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Dutsev Mikhail V.

Doctor of Architecture, Associate Professor, Head of the Department of Architectural Environment Design, Professor of the Department of Architectural Design of Nizhny Novgorod State University of Architecture and Civil Engineering; Leading Researcher of the Department of Problems of the Theory of Architecture, Institute of Theory and History of Architecture and Urban Development; Councilor of the Russian Academy of Architecture and Construction Sciences, 65 Ilinskaja Str., Nizhny Novgorod, 603950, Russia
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-8892-6841
ResearcherID: O-3458-2018
nn2222@bk.ru

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Dutsev Mikhail V.

Architectural Environment as a Contemporary



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Дуцев Михаил Викторович

Доктор архитектуры, доцент, заведующий кафедрой дизайна архитектурной среды и профессор кафедры архитектурного проектирования Нижегородского государственного архитектурно-строительного университета (ННГАСУ); ведущий научный сотрудник отдела проблем теории архитектуры НИИ теории и истории архитектуры и градостроительства – филиала ФГБУ «ЦНИИП Минстроя России» (НИИТИАГ); советник Российской академии архитектуры и строительных наук (РААСН), 603950, Россия, Нижний Новгород, ул. Ильинская, 65
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-8892-6841
ResearcherID: O-3458-2018
nn2222@bk.ru

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Дуцев Михаил Викторович

Архитектурная среда как современник

Abstract. The article attempts to comprehend the meaning of the *contemporaneity* from the perspective of the current architectural environment. The spatial environment of a person is the context and the object of the architect's creativity, a source of interpretations, doubts and bold assumptions. The times when "the contemporary" was perceived exclusively from the standpoint of challenge and revolutionary innovation are over. It seems much more essential to interpret the stated concept in the totality of the leading trends, conceptual and aesthetic shifts in the approaches and language of architects, consonant with the time. The author of the article proposes a model of a new artistic dimension of architecture, representing the integration of key plastic motifs conditioned by the updated reality of architectural creativity: historical and cultural, social, environmental, media, and performative.

Special emphasis is placed on the philosophy of the oncoming movement of the architect and the artist, which today allows us to talk about the architectural environment as a current art — sharp, frank, ambitious, revealing personal experiences and stories to its addressee. Such a confidential dialogue between the architect-artist and the user encourages a holistic understanding of the architectural-artistic environment as our "contemporary" and as an eternal "interlocutor" overcoming time.

Аннотация. В статье сделана попытка осмысления значения *современного* в ракурсе актуальной архитектурной среды. Пространственное окружение человека одновременно является контекстом и объектом творчества архитектора, источником интерпретаций, сомнений и смелых предположений. Времена, когда *современное* воспринималось исключительно с позиции вызова и революционной новации, позади. Представляется гораздо более существенным трактовать заявленное понятие в совокупности ведущих тенденций, концептуальных и эстетических сдвигов в подходах и языке архитекторов, созвучных времени. Автором статьи предложена модель нового художественного измерения архитектуры, представляющая интеграцию ключевых пластических мотивов, обусловленных обновленной реальностью архитектурного творчества: историко-культурной, социальной, экологически ориентированной, медийной, перформативной. Особый акцент сделан на философии встречного движения архитектора и художника, которое сегодня позволяет говорить об архитектурной среде как об актуальном искусстве — остром, откровенном, амбициозном, открывающем личные переживания и истории своему адресату. Такой доверительный диалог архитектора-художника и пользователя подвигает к целостному пониманию архитектурно-художественной среды как нашего современника и как вечного собеседника, преодолевающего время.

Introduction. Controversies of the contemporary

The contemporary is considered a controversial concept as it always arouses opposing feelings and attitudes. The contemporary is dissonant, polyphonic, raw, and kitschy. It is also “the perfect”, enjoying a certain acknowledged supremacy over the past. The contemporary is desired but perilous at the same time. So how are space-contemporary, architecture-contemporary, and environment-contemporary positioned, perceived and experienced today?

The contemporary fascinates and enchants, even hypnotizes, possessing a certain mysterious power over the minds of contemporaries, notably, people of different generations and opposing views. Apparently, we should speak of peculiar magic of the contemporary. Contemporaneity often becomes a defining criterion in contests and competitions, a pass entry for ideas and projects that become known, influential, and attractive, even though they may not necessarily be put into action, this is one side.

