MODERN ITALIAN ARCHITECTURE OF INTERWAR TIME - APPROACHES TO THE MEMORY OF THE SPACE

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Abstract. The focus lays on multi-storey constructions from the interwar time in Eastern and Mediterranean Europe. These building may need upgrading interventions. Such ones belong in Italy either to the Milanese Novecento movement, or to Italian rationalism, the main representative of which was Giuseppe Terragni. How does one to approach rationalist buildings and what they mean? Daniel Libeskind seems to have seen a way. The author worked in a research studio under the guidance of the world renowned architect in the same year and on the same topic the book Libeskind's "The space of encounter" was published. It is about memory in architecture and the significance of the space. The lessons from this experience are shown in this paper.

Reliance on space is a key concept in architecture. The world-known architect Daniel Libeskind (Jewish Museum in Berlin, World Trade Centre Competition winner) has made of out the value of space a central element of his architecture. The primacy of the space has been theoretically exposed in a book (Libeskind 2001) gathering a sum of the project work of the architect so far, and in the masterpiece of the architect, the Jewish Museum seen by some critics as a museum of spaces.

In Novelles Impressions d'Architecture, Libeskind (1998) writes "When architecture no longer deals with Space, all transactions, in which the container and the contained twisted together […] have come to an end".

1. The Book

The book is a multidisciplinary approach to architecture, for which Libeskind (2001, p. 53) sees a historical basis, in the Milan cathedral, "completed quite late and involved many negotiations with different interest groups: clerical, historical, architectural and musical".

In the foreword to the book "The Space of Encounter" (Libeskind 2001) Jeffrey Kipnis talks about Libeskind's architectural drawings which impressed him most: the "Micromegas: The End of Space", which are told to transport him "to somewhere new, somewhere else" (Libeskind 2001, p. 10), the genuine task of architecture, and "Chamberworks". In the afterword Anthony Vidler talks about the Jewish Museum of Berlin, called "'Building in Empty Space': Daniel Libeskind's Museum of the Voice", like of a repository of spaces, a museum which instead of the usual artwork contains spaces as such. The book itself is a collection of architectural drawings, photographs of architectural models, architecture concept papers as well as transcripts of lectures, interviews and similar texts. The author of this paper was most impressed by a work called "Three Lessons in Architecture: The Machines". This work was designed for a location in Italy.

Before approaching that work, a collection of Libeskind's statement on "memory" and "space", central points of the book, will be given. "architecture is a movement beyond material. It is length, height, and width, but also the depth of aspiration and memory" (Libeskind 2001, p. 73).

Around 1970 there were three architectural self-understandings (Fingerhuth and Koch in Selle 1996, p. 32):
1. the Modern view the architect convinced the decision makers of good and beautiful by the emancipatory effect of his constructions;
2. in participatory construction and planning the architect tried, together with the investor and the user to give understanding of good and beautiful in democratic communication and through the emancipatory force of the integrative planning;
3. in the autonomous architecture the decision makers decided the good, while the architect kept the artistic liberty about the beautiful, which was given a subversive emancipatory power.

Although Libeskind's architecture might seem at the first sight an autonomous architecture, his theories are in favour of participative

architecture. Such an example is the proposal for "the Machines", presented in an Italian urban setting, a project for a problem in the Veneto region, in Palmanova, in which the public is involved in a "participatory experience" using the machines. The machines give 3 lessons: reading architecture (medieval craft), remembering architecture (Renaissance idea) and finally writing architecture (modern industry). From the interview about machines we learn more about Libeskind's view: it is opposed to the traditional planning of the so-called God-the Father type, in which the final state which had to be reached after planning was stipulated, as well as the way therefore ("I think today everyone is trying to finish architecture", Libeskind 2001, p. 184). However, the cycle proposed by Ottokar Uhl, in which any building's demolition has to be taken into account from the beginning is foreign to Libeskind. Instead, a participatory process on the integration according to new values of such buildings is proposed to the Senate of Berlin. "In a democratic society, one should acknowledge that architecture will reflect very different, and sometimes conflicting views of the world. This is an alternative approach to the traditional idea of planning, which implies continuity based on projection. It is an approach that treats the city as an evolving, poetic, and unpredictable structure" (Libeskind 2001, p. 197).

