



Aesthetics of Architecture



Erasmus+

Lecture 4. Nature of architectural expression. Sense and meaning in language of architecture. Problem of mass produced kitsch. Essential role of ethics in the development of aesthetic ideas

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4.1. Introductory remarks

The architectural artistic expression, which is a very important aesthetic issue, cannot be dealt with in isolation from cultural meanings understanding. Due to artistic forms, the aesthetic potential of architecture plays an important role in society.

This is especially important in the development of socialization skills in society and in the aesthetic taste of the society members itself. The aesthetic taste is inseparable from the responsible attitude to the life of one's own and the community. This is related with question of ethics.

Understanding the essence of kitsch is an important part of a socially important approach to the architectural environment.

4.2. Architectural expression

Architectural expression is a wide term covering not only the outward manifestation of the inner purpose of a building or a group of buildings, i.e., an expression and indication of the total building programme, but also the close education of the human ego with the materials and mode of construction, which contribute to aesthetic sensation.

Architectural achievement thus becomes a landmark of the pattern of society indicating resources, spiritual and material, as well as economic and technical limitations.

The human mind has been struggling against restrictions of technology and resources, directing all its efforts to overcome these, so as to achieve emotional freedom.

4.2. Architectural expression

The resourceful master discovered an answer to his problem by grafting reforms on the tradition, which directly influenced the architectural expression of the time.

History of architecture reveals that expression improved gradually with the development in technique.

It has a simple origin in primitive cave-dwellings, sheep-skin tents, the hut and lake-dwellings on wood stilts.

Here it aimed at protection from inclement weather, wild beasts and other enemies. The crude imperfections reveal the story of resources and existing social pattern.

4.2. Architectural expression

The trabeated style of the Greeks had its origin in wood construction. Its limited structural organisation directly reflected on the plan. Due to structural limitations, the Greeks concentrated on refinement and achieved beauty through perfection of workmanship.

The colossal monuments of Egypt express the social conditions of the country under the Pharaohs. Without forced labour of a vast population of slaves and captives, such massive structures would have been impossible.

The warrior Assyrians and Persians believed in material satisfaction instead of spiritual mysteries and built luxurious palaces, decorated with pictures of hunting and fighting.

4.2. Architectural expression

Absence of stone in Babylonia caused the development of brick construction. which resulted in the evolution of arches and vaults instead of a simple trabeated construction.

Daring and skilful application of the knowledge of engineering principles during the Gothic period gave rise to the system of covering space by means of vaults and light masonry infilling.

4.2. Architectural expression

Today we find ourselves in possession of extensive knowledge of the machine age.

Distances have been reduced and knowledge and social patterns have almost become universal.

The vast world has shrunk so that we can even imagine it as being a small village.

The tremendous advancement in science enables us to obtain structural systems of unique satisfaction: Huge voids can easily be covered and space can be enclosed to any desired height vertically.

For the first time in history, advancement in science and technology have given freedom from restriction to mankind.

4.2. Architectural expression

The present-day architect works under circumstances different from those of his predecessors.

In the bygone periods the master-builder catered to the needs of individuals and built palaces, mansions and places of worship, to suit the taste and culture of individual clients.

Today, the architect has to cater to the needs of the common man. He has to vie expression to the growth, progress and culture of a generation.

The building technology has spread into a variety of specialised branches. Machines have occupied an indispensable position in the organisation of building programme.

4.2. Architectural expression

The architect has to act as a coordinator, as a man of vision and professional competence.

His business is to unify all the social, technical, economic and aesthetic problems, which arise in the construction of buildings and with his acceptance of the importance of industrialisation, he has to explore the new relationship dictated by racial and scientific progress.

The character of present day architecture must obviously be the reflection of the environment effected by progressive advancement in accordance with the march of time.

4.2. Architectural expression

In the past, technological limitation and possibilities of structure have been a source of architectural inspiration.

Today, the limitations have disappeared and possibilities in structural sphere have increased to such an extent that these have become the major compelling forces influencing expression.

Each new addition in the advance of technique has created a desire to take advantage of it.

4.2. Architectural expression

To foster and develop national spirit in architectural expression, it is desirable to introduce effective reforms in architectural education and training of students.

Students possessing proper scientific knowledge and background of history and culture which are mainly responsible for the evolution of inheritance, will contribute endless varieties of original forms within the limits of imagination. Skillful application of the principle shall yet produce results, native and natural.

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4.3. Role of ethics in the development of aesthetic ideas

Already in the 1800s Wilhelm von Humboldt introduced a certain alternative for the relationship mode between society and individual.

Such alternative was based on cultural means and according to him can't be achieved with the help of state administrative instruments.

Unfortunately, the mainstream civilisation of the 19th century had chosen another model – that of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

Hegel's vision of society caused the subordination of an individual to the power of the state and subsequently subordinated culture to the state, as well.

4.3. Role of ethics in the development of aesthetic ideas

This part of lecture aims at revealing the role of architectural and urban environment in programming ethically significant content in the perceiver's consciousness.