The other side is the frightening pathos of the new and fear of risk. Meanwhile, of interest is the fate of the concept of contemporaneity over time, at each historical stage, in particular, today. The con-temporary means appropriate to the time. However, time itself is different for every person; it does not even last or feel the same. In this regard, the contemporary, like fashion, is subjective and delusive.

What is contemporary in architecture? Today may well be the best time for effective answers to this question. There will be many of them... or there will not. Postmodernism is not modern by any definition. The recently relevant parametricism is too obvious, self-contained and not always upholding its own principles. Environmental orientation is relevant, but it is rather atemporal. To a similar, atemporal group it is possible to attribute conceptual creativity in architecture. Can the social pivot, the (so much-talked-of) rejection of “beauty” in favour of ethics, urbanism and other games (at times reasonable and noble) around a person be considered contemporary? Yes, but there is little actual architecture, form, or language involved. It could be concluded that it is the style of thinking, the approach that is contemporary, but then we will have to admit that contemporaneity can simply dispense with professionals, that is with us. In this regard, there is definitely something to reflect on...

In the light of the topic, it is permissible to highlight individual trends, patterns, and even construction materials. Glass, for example, has remained modern for not less than a century. The very principle of transparency, permeability instead of unassailability of walls at various times has been proclaimed a turning point in professional consciousness. The avant-garde of the early 20th century is traditionally considered new, such is its legitimate status. And this series could be continued.

As follows from this overview, the ideas that claim the status of “contemporary” are pivotal but often atemporal. Moreover, the range of these intentions is characterized by a defined artistic and plastic nature, presumably due to the initial antithesis of the classics recognized at the level of architectural orders. Simplification, extreme proportions and colour, the priority of the plane, scale violation, dynamism, non-linear surfaces, and “deceiving” techniques — such are the not inalterable but convincing features that appeal to the feeling of the new, consonant with the changing time.

With a dose of irony, it can be assumed that there is a range of messages existing in the history of meanings and forms, which are interpreted as either “traditional” or “contemporary”. Thus, “contemporaneity” is only a mark of our choice. Based on the conclusion about the critical role of a person in identifying the degree of novelty and recognizing the contemporary, it is reasonable to find the initial message of target orientation in the total environmental act of will, which works not only in the everyday but also in the cultural context. Therefore, we would like to compliment the definition of “contemporaneity” *as a lasting, inextricable connection* (spatio-temporal, civilizational, interdisciplinary, and personal connection), introduced by Yu.P. Volchok [1].

The new artistic dimension of architecture

Manifestations of current artistic motifs and processes in the new architectural realities are characterized by the following principal directions:

- Reintegration of art languages.
- Architects’ personal artistic methods and techniques.
- Collaboration of architects and artists.
- Art interventions in the environment.

Virtual forms of architectural and artistic interaction.

Remarkably, the emergence and implementation of these directions is attributable to the interaction of the “artistic-aesthetic” and the “conceptual” elements, as well as the objective conditions of the modern consumerist society: society inclusion, system dynamics, and the speed of priority change. Meanwhile, what may be of particular interest is transformations of the artistic and plastic codes of architectural meanings and forms (formation). Let us display the approximate evolution of the mutual influence of architecture and art in the form of a non-hierarchical system with branching, interweaving, and branches growing into each other:

- the geometric language (rejection of figurativeness in favour of abstraction), which gave rise to the canon of mature modernism and the glossary of modern architectural forms;
- the organics of avant-garde as a synthetic experiment of colour, form, and perception;
- the curvilinear “order” in the evolution of spatial representations, which marked the forefeeling and recognition of non-linear systems and their intuitive perception and description;
- the focus on a person’s immediate perception of a phenomenon, which in many respects develops the streamline of the organic approach;
- natural motifs and the “art of the elements”;
- the “ciliary” function of architecture, its illusiveness and intangibility;
- theatrical interpretation of the architectural space and the city;
- social pivot, entrance to dialogue with an addressee, urbanism;
- scaling structures, perceiving an object from the standpoint of the use scenario;
- “design” of architectural objects and the environment;
- “the artistic” as participation in real life, experiencing an image in the environment.