"any material, including the building itself – is only a triggering point for relieving, not one's own experience, but the experience of reality. In other words architecture is possible only insofar as it can be reopened. That reopening has nothing to do with 'history' or objective facts … that there could be for two thousand years books that are not read, things that are not looked upon, because there is no one to look at them …" (Libeskind 2001, p. 184). The machines function in the same way, they "can be buried and dug out again".

"a particular biography is vulnerable, and in order to hold it together one has to create a space of encounter that does not reduce it to an object, but maintains it in the tension of a history that is not over […] a profound place for the encounter of the future and the past" (Libeskind 2001, p. 92, 95).

2. Italian rationalism

In December 1926 seven young Milanese architects (Gruppo 7) introduced in Italy the International Style under the name of "razionalismo" through a manifesto in Rassegna Italiana (Etlin 1991, p. 225) and formed a movement, the Movimento Italiano per l'Architettura Razionale. "Italian Rationalists were intent upon creating a contemporary architecture particularly attentive to functional requirements and constructed with modern materials made into

forms that evoked the spirit of a machine civilization. As in many other countries, these architects also attempted to imbue this international avant-garde with a national identity grounded in tradition" (Etlin 1991, p. 226). In the first phase the functional solution for the housing issues of an ordinary person stayed in foreground, although this aspects is not so widely known (Etlin 1991, p. 226-229). Rationalists architects participated at the IVth Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne in Athens in 1933 and in the subsequent competition for the 1934 regional plan for Como (Etlin 1991, p. 228). This date is of particular importance since in 1934 also the Master Plan of Bucharest, the capital of Romania was drawn and it generated sequence of modern building on the main boulevard without equal in Europe. In Como, the modern buildings of Terragni are dispersed through the city. A second level of Rationalist activity is seen by Etlin (1991, p. 233-234) in monumental buildings. In this part of activity it reacts to a parallel movement in Milano, the Novecento, lead by Giovanni Muzio and which featured two phases: the Decorative Novecento and the Geometric Novecento. The Geometric Novecento, which followed the Decorative Novecento, was a reaction to Italian Rationalism (Etlin 1991). It promoted another type of housing, where romantic spiritual needs like "casa mia" (my house, Etlin 1991, p. 327) played a very important role. 1931 Rationalism attempted to be made official state architecture, that is, of the Fascist state of the time (Etlin 1991, p. 234). Giuseppe Terragni, like the other new rationalist architects, had the feeling of living in a privileged time, "making possible the creation of a new artistic style" (Etlin 1991, p. 234). The new time was European. It featured a convergence of the arts, literature, science and architecture on multiple levels.

Reinforced concrete enjoyed the liking of the Italian rationalist architects also before Gruppo 7: "On the eve of World War I, with Sant'Elia in Milan, Giuseppe Lavini in Turin, and Marcelo Piacentini in Rome, each of the major urban centers had its spokesman for a rational architecture" (Etlin 1991, p. 240). The employment of reinforced concrete was first demonstrated by a cinema in Rome by Piacentini, a far relative of the Hungarian Pre-World War I architecture which Piacentini admired (Piacentini 1921), more precisely of István Medgyaszay's theatre in Veszprém. Etlin quotes another comparison, to the Théâtre des Chapmps-Elysées of the pioneer of reinforced concrete, Auguste Perret, in Paris. The Gruppo 7 also reviewed the current state of modern tendencies throughout the Europe of their time (Etlin 1991, p. 147-248), putting a special accent on Germany. Instead of national nuances, they pleaded for local nuances: individual traits. Instead of the vernacular they see the eminent Italian

design in form of the urban palazzo. The presence of the individual and national can be linked to the contextualist trait in the Italian rationalism.

Rationalist Architecture was called by Etlin "a contextual avant-garde" and the whole chapter 8 was dedicated to this issue: "contextual buildings in the multiple meanings of the word: Italian in character, specific to their city, appropriate to the cultural history of their building type, and responsive to particular site conditions" (Etlin 1991, p. 255). In Italian the name for contextualism, promoted originally by a Roman association, was "ambientamento". "L'ambientismo was, as Giovannoni explained, 'the correlation between a work and its surroundings; the artistic harmony between individual works and the whole': The general idea of contextualism was adapted from the Sittesque movement in urban design." (Etlin 1991, p. 116). Camillo Sitte has promoted an urban analysis in which the monuments appear on the background of common buildings. New constructions must not look old, but remain new, since the new material reinforced concrete asks for new rules, and harmonise themselves with the old, particularly in what concerns the proportions. This was a rarity in avant-garde aesthetic: abstract geometric forms but contextual urban planning approach. However, since in Greece, Romania and Portugal it was mainly built in the city centres, the architecture there had its own contextualism. Etlin (1991 p. 255) sees the architecture of Le Corbusier also as being contextual.

