



Philosophy of Architecture



Erasmus+

Lecture 5. Social, political and moral features of architecture

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5.1. Introductory remarks

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.

5.1. Introductory remarks

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

We are setting here 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.

5.2. How creations of art are forming attitudes of their observers: theoretical preconditions

Together with the term *text* (here it means a work of art or any other segment of personal or collective creation) the concepts of *contextual information* and *attitudes* of the eventual perceiver of the message presented by the text will be employed further.

According to Yuri Lotman, in fact, every text encodes a certain *image of the audience* and this image starts actively operating on real audience and serves as a kind of normative code.

The latter imposes a certain picture of the world that finally becomes 'natural' to the perceiver.

The mechanism of interaction, or in other words – configuration of the *text*, *contextual information* and *attitude* switches on when the perception of the text begins.

5.2. How creations of art are forming attitudes of their observers: theoretical preconditions

The mentioned configuration is carried out (supported, fixed) by certain *metalanguage* encoding the character of social relations (generally the term *metalanguage* is used for the characterisation of technical language describing other languages.)

The analysis of interaction of the text and its perceiver can be better treated as an identification of the type of the *metalanguage* encoding a certain code of social relations in the text.

After the identification step, one can get brief information about the capacity of the text to take part in the cultivation of certain ethically marked state attitudes and provisions in the observer's mind.

5.2. How creations of art are forming attitudes of their observers: theoretical preconditions

Taking into account this brief information, the decision to change the text can be made.

The main basis, on which the conclusion about the relevance of *metalanguage* is founded, is the criterion of the depth of connotation found in the text.

Having the capacity to function *metalogically* (i.e. the capacity to change the logic of the world structure in mind), the text (together with additional *contextual information* exposed to the recipient) must fix at least three levels of connotation or *semantization* (These remarks based on the concept of the depth of connotation have been stimulated by the recent ideas of Russian cogitologist Victor Sergeev).

5.2. How creations of art are forming attitudes of their observers: theoretical preconditions

In terms of social relations, the rules by themselves are senseless. They acquire sense only in certain actualized contexts.

The set of rules represents the *logic of actions*. Such logic is not singular or exceptional and is capable of transforming itself regarding the circumstances and the type of the task.

It possesses its own rules of different level and of different nature, which for the secondary level serves as *logic* and for the basic level serves as *metallogic of actions*.

5.2. How creations of art are forming attitudes of their observers: theoretical preconditions

While analysing the depth of *semantization* as one of the textual aspects it is possible to identify the ability of the text to implicate ethically marked states of mind, foster certain attitudes.

Thus, a certain instrument for textological analysis regarding the revelation of texts' capability to form such states of mind has been found.

When the third level (i.e. *metallogic of actions*) is absent (in this case, the metalogical operation is blocked down), it is not possible to give meaning to the message in a wider context.

5.2. *How creations of art are forming attitudes of their observers: theoretical preconditions*

For the *semantization* that limits itself solely by the two levels, the context is not relevant.

This type of *semantization* characterizes the text filled with absolute monologues assertions, statements, and allusions that possess unilateral and flat sense.

Such texts do not stimulate the efforts of understanding the world, of learning to accept other living creatures. Rather they suggest the treatment of living beings as objects of subordination in terms of power, manipulation, and repression.

In this context, such ecologically oriented concepts of Eric Fromm as *necrophilic* and *biophilic* ethics, Albert Schweitzer's concepts of *ethical mysticism* and *mysticism of identity*, and Alexandr Ljubischev's ideas of *polemism* and *harmonism* would be noteworthy here.

5.2. How creations of art are forming attitudes of their observers: theoretical preconditions

Schweitzer's *ethic mystique* can be explained in the following way: acting in unity with the world; *mystique of identity* means the situation when a subject is acting with the attitude aware of its exceptional nature; the latter kind of the mystique is correlated with the ideologies of totalitarian regimes.

The understanding of context requires inner efforts. However, these efforts are indispensable in the process of upbringing of a personality. The character of understanding is related with the perceptual ability of the recipient.

Sometimes additional information is necessary to put the message into a wider context. Why should the audience be differentiated by age in some particular cases? The reason is that in these cases the recipient, because of the lack of personal maturity is not capable to reveal the metalogic content that is evident for an adult.

5.2. How creations of art are forming attitudes of their observers: theoretical preconditions

Although constraint is unavoidable to some extent, however, the exposition of violence in art and media, without appropriate concomitant metalogic content turns out to be destructive.

The context management is very important for assuring consideration and responsibility, i.e. ethically marked understanding.

