of Art. Translated by Ivan CHVATÍK. Prague: OIKOYMENH, 2016. Oikúmené (OIKOYMENH). ISBN 978-80-7298-207-3. pp. 53

Cartesian dualism, where, according to Heidegger, we unify the subject-object view of the world with the word *Desain*. Explaining the perception of a human being in the world, how one works with their existence, where, according to Heidegger, there are two possibilities. We can create our existence through our awareness of our responsibility for our actions, but also for the creation of our own work. The second approach, relying only on superficial understanding, tries to delegate the existence of oneself to someone else, as if our existence were an instrument devoid of responsibility for our life and for the creation of our life in the world. The world makes sense only to us, and perhaps here, some already see a view of the world through the lens of phenomenology, which is deeply rooted in Central European thought and presents an approach that opens up possibilities for how to approach the work itself. No matter how hard we try, the world around us becomes more challenging to interpret, with an excess of technological progress and scientific monopolies, we attempt to calculate everything, quantify every individual element, describe them, and then work with them. We strive to understand this world, but we forget the realization that this world does not provide answers to fundamental questions; it merely describes, instead of explaining, we deepen the gap between the subject and the object, between what we are and what our perception is directed towards, we do not seek to connect these two phenomena but look for reasons for greater distance. Therefore, in architectural creation, we must start from a different foundation than that scientific-technical one, which deepens the gap of understanding. What other foundation could there be but the one from which all sciences have sprung, namely, philosophy.

## THE CONTEXT OF THE TIMES

What perspective should we adopt to view the present era that influences architectural creation? How should we talk about architecture, how should we interpret it? In the case of our attempts to understand our times, we perceive this phenomenon as the horizon<sup>6</sup> of our era, just as the Athenian era had its horizon, our era has one too. When we look at a particular era and seek to comprehend<sup>7</sup> it, we must recognize the connection between the horizon of our time, from which we start, and the horizon of the era we are looking at. This state is perceived as the fusion of horizons. To avoid being too abstract, let us consider the following example. When we want to fill a gap in the city center, we engage in an interesting dialogue, where we are in contact with the past, an era when the perspective on our world was different, and it is challenging for us to grasp, as we lack the experience of living and understanding that time. Understanding always involves the "process of fusing these seemingly being for themselves horizons. We are primarily familiar with the power of such fusion from earlier periods and their naive behavior towards themselves and their origin."<sup>8</sup> This understanding, or the lack of it in our thinking, is fundamental in initiating a dialogue with a bygone era.

This may lead us to an answer to the question of why we struggle to intervene more into historical city centers and boldly imprint the *Zeitgeist* in the most prominent and visually dominant way that architecture offers because we lack a methodology for the dialogue between the past and the present. In essence, when a space lacks dialogue, a superficial expression is created, which is challenging to relate to, and to love something, you must have a relationship with it.

## SCIENCE, ARCHITECTURE, AND PHILOSOPHY

A unique connection of three worlds that are losing in their race for dominance, especially in the postmodern era.

### Science

Science is "an organized, systematic endeavor that gathers knowledge about the world and condenses this knowledge into verifiable laws and rules."<sup>9</sup> We strive not to disperse our knowledge into individual parts, as we do in a library; scientific disciplines branch out into subfields, and the boundaries of our description of the world seem limitless. Even though "the paths of science can be interpreted more prosaically. It could be said that progress can only be made in two ways: by accumulating new percentage experiences and by better organizing those that are already available."<sup>10</sup>

### Architecture

There is much that architecture is, and we can present many definitions to describe it, but what we are concerned with here is a different matter: insight into the substantial roots of architecture. Here we can describe the various influences that the present era has on architecture, including political, economic, socio-cultural, and others. From architecture emerges what represents our time. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that "in the current context, where architectural culture is dominated by concepts such as sustainability, digital production, parametric design, and the spatiality of globalization, it is more than necessary to insist on the fact that architecture is primarily epistemology or a form of thinking and interpretation that is exceptionally suitable for dealing with many conceptual paradoxes that people perceive in the world."<sup>11</sup>

### Philosophy

What is philosophy - It is a path to decision-making. "The most important condition for decision-making is the conversation we have with the being itself, and for that, the most important thing is to be open to being, to dwell 'in der Lichtung,' in the light. This requires courage, temporal temporality, and the ability to gain insight into the essence filled with generality, as Husserl often articulates. Everything that is clarified requires clarity in which it shows - phenomenally the thing, emerging from itself, thanks to this clarity as a showing background or referent, as expressed with Jan Patočka. Human beings want to control this showing, in that lays the essence of the voluntaristic superhuman of recent decades."<sup>12</sup>

## THE PATH OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Just as the Platonic allegory of the cave, in today's era, both science and architecture are imprisoned, as are all those who do not sense it. Similarly, as Plato states in the dialogue *Symposium*: "no one who is not aware of their deficiency desires what they do not sense a deficiency of." Gaining the courage to step out of the cave is the path out of the superficial, focusing one's perception on the essence of things is partly granted to us by the postmodern world with its pluralism and resignation. Similarly, architecture is born from insights into the essence, for even when we view an architectural work from a hermeneutical interpretive perspective, we must realize that the work has its own declarative value, serving many purposes and interpretations. Often, the object's purpose remains the same, but our thinking changes, just as "a young apprentice, when he first started working for Ford, could be sure that he would end his working life in the same place. The time horizons of heavy capitalism were long-term. The workers' horizons were outlined by a lifetime of employment with the corporation. (...) Today, the situation has changed. A fundamental component of the changes happening on many fronts is the mentality of 'short-termism'." Marriage in the style of "until death do us part" has certainly gone out of fashion today; it has become more of a rarity: partners no longer expect to stay together for an extended period. According to the latest estimates, a young American with a reasonable level of education expects to change