As the column and the arch built the vocabulary of the last centuries, the Gruppo 7 looked for the vocabulary of rationalist architecture and found (Etlin 1991, p. 250):
1. the lack of decoration;
2. the proportion and abstract rhythms;
3. the expression of the structural skeleton ("la construction apparente");
4. the cantilevered balcony;
5. the corner window;
which were different of those five enounced by Le Corbusier for modern architecture (Bostenaru 2005).

Representatives of Italian rationalism were (Etlin 1991): Giuseppe Pagano, Gino Levi-Montalcini, Giuseppe Terragni , in Rome Innocenzo Sabbatini, Giuseppe Capponi, Pietro Aschieri and Mario Ridolfi, Adalberto Libera, Giovanni Michelucci, Angiolo Mazzoni. Roman rationalism promoted in this city of baroque round forms.

The Novocomum in Como (1928-29) by Giuseppe Terragni is the first modern housing building constructed in Italy. It uses a nautical imagery (was called "oceanliner") which reminds the imagery of the Arkadenbazar by József Vágo in Hungary (Bostenaru 2005), strengthening again the links

between the development of Italian early XXth century architecture and the Hungarian one. The five residential buildings in Milan designed together with Pietro Lingeri further applied the functional criteria, with rooms possible to merge by opening of sliding doors, and prismatic geometry seen at Novocomum. The reinforced concrete skeleton builds an integral part of the concept and in case of Casa Rustici the boxlike aspect creates the mentioned parallel to the Italian palazzo (Etlin 1991, p. 271).

3. The architecture of Giuseppe Terragni

At the 100th anniversary of the birth of Giuseppe Terragni, the architect of Italian rationalism best known abroad, the nephew of the architect, Attilio Terragni, one of the curators of the exhibition, Daniel Libeskind, both architects, and the photographer Paolo Rosselli authored a book called "The Terragni Atlas" (Terragni, Libeskind, and Rosselli 2004). It presents 16 built works of the Comasco architect. The Atlas is organised on three levels:
- contemporary texts;
- photographs (comparison of original images and contemporary photographs);
    - original texts
bringing thus together "contemporaneity, simultaneity and historical documentation" (Terragni, Libeskind, and Rosselli 2004, p. 17).

At the end of the book Rosselli, who provided for rich colour illustrations, compiles some notes in an essay on "How I photographed Terragni" (Terragni, Libeskind, and Rosselli 2004, p. 358-361). Rosselli characterises Terragni as being "a non-professional photographer who was nonetheless completely at his ease in using a camera […] to test architecture, to make it react, to see what happened when it was transferred onto a piece of paper; and it became one of the many fragments of reality […] fifty years later […] I have been able to superimpose Terragni's essential atmospheres with all that is new that I have seen and photographed in the meantime; I have frequently waited before photographing […] the comparison between the past and present in the image […] the photographer working today with certain ideas, convictions and desires […] a commitment and a responsibility to show, to translate and to render visible masterpieces that are very complex and very different to one another […] something exceptional that one sees and fears will be list if it is not documented by a photograph [in …] a landscape that since the Thirties has changed considerably" (Rosselli in Terragni, Libeskind, and Rosselli 2004, p. 358-360).