Since people usually cannot directly feel that they are manipulated, including by architectural means, in other words, their “eyes are closed” or their consciousness is affected in a mystical way: the etymology of the word *mystique* shows an association with closed eyes – in Greek *myein* “to close, to shut”.

5.2. How creations of art are forming attitudes of their observers: theoretical preconditions

The examples of supplying the situation of understanding by metalogical information are as follows. The minister of Adolf Hitler's government Albert Speer wrote in his memoirs that the young Germans of the 1920's had no possibility to travel and visit other countries. He regretted that the lack of communication enabled the indoctrination and manipulation by the Nazi regime.

References

Petrušonis V. Messages of architectural objects. *Architecture and Urban Planning*. Warsaw; Riga: De Gruyter Open; Riga Technical University. Vol. 13 (2017), p. 48-53.

5.3. *Relations between the means of artistic expression and ethical content*

Myron Rush offers four main types of social relations between people: *collaboration, revenge, domination, and isolation*.

Alexandr Zholkovski in his turn claims that the objects (as *targets*) of the specific process, which he calls *amplifying* in artistic activity, often are mostly *life, death, love, visible world in general, success, etc.*

These phenomena construct the *main vocabulary* of human life. The effect of 'amplifying' is a crucial and constitutional condition of the impact of an artistic object. It is based on the *self-movement* of the *fabula* features.

Zholkovski presents this example to show how, in a *silent* way, the *fabula* can be moved out: for instance, if you want to take from the hero his weapon, you can make use of the etiquette rules – after an official meeting to invite him for dinner before which he will have to hand over his weapon; then the last task of capturing the warrior will be more than simple.

5.3. Relations between the means of artistic expression and ethical content

Thus *amplifying* is the means and the result simultaneously.

It is related with something that has pre-reflective character, not expressed by words and motivated only by the situation. When the writer unites the poetic elements in certain configurations, he is automatically switching on a certain mechanism, which helps to amplify certain aspects of semantic nature.

It should also be noted that 'strengthening' in terms of Zholkovski can be related to the problem of programming certain stereotypes of behaviour in the observer's consciousness as certain models of social relations. Finally, the model as of stereotype – after *amplifying* carried out by the work of art is suddenly, indirectly slipping into the individual consciousness.

5.3. *Relations between the means of artistic expression and ethical content*

The patterns (or metaphors), which express domination, revenge, segregation, manipulation, etc. suggest that the world abounds in social situations of *polemic* nature (in Alexandr Ljubischev's sense).

In such a case, the value of co-operation and harmonious behaviour is diminished.

Furthermore, what has been said about the limited *semantization* of the second level discussed above, in the case of arts, might be associated with the so-called *hierarchical type of composition*.

The third level of semantization (when the metalogic of the situation becomes understandable), which plays an essential role in the development of ethically marked attitudes, respectively might be associated with the organic type of composition.

5.3. *Relations between the means of artistic expression and ethical content*

The defining of such compositional types is based on the concepts developed by Evgenija Kiricenko. Such compositional types are relevant not only in architecture, but also in artistic texts of other kind.

However, the formation of harmonistically emphasized attitudes is possible only in case if *metalanguage* enables reconsideration towards both the experience and the state of mind of a person – perceiver – and at the same time towards the context of perception of the cultural text.

In the process of perception we have a contact with the text and it's components that we are naming as *intexts*. Intexts are recognizable (visually or recollected in memory due to associations, i.e. in this case intexts are working virtually on cognitive level) components of text.

5.3. *Relations between the means of artistic expression and ethical content*

Usually they are related to compositional type – *hierarchical* or *organic*. Every intext can evoke in the observer's consciousness some *metatexts* – cultural ideas presenting a certain world model, that figure in ontology which is different from intext ontology.

These world models conveying different stimuli for understanding of the world can be related to different ethically marked composition types.

References

Petrušonis V. Messages of architectural objects. *Architecture and Urban Planning*. Warsaw; Riga: De Gruyter Open; Riga Technical University. Vol. 13 (2017), p. 48-53.

5.4. Role of architecture in upbringing of perceiver's mind

Certain models of social relations can be presented in the artistic text both with the help of metaphors (generally called *metaboles*), and with *silent* structural elements *positionally* encoded in the text serving as hidden metaphors having a mystic character.

The latter principle is mostly suitable in the architectural and urban compositions. Since the origins of architecture, it by its forms has been playing an ideological role in the modelling of the world based on the ideas of social ('cosmic') order.

Hierarchical compositions (obviously not exclusively in the sphere of architecture) 'amplify' the importance of domination and dictate, while the organic ones encourage collaboration.