These mentioned approaches enrich the single field of contemporary architecture artistic integration, which today is primarily regulated by several guidelines: “concept”, “theatre”, “design” and the natural principle. All of them to a certain extent invert the order described in the classical triad and are unusual for today’s architecture addressees [2]. On the other hand, their appearance is inextricably linked with the civilizational processes, including the trends for the openness and interactivity of the human environment. As we can observe, not only is architecture developing as

an interdisciplinary science, but it also has reached the border of artistic practices. Another step — a step towards architecture — is real artistic interventions in the environment, urban art and festival culture.

Let us appeal to some current trends and examples of searching for the contemporary in city architecture and environment. We will discuss the already implemented and existing spaces and objects in the social context of our contemporaries.

The contemporary as a challenge

To begin with, we would like to refer to the knowingly “contemporary”, programmatically defined as innovative. In this regard, an illustrative example is the new CityLife district in Milan (A. Isozaki, D. Libeskind, Z. Hadid, P.P. Maggiora, K. Gustafson; under construction) [4]. It is a sort of ultra-modern island in the city with tradition, which features convenient infrastructure, up-to-date aesthetics, and starchitecture. The attitude towards this territory in the professional community and society is rather ambivalent, whereas most of both positive and negative aspects mentioned in reviews are associated with either the acceptance or rejection of obvious novelty. Traditionally, let us start with the positives.

The architectural concept possesses an impressive semantic integrity: the towers are named after their authors — renowned architects, and the surrounding residential buildings are also original authorial. Quite literary a remarkable solution, both functionally and artistically, is a public space with an exit from the metro and all the essential infrastructure. Everything is comfortable and fashionable to the fullest extent. However, this is where first doubts arise. The most fundamental one, the one that is plain to see, stems from the negation of history. Indeed, at a first glance, the context and identity of Milan was not looked back on there. The architect’s hand, for example Z. Hadid’s style, is highly recognizable and replicated, while landscaping and beautification techniques are largely universal. Both of these elements are modern but cannot be accepted unambiguously. Along with this, the new construction objects (some not even finished yet) are already at risk of becoming obsolete. However, let us not be too quick to criticize!

Let us try to have a wider look at this issue, by which we primarily mean analysing it geographically, territorially. This is where history, some

ethical and strategic resources become revealed. The church of Santa Maria delle Grazie in distant but obvious perspective of the inner-block pedestrian street of Z. Hadid's residential complex confirms the connection of the new area with the city structure and values. This urban planning solution, equally indisputable in its simplicity and ambitious, captures two poles apart: the pearl of Italian culture, one of the sacred places on the maps of the city and Europe, and the new centre as a sign of renewal, the search for the future of Milan.

Meanwhile, the district manages to fulfil its defined great role despite some extremes of starchitests' play. Emerging around is a renewed city environment designed by local architects and distinguished by ingenuity, high professionalism and taste. Nearby, next to Charles Jencks' Time Garden in Portello Park, there has appeared a charming residential area developed by Cino Zucchi, which already represents a different, glocal focus. Thus, the place obviously needed certain activation, the injection of the new and somewhat aggressive. Apparently, in today's media world it is impossible to do otherwise — a synergy of approaches is required, a confluence of the user (non-specialist) mode and the professional mode.

We shall enlarge upon the current creative activity of Cino Zucchi, since it interprets past as present, and the architect addresses his "challenge" more to the one-dimensionality and scholasticism of conservative assumptions and to the excessive lightness of total renewal. Not coincidentally, C. Zucchi explores the traditional Milanese cortile courts of the 16th—17th centuries, their structure and morphotypes along with the categories of comfort and human-dimensionality, which clearly encompasses the vital dimension of the environment. The architect makes use of author's concepts of "domestic monumentality" and "single everyday mentality" as ontological guidelines of the profession. C. Zucchi appeals to them in the monograph about the famous Milanese architect Luigi Caccia Dominioni (1913–2016), in the concept of the Italian pavilion at the recent EXPO, and in his objects. His modern buildings keep the memory of the original proportions and facade articulations conditioned by the entire architectural tradition, but seem to be covered with endless patterns. This technique is not just the architect's signature line but also an indication of the plastic connectedness, the single nature of today's urban architectural environment.