The author has set himself the following tasks:

- 1) to analyse how certain ethically important attitudes can be programmed by artistic texts by means of rhetoric nature;
- 2) to find out the relations between the means of artistic expression and ethical content;
- 3) to purify the structural features of architectural objects that can strengthen certain attitudes of the observer;
- 4) to present some examples and interpret them.

4.3. Role of ethics in the development of aesthetic ideas

The main idea of this part of lecture is that the architecture and the artistic texts of other kind might be evaluated from the point of view that evaluates how they are fostering ethically marked abilities of people to care, sympathise and take responsibility.

The architecture of a particular type might contribute to the neutralization of destructive attitudes in human consciousness; herewith provoke actions that can be characterized as manifestation of *biophilic* ethic (expression of E. Fromm).

The fact that visual information is the greatest part in all informational flow that influences human mind is still not accepted by the architectural and visual art critics in instrumental aspect of ethical problems.

4.3. Role of ethics in the development of aesthetic ideas

Wherefore it is important to spread knowledge about the fact that the features of architectural texts and visual art texts related to them play significant role in the programming of positive psychic qualities.

The metaphors and connotations which are related to domination, revenge, segregation, manipulation suggest that the world abounds in the social situations of polemical nature. In such case the aspects of co-operation and harmonious behaviour due to such programming are diminished.

The understanding of the importance of assuring harmonic vision of the world should be evident as any elementary textbook truth.

The solution of this problem should come from the society itself, from critics and artists. Doubtless, cultural texts should cultivate the relations between an individual and the society in an appropriate way.

4.3. Role of ethics in the development of aesthetic ideas

I think that critics should evaluate the balance of the possible impact of images, metaphors, connotations.

If in the contemplation the pressure of connotations with polemical content prevail, the programming of inhuman implications in human mind is at work.

We need effective means of critical interpretation of art creations (both already realized and just planned).

We need specific instruments for evaluating the texts that can be used for better comprehension of complicated things related to *mystique* and ethics.

4.3. Role of ethics in the development of aesthetic ideas

The authors of artistic texts in composition of their creations should employ the model of social relations based on rightful *metalanguage* (i.e. promoting the world of *collaboration*, not *confrontation*).

The knowledge about semantization levels, different types of metalanguage that work in programming of mind, about the role of metalogic information that is adjusting attitudes according to appropriate context is crucial for the analysis and evaluation of art creations including architectural objects.

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4.4. Problem of mass produced kitsch

The meaning of German term Kitsch - rubbish or pretentious trash, anything that is shoddy, tawdry, mawkishly sentimental, and in bad taste.

When applied to any of the arts it means something that is false, superficial, and a spurious imitation of real artistic creations, so implies that Kitsch art apes something without any understanding or depth whilst at the same time endeavouring to please, soothe, and reassure.

However, it has also been described as the cultural revenge of the proletariat, and has been identified as part of Camp taste that values the outrageously hideous for its own sake.

4.4. Problem of mass produced kitsch

Much architectural Post-Modernism possessed Kitsch-like aspects (notably the allusions to Classicism made without any evidence of scholarship), but some designers have deliberately introduced reflections of Kitsch in their work for populist commercial reasons.

Prior to the industrial revolution, there was only a market for formal culture for those who were literate, and had the wealth and leisure to invest in the fine arts and literature.

However, during the industrial revolution, peasants from the countryside began to migrate to the city and learned to read and write for the sake of convenience.

In addition, books and paper became affordable during the revolution, creating a catalyst for universal literacy.

4.4. Problem of mass produced kitsch

The rising population of literate peasants who could not afford the exclusive culture in the city created a demand for a new culture, and kitsch filled the void.

Kitsch art is one dimensional and cliché in content, however it was preferred by the proletariat and has become the main culture of today's society.

A hypothetical situation of a Russian peasant faced with paintings *Woman with a Fan* by Picasso and *Cossacks* by Repin will attempt to explain the popularity behind kitsch.

The peasant interprets the Picasso as “a play of lines, colors and spaces that represent a woman”. In Repin, “the peasant recognizes and sees things in the way in which he recognizes and sees things outside of pictures – there is no discontinuity between art and life”.

4.4. Problem of mass produced kitsch

The hyper-realistic depiction simplifies the painting so there is only one interpretation that can be immediately identified without effort and the melodramatic effects created by a cliché depiction of sunsets and explosions evoke Pathos in the spectator.

Not only did kitsch become popular in mainstream culture, it also became popular as the “main instrument for manipulation of masses” in totalitarian societies.

For instance, during Stalin Russia, the communist party “decreed art must serve the cause of revolution, and it could only do so with imagery that was universally and easily understandable”. The shallowness of kitsch and the Pathos it creates is perfect for propaganda. The trend quickly spread among totalitarian governments, resulting works such as ‘Worker and a Kolkhoz Woman and ‘Hands of Victory’.

4.4. Problem of mass produced kitsch

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