5.4. Role of architecture in upbringing of perceiver's mind

The contradiction between these two types of composition is asymmetric. In certain environment smaller texts of the hierarchical type can make a natural part of the larger organic text.

This is so because a hierarchical text is actually a monologue, tending to impose domination. However, when being placed in contextually appropriate space it will 'perform its mission' – local compositional domination (thus taking part in structuring certain intrigue, forming ambiguity), expressing together with organic elements the idea of 'collaboration'.

Hierarchical architectural texts tend to dominate because of their structural regularity (symmetrical-pivotal qualities, the emphasis on centrality and verticality, etc.).

5.4. Role of architecture in upbringing of perceiver's mind

These features give dramatic character to the architectural object, thus forming the paradoxical junctions of 'organic' and 'hierarchical' *intexts* that help the recipient by evoking his/her emotions to make some private discoveries of the meaning offered by the text.

However, it shouldn't be allowed for the hierarchical elements to form the core of composition unilaterally.

Having defined the type of building composition before its reconstruction (which is equal to the defining of the type of *metalanguage*) as well as the type of the building composition as it is seen in its perspective reconstruction drawings, it is possible to foresee what compositional type will dominate after its reconstruction.

5.4. Role of architecture in upbringing of perceiver's mind

From the socio-cultural point of view, it is very important to preserve the existing compositional type of an urban environment.

In fact, changes from an organic to hierarchical type should be very discrete.

It is crucial to evaluate the compositional type of an urban space that covers a larger 'taxonomical radius' of the territory. In case the type of the composition is altered, a change from hierarchic to organic is more welcome than vice versa.

The discussed principles for the testing of a compositional type of a building might be applied in the architecture of any historical period and of any region. However, the list of questions should be extended.

5.4. Role of architecture in upbringing of perceiver's mind

The categories covering the 'artistic' aspects of polyphony, continuity, and transparency (also including certain artistic features, i.e. motives, metaboles-tropes, etc.) should be added.

Testing of the compositional type of an urbanistic complex differs from the testing of the compositional type of a single building, but the main principles remain the same.

Interpretation of some architectural objects

Berlin Olympic Stadium

A proper example of the tendentious alterations of the compositional type of the building from organic to hierarchical one is reflected by Thomas Schmidt in the description of the Berlin Olympic Stadium design history. The reasons for the Berlin Olympic Stadium design alterations were linked to the Nazi seizure of power in 1933.

5.4. Role of architecture in upbringing of perceiver's mind

The alterations of exterior design (that was offered by architect Werner March as a design in full accord with the spirit of modern architecture prevailing at the time) were carried out 'in collaboration', with architect Albert Speer. Thus, since the architectural work of Werner March was clad in freestone (refusing to use elegant concrete constructions), the structure of the façade assumed the ideological mantle.

In order to achieve the desired effect of awe-inspiring massiveness, huge blocks of ashlar were used in certain places, for instance, in the Marathon Gate.

The building materials were meant to express the National Socialist ideals of naturalness, simplicity, permanence, robustness, greatness, and certainly, power.

5.4. Role of architecture in upbringing of perceiver's mind

Form, dimension, and proportion were intended to impress the public through sheer size, while at the same time the rigid mass of stone was meant to symbolize the furtherance of human integration and subordination.

Since the Nazi vision of the urban environment was based on the emphasis of hierarchical connotations, they imposed their scheme on the project of the Berlin Stadium.

5.4. Role of architecture in upbringing of perceiver's mind

Julius Janonis Square

In the main square of a small town Biržai, Lithuania, a monument to famous Lithuanian poet Julius Janonis was placed in the Soviet times (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Monument to famous Lithuanian poet Julius Janonis (1976, sculptor Konstantinas Bagdonas, architect Vytautas Brėdikis, Biržai, Lithuania) [Picture: V. Petrušonis].

5.4. Role of architecture in upbringing of perceiver's mind

The 'revolutionary' character of his poetry was favoured by Soviet ideology.

Earlier – in the period before Soviet occupation in 1940 – the place had an important social role – it was the main square of the town playing an important role from the point of view both of commercial and socio-cultural activity.

After the establishment of this totalitarian monument the place turned into a 'black hole' losing its socio-cultural sense. I was preparing the plan of the central area of the town and proposed the removal of this statue in order to open the possibilities for more active social life there.

5.4. Role of architecture in upbringing of perceiver's mind

In spite of the high artistic value of this creation I insisted on the removal of the poet's monument because the text of the square with the statue was programming some unfavourable implications in the mind of square visitors.