"Many years ago, my project was that of trying to recover the ideals of modernity from these indecipherable writings of great poets, writers and artists who, like Terragni, were rendered obscure and chaotic by the dramatic events of the twentieth century" writes Libeskind in his essay (Terragni, Libeskind, and Rosselli 2004, p. 54). Libeskind relates the "personal conversation" had with the Comasco architect, when comparing the works of the later with the own (the Monument to the Fallen in Como with the Jewish Museum in Berlin, the columns in the Danteum project with the column containing earth in the garden of the same Berlinaise Museum. "The reduction to essentiality, the purification of architecture in the work of Terragni is the dismantling of the work of memory, a battle against the spectres of history" begins Libeskind, but ends: "Memory and shadows are subjects that belong absolutely to Terragni and the transparency, the reflectivity and the shadows of the physical document of space in his architecture are also their transcendence beyond the walls […] we see the figures and shadows of the human beings within the transparency of the wall. Shadows, transparencies, human beings as images projected in continuous change as in another of Terragni's incredible powers: narrative abstraction. His works always recount a story no matter how abstract it might be" (Terragni, Libeskind, and Rosselli 2004, p. 56-58). There are contextual stories, following another Italian stylistic movement of the 20th century. "Terragni's spiritual mission contributes in a contemporary way to something that is part of a legacy and belongs to its time as something unique, as something that returns." (Terragni, Libeskind, and Rosselli 2004, p. 58). Como was also one of the cities the analyses of which were presented at the IVth C.I.A.M. in Athens ("The functional city") along with Genova, Rome, and Verona from Italy in 1933. The IVth C.I.A.M. influenced seminally the urbanism of the 20th century. The Casa del Fascio, the architect's main work, which assured his place in an international anthology of architecture, was designed in this urban context. In the concept paper to Casa del Fascio published in Terragni, Libeskind, and Rosselli (2004, p. 146-155) accent lays on the "evidence of the structure". Unlike Le Corbusier, who enounced as principle of modern architecture the independence of partitions from the plan, Giuseppe Terragni followed with this construction a villa type where flexibility was achieved through set backs of the partitions from the exterior cube shape within a grid structure of reinforced concrete columns of beams, which play a strong artistic role in the beauty of the building.
The original texts by Terragni deal first with the revolution introduced by reinforced concrete as a material, with the use of (sometimes mirror

polished) stone in which Italy is so rich in his architecture other than for load bearing roles, with the colour surface suitable for modern architecture interiors which is linoleum, with the progress towards more void surface in the façade with time and thus the role of the building material glass, which occupies a central place in the creation of the architect in various shapes, from brick to surface (extra-strong glass, glass bricks hammered glass, opaline glass), and various colours through the various lightings. Attilio Terragni affirms in the essay written with this occasion that the Casa del Fascio was "a formidable buttress for the permanent revolution of modern building techniques" (Terragni, Libeskind, and Rosselli 2004, p. 210). A whole chapter is dedicated to this so-called "evidence of structure" (Terragni, Libeskind, and Rosselli 2004, p. 212-213): "The internal visibility of the Casa del Fascio was born out of the study of the reinforced structure. […] Terragni replaced the Cartesian indifference of the structure proposed by Le Corbusier with a new material and corporeal reality, the reinforced concrete frame being capable of assuming regularity and irregularity, gravity and suspension in resonance with the space of the building". The sense of time is given by the dialogue of the materials: "glass over the layer of marble […] over the ancient material is laid the crystal of the modern era […] the indication of a diverse durability in architecture" (Terragni, Libeskind, and Rosselli 2004, p. 213). Because of the glass "each individual room must be carefully designed, not only as an independent functional unit, but also as part of a single space in its entirety" (Terragni, Libeskind, and Rosselli 2004, p. 214). The meaningfull employment of the structure was not reduced at the Casa del Fascio in the work of Terragni, but also in other, mature, works the reinforced concrete cage structure was used, for example at Villa Bianca, Seveso (1936-37). The motive of bringing the exterior environment, the breathtaking landscape, present also in Novocomum, Como (1927-29), to be part of the interior space through the high amount of 'void' i.e. glass in the exterior wall, is also present here. Reinforced concrete builds also the structure of the Monument to the Fallen, Como (1931-33) after the drawing of the Comasco futurist architect Antonio Sant'Elia, who died to early to apply his visions, despite the heavy and demanding blocks of natural stone employed.

4. The encounter

The Earthquake Engineering Research Institute has a series of monographs called "oral histories", which makes the readers acquainted with the life of personalities in earthquake engineering by means of a long interview.

Building a rediscovered space is another way of doing this interview: putting together pieces of life, photographs, drawings and thus going back in the time when that great architecture we admire today was created.