The contemporary as a history participant

Can history be contemporary? As regards the architectural and artistic history, it is always contemporary in that it is always co-present to the time, corresponding to the current of events and benchmarks of change. The tradition and primordial vernacular architecture remain alive, despite the fact that they have been relegated to the sidelines by the global world. Meanwhile, in the current glocal strategy, the local — the indigenous, and the universal — belonging to the world of fast pace, technology and media, clash and merge into a single image. Some traditional cultures, for instance, Asian ones, largely maintain their ideological, domestic foundations and plastic canons in their original archetypal form, conveying them through architecture. Remarkable is consistency in religious architecture. Indicatively, the modern temple complex Akshardham Temple in Delhi (2005) provides a most complete idea of the Indian tradition, including its scale, symbolism, and rich carved decor, claiming to be a place of attraction, unity, and preservation of intangible values.

In the European world, the succession processes in the architectural environment act differently, while the tendency towards the "living" and the lived history is clearly propelling today. The reconstruction of the Palazzo Gorani and the residential complex (Palazzo Gorani a Milano) in Milan upon the project of Gianluca Zambotti (2017) form an ensemble in the city centre that combines historical and new buildings. The petite square has preserved all the nuances and the tradition — scale, details, and authentic monuments. Nevertheless, the new prevails there, encompassing all the development along the perimeter. The authors do not restore or stylize the environment — all objects are honest to time and history. The landmark of the site that also clearly reveals its history is the reconstructed tower with a new staircase inside. It is remarkable that the building retains and displays all the ravages of time while featuring a number of significant "add-ons" (stairs, stained-glass panels, etc.). The surrounding buildings are modernly laconic and low-key in plastics, but apparently, they take from history the essentials — a certain spirit of "irregularity" and barely perceptible chaos, which is manifested through bevelled and inclined angles, window shifting, and archaeology fragments that suddenly appear against the background of the new. Such features normally appear over time, but in this case they are revealed immediately and look organic. The

ensemble is perceived as a completely natural environment of a city with history. And from this perspective, another plane of novelty is apprehended, presumably the main one, associated with an appeal to a person.

Therefore, the element of the historical environment has acquired an updated status of an entirely living place and history being lived today. More precisely, this place has realized its potential in several perception planes at once: a point on the “archaeological path” of Milan, new living quarters in the city centre, and a sophisticated and fragile memory space. Apart from any other advantages, the one that appears the most significant is the introduction of the history of the place and material monuments into a real life context, in essence, into contemporaneity.

The contemporary as business and media

“To work within one of Italy’s historic piazzas is both a great responsibility and wonderful challenge. We combined two fundamental elements of the Italian piazza — water and stone — adding a glass portal that creates a multi-sensory experience as visitors enter the store through a cascading fountain that seems to envelop them”⁽¹⁾, said Jony Ive, Apple’s chief design officer, at the opening of a new company store in Milan (Apple Store, Apple team in collaboration with Foster + Partners, 2018). An impressive statement, to which there is seemingly nothing left to say, were it not for a series of circumstances. We have to admit, this Apple store, like the company’s other sales offices in many cities worldwide, is a tribute to fashion. Such is the first and main thesis. The second one justifies the company’s policy and even partly returns to the area of culture, since this fashion is indeed democratic, environmentally friendly, and aesthetic in many respects... Moreover, it is largely created by the brand itself. The case is highly ambiguous and very modern! What we observe is a collective author and a collective consumer. Their motives are ultimately simple — to integrate into the consumer society at best value. The result is pleasant, acceptable, but alarming.

(1) A new Apple Store with fountains jet water over entrance designed by Fosters + Partners opens in Milan// Strelka Magazine. July 27, 2018. Available at: <https://news.rambler.ru/other/40430944-v-milane-otkrylysa-apple-store-s-vhodom-vodopadam-po-proektu-fosters-partners/> (accessed 19.05.2019). Fountains jet water over entrance to Foster + Partners’ sunken Apple Store in Milan. Available at: <https://www.dezeen.com/2018/07/26/foster-partners-apple-store-milan-italy-architecture/> (accessed 19.05.2019).