I analysed the entire square composition (and, at the same time, the parameters of written poetic texts of the mentioned poet) stressing the aspect influencing the minds of people by the content of texts related to him.

Placing the statue in another context in order to diminish its impact on the minds of people appeared to be problematic because of the big dimensions of the monument. If one tries to evaluate the works of art of the past he must always keep in mind the context that sometimes is rather hard.

5.4. Role of architecture in upbringing of perceiver's mind

Usually in democratic societies the monuments demonstrate a smaller scale leaving space for a dialogue between the society and 'hero'.

Thereby, the mentioned statue is dominating the space of the square (it is built on a high column in the very centre of the square expressing in such way the character of the Bolshevik aggressivity; most metatexts that are actualising the intexts related to monument in the subconsciousness of the visitor of the square have highly polemical character, mostly related to the topics of war, revenge, confrontation, social segregation.

The presence of the mentioned monument has changed the surroundings of the square ensemble through the attributes of hierarchical compositional type.

5.4. Role of architecture in upbringing of perceiver's mind

Now let us look closer at the monument's connotative content. The artistic image intexts in the monument that suppose metatexts promoting controversial provisions are dominating.

In general most of metatexts actualized by the monument are fixing the role model emphasizing the domination, revenge, and the principle of segregation.

This hierarchical nature is expressed by such intexts clearly recognizable in physical plane: emphasized verticality; composite core presence at high altitude; presence of a large open space in the background; placing of monument within the geometric centre of large open space; exclusive monument of such scale in the whole city; large territory designated for the monument; placement of the monument in the city's main square that is located on the main street of the city.

5.4. Role of architecture in upbringing of perceiver's mind

Dominance topic is also actualized by other intexts: a monument to the poet (it is natural because poets in general are extraordinary, exceptional people); monument to a celebrity coming from a poor peasant family (the cult of 'a common man'); monument to a man persistently 'heroically' seeking education.

On the cognitive level the figure has the following intexts: Janonis' achievements in literature and poetry are highlighting the context of exclusivity. Intexts, actualizing the context of highly polemic socialist revolution: a monument to the man whose poetry was calling the people to change the social order using coercion, was dividing society into warring opponents, was inspiring one social group of society to prosper at the expense of another group (by taking away assets from ones, and distributing to the others).

5.4. Role of architecture in upbringing of perceiver's mind

The intext representing Janonis as a national cultural hero: monument to Lithuanian folklore voter. Some intexts witness ignorance of the tradition: monuments to poets – artists contain intrinsic controversy; their monuments are implemented in poetry not in a statue.

Here we have an intext, emphasizing respect for utopia: the Soviet government built the monument to the poet, who glorified the utopian world marked with blood. Also we can find the highlighting of the war theme: fluttering cloak recalls not only a candle or torch (the connotation usually mentioned in the popular press, but also recognizable from the Soviet war movies as a tent-coat of the Soviet soldier – liberator).

5.4. Role of architecture in upbringing of perceiver's mind

If we include in the set of intexts the surroundings of of the monument, we can find specific marks of the Soviet system, traces of renovation culture of urban centres.

Creating the 'right ideal' new world by replacing the 'wrong' old world, the square and its surroundings were arranged even at the cost of demolishing the building of former Lutheran Church that from World War II had been there without a roof (in Fig. 3 the place of the Church surrounded by trees can be seen to the right from the monument).

5.4. Role of architecture in upbringing of perceiver's mind

Intexts, physically or conceptually (in the latter case, those who are familiar with the collective memory) expressed in the monument to poet Julius Janonis act as 'hints', 'keys', 'anchors' of mind.

They all are promoting, strengthening the certain model of ethically marked social relations (as specific 'picture of the world') in human consciousness.

Unfortunately, all intexts associated with the monument, even those which otherwise would be acceptable in sense of promoting harmonism and cooperation, because of the specific reinforcing effect ultimately serve only for emphasizing the socialist ideology with seeming 'strengths' of this doctrine.

5.4. Role of architecture in upbringing of perceiver's mind

The main idea of this presentation 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.

5.4. Role of architecture in upbringing of perceiver's mind

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.

5.4. Role of architecture in upbringing of perceiver's mind

Doubtless, cultural texts should cultivate the relations between an individual and the society in an appropriate way. 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.

5.4. Role of architecture in upbringing of perceiver's mind

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.

Original concept and certain instruments of such evaluation analysis are disclosed here.

References

Petrušonis V. Messages of architectural objects. *Architecture and Urban Planning*. Warsaw; Riga: De Gruyter Open; Riga Technical University. Vol. 13 (2017), p. 48-53.



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