The attitude towards the heritage of the Modern Movement is different across Europe. The author of this paper has followed a series of conferences on the attitude in some countries like Germany, Russia, the Netherlands, Czech Republic, Italy and France, to be continued. Aim is to investigate the links between the heritage of the 20th century and the architectural practice of today. On the IV Congrès Internatiounaux d'Architecture Moderne in 1933 the Charter of Athens was proclaimed, and, as later documented by Le Corbusier, was to put the basis for planning and construction of rational cities, the key concept being the strict separation in independent zones for the four 'functions': living, working, recreation, and circulation. These concepts were widely employed in rebuilding efforts of European cities after the Second World War, and the wave is called hence 'Functionalism'. The periphery quarters appeared as canonic Modernism spread in post-war time, as demand for housing explodingly increased. In interwar time, even in pre First World War time, such housing has been developed experimentally, assuming the heavy social load of solving the problem of housing in minimum space at maximal economic efficiency. The housing design was rational, using new technologies of industrial production. The beginning of the 20th century features the non-western otherness of a predominantly Western Modernism. Generally accepted, Modernism is a historical phenomenon manifested in a linear history in two defining peak moments: interwar and post-war, even if some "other" Modernisms continue to exist. Such 'other' Modernisms existed paralelly to main stream Modernism also. It is a question of not only theoretical, temporal and aesthetic boundaries, but also of geographical/cultural boundaries. There is a conditional dependency between the geographical and chronological boundaries – such some interwar architecture in Eastern Europe had predecessors in buildings raised pre-World War I in Central and Western Europe. The same was featured in the second half of the 20th century, even if the reasons were different from the search for expression. During this time, Western Europe saw the development of the so-called participative planning, while mass housing in totalitarian regimes was built in Eastern Europe. In today's architecture practice we can see the reaction, in variously interpreted architectural approaches to the spread of functionalism in the post-war time, when the ideals of the early 20th century Avant-Garde left place to mass housing. The Western architecture of the Italian rationalism has in common with Eastern European Modernisms of Greece and Romania the

contextualism: its buildings were not raised at the periphery but in the city. The city of Milan is a product of the 30s just as the main boulevards in Bucharest, the capital of Romania, are. The section in the centre of Bucharest may be unique in Europe, while the Milanese chef d'oeuvres are spread in the neighbourhood of the central railway station similarly to Athens, but the position of the building in the context builds a difference to the approach in Germany, for example. In France this approach, which served as model for Romania, was spread in pre World War I time.

Each of these other modernisms deserves a unique encounter.

Figure 1. Schemes of "spaces of encounter"

Figure 2. Architecture of Giuseppe Terragni

Although the role of the function, the architectural programme, is clearly assigned in the morphologic analysis, for illustrating the role of the load-bearing structure in the repertoire of elements of architectural language, the modelling will go one step further in abstractisation. The study of a space designed on the simple volumetric form of a cube was performed (Fig. 1). The metaphor followed herewith was that of the box, which opened builds the door to a certain type of space. But these boxes are part of a larger composition – a scenographic installation symbolising a unique encounter. As mentioned, Libeskind intended to rediscover the spirit of Terragni, leading to the unique spaces the architect created, by looking at personal object like the drawings of the architect. The photographs taken by the architect are another mean, as noticed by Paolo Rosselli. For the scope of the PIANO project the author of this paper adopted a similar immersion:

discovering the feeling of the spaces, sketching them in a simplified manner. A first sketch is the 2-dimensional representation of the photograph (Fig. 2). Then another kind of door can be conceived, to enter the heritage space (Fig. 3):

1. in a first stage there is the shadow. In the rediscovered space we saw only shadows. The shadow left by light through the glass of the door on the wall, or the complex shadow left by spaces in the box.

2. in a second stage there is a mirror. The photographs come close to the mirror. They reflect.

3. in a third stage there is a projection. The projection incorporates what today's architecture practice has to add to the interpretation of the 20th century architectural heritage, what and how has to be preserved. An excellent example was given by the architecture of Carlo Scarpa the historic substance being layered with contemporary interventions (Schulz 1999).
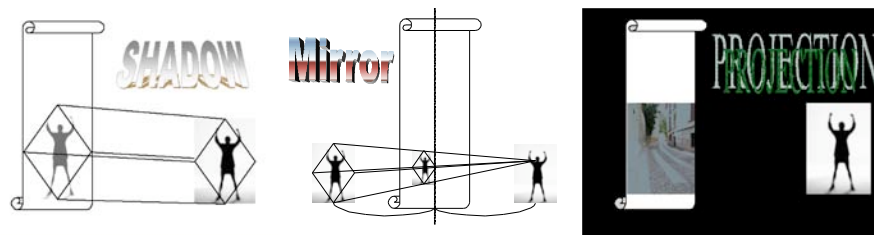

Figure 3. Concept for the design of a door

Acknowledgements

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