The contemporary as the art of telling personal stories

Contemporary art in the totality of its practices is arguably associated with the greatest challenge; it triggers controversy, compels admiration and breeds discontent. However, even in this diverse, seething world, one can trace a consistent trend, which can be called an attempt at self-determination. The monotony of methods is tiring and naturally begins to conflict with the tasks of creative activity. In this respect, what comes most significant is not the oppositions of the old and the new, tradition and modernity, but the confrontation between the mainstream and the authorial, the true and the “fake”, the vital [3] and the “fossilized”, the artist’s personal language and universal clichés. Conceivably, it is not all that simple in these concept definitions, since the contemporary artist often turns to consumer opinion and style of thinking. Summarizing the ideas expressed above, we shall assume that a peak artistic trend, to which the limit of trust has not been exhausted yet, is a documentary theme, the artist’s confession. It should be noted that this idea is far from new, suffice it to recall the performances by Marina Abramović or Ilya Kabakov’s fictitious documentation. Naturalness, authenticity, and documentation in cinema, theatre, and dance have acquired the status of a festival trend.

A person’s need to look closely and listen to themselves for what they are is understandable, whereas the point of vicinity and mutual penetration of reality and imagination require research or, at least, close attention. And, of course, a separate subject is the spatial and environmental “authenticity” of a person’s life, the “documentation” of their current environment. The tautology viewed here puts numerous questions regarding the mechanism of perception and self-awareness in today’s society.

The creative work of the current German artist Anselm Kiefer is modern and widely known today. However, the majority of his projects address heritage — cultural or human. Indeed, in A. Kiefer’s works, contemporaneity is stretched to the maximum, representing the ongoing history of man and culture. In the truly orchestral, “total” work, *The Seven Heavenly Palaces* at HangarBicocca in Milan (2004–2015), the author tells at least three or four stories simultaneously. The first one is a purely personal drama of the artist’s childhood, spent in a ruined post-war city. This is literally shown by seven frightening concrete structures that form the main installation frame, and the author’s wall painting. The texture of canvases is sand,

a symbol of time. The core of the author's concept is in the sacred story about the steps of the ascent to the truth and the Divine Principle, set forth in ancient Jewish writings. It is critical to highlight that the author concurrently refers to the context of the place, interpreting the theme of railway service that has long been operating in this part of the city. The site-specific genre allows resourceful work in this direction. For instance, the framework for all parts of the towers is standard cargo containers that form the distinctive local topography.

The nerve centre of the narrative and its main problem are rooted in the artist's thoughts, mostly downward, about the possibility (or impossibility) of human history without wars and destruction... What we can see here is the desired history, which the author timidly hopes for, believes in and calls us to join in doing so. In the meantime, knowledge becomes the foundation for the renewal of the world — this is what the lead books placed at the tower base expressively hint at. When we have a journey inside a work of art that displays a clash of realities or a tangle of stories ranging from mythological to documentary, we involuntarily understand that we ourselves become engaged in this ongoing narrative. Here another integral story becomes visible — the one that belongs to each visitor and in essence represents contemporaneity.

Contemporaneity, according to A. Kiefer, embraces individuals from the past (like in the well-known series by V. Khlebnikov), textbook truths, and today's passers-by...

Architectural environment as a contemporary art

The modern civilization is faced with a constant "reality crisis", in which reality fails to keep pace with people's needs and tastes. Art is a way to overcome reality without actually destroying it. These days, however, the constructive significance of creative activity is put into question with ever increasing frequency... S.S. Stupin, in his series of scientific works, raises a complicated problem of a modern person's worldview in artistic projection, when the fit of feelings and artistic impression are accompanied by anxiety, loneliness, and despair [8]. The existential dimension can help to more fully comprehend the contexts of creativity as such, which is in a state of constant dialogue of poles.

What current artistic practices imply is not only manifestos and challenges to contemporaneity, but also real environmental conditions in which a viewer or participant in an urban event is immersed. It is important that the boundary between the art object, the work of art, the architectural form and space is blurred. Apparently, today this is an essential and highly demanded resource for the modern city space. Art creates the opportunity to transform the environment into a real-life artistic image.

It is worth mentioning the multidimensional performative qualities of the architectural environment, coexisting with man materially and non-materially, renewing and decaying, penetrating into both animate and inanimate worlds. The significance of this quality, as well as of the entire super-phenomenal experience of a person in their spatial environment, is emphasized by M.R. Nevlyutov [5].