<sup>6</sup> A horizon is a view, which from one point contains and embraces everything visible. GADAMER, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method I: Outline of Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Second, revised edition. Translated by David MIK. Prague, Triáda, 2020. Paprsek (Triáda). ISBN 978-80-87256-62-6 pp. 265

<sup>7</sup> To acquire horizon means to learn how to look out for what is close and very close, and not to look away from it but to behold it at some larger whole and more correct dimensions. GADAMER, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method I: Outline of Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Second, revised edition. Translated by David MIK. Prague: Triáda, 2020. Paprsek (Triáda). ISBN 978-80-87256-62-6 pp. 268

<sup>8</sup> GADAMER, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method I: Outline of Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Second, revised edition. Translated by David MIK. Prague: Triáda, 2020. Paprsek (Triáda). ISBN 978-80-87256-62-6 pp. 269

<sup>9</sup> SALINGAROS, Nikos A., HORÁČEK, Martin, edition *Unified Architectural Theory: Form, Language, Complexity*. Translated by Hana LOGAN. Brno: Brno University of Technology – VUTUM in cooperation with s Barrister & Principal Publishing, 2017. ISBN 978-80-214-5345-6. pp. 51

<sup>10</sup> POPPER, Karl R. *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. Prague: OIKOYMENH, 1997. Oikúmené (OIKOYMENH). ISBN 80-86005-45-3. pp. 304

<sup>11</sup> PETIT, Emmanuel. *Irony, or, The Self-Critical Opacity of Postmodern Architecture*. Translated by Ladislav NAGY. Revnice: Arbor vitae, 2018. *Texts about Architecture*. ISBN 978-80-7467-143-2. pp. 39

<sup>12</sup> HOGENOVÁ, Anna. *Fluid Era and Task of Thinking*. Prague: Charles University, Faculty of Education, 2017. ISBN 978-80-7290-968-1. pp. 43

their occupation at least eleven times in their lifetime. If the thesis of capitalism is the imperative of growth, the thesis of<sup>13</sup> our time is not to stay in one place, not only in the working sphere but also in personal life. We are detaching ourselves from the course of humanity's history, which leads us to the question of identity.

## IDENTITY

existence to clarify our thoughts with the aim of understanding the essence of architectural creation. An architectural work shapes the architect, as we've previously mentioned, but it is essential for the work to originate from an authentic and firmly anchored philosophy since if we only reflect societal demands in architectural works, the work lacks being but only presents it. "In the 20th century, architecture became a mass phenomenon under the influence of leading architects who exploited selected philosophical texts to support their ideals and assert themselves. Architecture detached itself from any higher principles of human existence, turned away from nature and the sacred. For the first time in human history, people began deliberately creating unnatural structures that are not comfortable to live in and are unpleasant."<sup>14</sup> The problem in this case is not one of existence but of ontology. Just as we confuse a message with information<sup>15</sup>, we confuse being with existence, assuming that the pinnacle of our lives and its purpose is the hedonistic imperative of life to absorb as much as possible but not to understand life. Just as an architect approaches a project with the aim of superficially satisfying the client's demands, their work becomes superficial, and the client soon becomes satiated and seeks change. We'll explain the ontological scarcity here through ontological difference, which is given by the distinction between being and existence, where being cannot be transmitted as information, let's think of the existence as building, observe the building showing in the background, which is being but without existence, we would never penetrate into that being through which existence presents itself to us. We must decide whether we will skim the surface of beings or immerse ourselves in the essence of being and begin living an authentic, and, in this moment, truthful life because only from this do works emerge that contain truth within them. So, how is a work created? We will illustrate this through two questions following the creation of the work:

"1. What does it mean to be created and to create, as opposed to make and being made?

2. What is the most inner essential determination of the work itself, from which alone it can be assessed how much the work belongs to the fact that it is created and how it determines the being of the work in relation to itself?

Creation is always meant in relation to work. The essential determination of creation includes the happening of truth. We determine the essential determination of creation in advance from its relationship to the essential determination of truth as the disclosure of existence."<sup>16</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In the thesis, we have tried to outline a perspective on the current era, which focuses more on achieving the goals of one's desires and anchoring one's liberal stance in a world that contains several dictionaries with various definitions depending on who we want to be at any given moment, however we are missing the important - being authentic to oneself because only from this demanding lifelong process, where we do not ask about the path but directly inquire those paths, does genuine work emerge. Architecture, as a visually expressive art, sometimes responds to society,

but it is society that should provide deeper insights into our minds. Without these insights, we cannot fill the gaps because we do not know the language of dialogue, nor do we know the language of architecture. This leads us to the essence of the problem, namely that architecture should not be subservient to philosophy or science but should critically respond to the era in which we find ourselves, and philosophy contributes to that end with its methodological side as a quiet of the soul, and science with its unwavering joy of gained knowledge. An architect has great power in creation but also a great responsibility to let this awareness be born within, which is a great gift.

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<sup>15</sup> The concept of information is understood here as the realm of data that is directly relevant to an individual and influences their life. In contrast, the concept of a message is the content of data that does not have an impact on an individual's life. For example, information might be the weather conditions for a builder who wants to construct a house tomorrow, whereas for the life of this builder, it is inconsequential that the GDP has dropped by 0.003 points. Often, information is confused with a message and vice versa. (Page 7)

<sup>16</sup> HEIDEGGER, Martin. Origin of the Work of Art. Translated by Ivan CHVÁTÍK. Prague: OIKOYMENH, 2016. Oikúmené (OIKOYMENH). ISBN 978-80-7298-207-3. pp. 82