With regards the stated artistic and image line, of particular relevance is theatrical interpretation of environmental scenarios, production of lighting effects, and the use of media images. The "theatre-city" concept builds a world of illusion, kaleidoscopic architectural themes and styles, collage of materials, their properties and textures, a play of transparency and reflection.

The virtuality of the environment in a variety of its forms is considered today as a "miraculous" but already largely common direction, which allows making the most daring break from physical reality. If experiments with augmented reality imply interaction with the living environment, virtuality and its extreme manifestations focus on the creation of new alternative worlds. In essence, this is a continuation of visionary design or a variation of paper architecture that has overstepped the boundaries set by graphic material.

As can be seen, a new community-focused artistic and aesthetic platform of architecture and environmental design is being established today. The artistic integration of plastic languages, natural motifs and social needs is becoming a much-in-demand resource. Integral works arise, which converse with the addressee, reflect the dynamism of modern life and alongside with that implement the author's statement of the architect-artist or "artist-architect".

Curvilinearity of space as a modern plastic tradition

Curvilinear contours, fluidity of form, and non-linearity of structures have become a pervasive artistic idea of plastic culture, which can be perceived as representation of uncertainty of modern man and the operation of a synergetic worldview model. Meanwhile, a different treatment is possible, based on the recognition of the value of the living world, bionic motives and the capacities of a constantly evolving form. Both approaches have intertwined at various times and have formed a single line, each time marked by a targeted artistic language and certain stable techniques. It is remarkable that subverting canons of the old tectonics, each “new” art and architecture seeks to develop and adopt certain rules. What can be counted among them is the “organic order” of some sort, a sign of rejecting the pressure of the logic of three-dimensional space. The origins of canonization are found in W. Hogarth’s “line of beauty”, in K. Petrov-Vodkin’s “spherical perspective”, in the organic experiments of M. Matyushin’s Organic Culture Department, in spiritually meaningful quests of the successors of K. Malevich, p. Kondratiev, and V. Sterligov [6]. Regarding today’s statements, the strongest of them is the parametric doctrine by p. Schumacher and the creative work of Z. Hadid, starting with her graphic series. The plastic has its own rich history and theory.

Another trend that incidentally appears as an up-to-date resource is the aesthetics of empty space and its modifications, or to be more precise, “gradations”: the tradition of silence and shadow in Japanese culture, K. Kurokawa’s Rikyu gray, minimalism with its conceptual economy, B. Tschumi’s trigger spaces consonant with H. Poincaré’s concept of event points. J. Nouvel’s dematerialisation, E. Diller and R. Scofidio’s “ciliary function” — all these are the phases of temporary disappearance or oblivion of architecture as scale and material.

The intertwining of the two directions mentioned above gives rise to another way to interpret architectural spaces — organic, sensitive, and responsive (in the terminology of parametricism), and at the same time as if infected with a virus of transformation: spatial and temporal dimensions, sensations, or even a recipient’s consciousness. The unfilled becomes filled with unmotivated reflection and anticipation, a sort of unsafe, but appealing energy of metamorphosis.

The contemporary as a glimpse into the future

The contemporary as new tectonics is uncompromisingly reflected in the building of The Rolex Learning Centre, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL, Switzerland, 2010) created by the architects Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa from the Japanese architect firm SANAA. In many ways, this object represents an achieved dream of a perfect space where all components of life harmonize, especially, the intellectual and ecological elements as an idea of the most natural environment. It is no coincidence that the aesthetics of architecture provides parallels with a certain fictional life order, the world of film fantasy — refined interiors, sterile environment, and restful light. Meanwhile, such diffused lighting was the informed choice of the architects who follow the original Japanese concept of shadow (in this case, half-shadow).

The formed space is continuous and curvilinear, with practically no barriers, which was the customer’s requirement: interdisciplinary connections as a new approach to knowledge acquisition. The visitor is immersed in a special organically developing environment, a single fluid space that has overcome the Cartesian coordinate system. The object is permeable in all dimensions; it forms not only the interior, but also the external environment, while defining its configuration. The vesicular curved plate of the centre is perceived as a high-tech membrane and at the same time a “leaf” on a tree of the future.

The geometry of this “plant” should come as no surprise, since it is knowingly, by its nature, technological and architectural — a symbiosis of science, technology and nature implemented through design. In this respect, what springs to mind is the oracular (to a degree) fantasies of K.E. Tsiolkovsky [7], *The Plant of the Future. Animal of the Cosmos. Spontaneous Generation*. The great scientist predicted closed spherical formations, living and self-sufficient. Today in Lausanne there is a prototype of such a “living” space; however, without assaults upon common sense, real life is being lived by living people, visitors, whereas the architectural environment is just the most adapted and suitable outer covering. It is valuable that architects working at the forefront mentally continue the ancient Japanese tradition of shadow half-spaces creation and harmony with nature. The ultra-new appears to be a variation of the historical, and experiment is a branch, or rather, a sprout on the tree of history.

Conclusion. The environment and contemporaries

Man and the environment live side by side, in a single flow defining and shaping each other. Meanwhile, residents are most commonly discontented with their surroundings. In other words, we observe incompatibility between our demands and the life space. But this is just one angle... The environment by its nature possesses inertia, for at least two reasons. Firstly, any environment, even a completely new one, without evident traces of the past, is the successor of history and culture. Not only does the concept space store and transmit the genome of civilization, nourishing and educating us, but it also raises uncomfortable questions. Indeed, there is very little transparency on the issue of heritage and its further destiny, and the matter of achieving absolute comfort or choosing a style is far from being one-dimensional. Faced with such challenges, a person is simply forced to move away from clichés or idyllic utopias. Environment is always more complicated...

The second reason lies in the materiality of the environment, the multitude of participants in its creation, and the duration in time. That is another sobering response to our impulses and ambitions. Without doubt, artistic quality is also part in this ongoing cycle. The image-bearing side of architecture is being challenged, attempted to canonize, conceptualized, seduced by fashion or design. We become enchanted and disenchanting but always require the environment to be contemporary (in one of the meanings) or, on the contrary, to be truly historical, fully intact. Everything centres around the actor or contemplator themselves, that is, us — a person, society, or sometimes a “lyrical hero”, when we ourselves cannot determine our role and change it.

Apparently, there is another reason, a purely psychological one, why expectations and reality do not fit together. A person is used to being demanding of others. This logic often emphasizes the concept of the contemporary as the desired and sought life order: comfortable, aesthetic, democratic, environmentally friendly, and affordable, the series may be continued. There is an evident tendency to consume and get easy-to-reach results, as well as an alarming mania of discontent that can be understood as a certain disrespect for the complexity of the system and its participants.

Based on the criticism expressed, we should wish our contemporaries, if not to change the consumer views on the environment, then to

considerably re-evaluate them, especially since the preconditions are apparent. Recognition of the complexity of life, respectful but not museum-like inclusion of history into modernity, accurate and sincere artistic interpretations and ambitious environmental interventions, and last but not least, spatial experiments — this is what makes the environment our living associate. The environment is our contemporary, despite being invariably older and each time younger than we are. This axiom is understandable, but what matters is the emphasis placed, when we come to understand and accept our living space not as a predetermined lifeless scheme or simply “building material”, but as a living, breathing, and thinking body, or even a “personality” as a projection of a great many self-valuable personalities that possesses integral consciousness of the past, present and future.

Despite multiple problems, the interest in the environment on the part of the user is visible today: at other times naive, media, momentary, but encouraging for the most part. The convergence of the social and the professional cannot happen without certain concessions, generalizations and losses. This connection, which has not yet fully taken place and is only intended, rediscovers the potential of the architectural environment and allows the contemporary to enter the cultural and mental field of its contemporaries. It cannot be totally conflict-free — it should become more natural, trust-based and creative. In this regard, it begs to rephrase the common phrase “environment for living” into “living in the environment as an integral all-encompassing element”.

The contemporary can neither avoid conflict and aggression in the already established environment — material or metaphysical, since the new is always unusual, to say the least. However, this clash can be directed into the channel of productive dispute, dialogue, and co-creation. The way towards it has largely been paved, if to consider transformation as very personal (living, “documentary”), and not external or extraneous. Such an attitude implies a different degree of responsibility and human involvement (regardless of direct or professional interest). Therefore, the sought method is based on maximum engagement of the architectural environment in modern people’s culture field, allowing it to become our legitimate contemporary.

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