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...ALIKE IN STONE AGE

Paul Rudolph, the creator of remarkable opus in contemporary architecture speaks about psychological impact of space, about 'fashion', confusion and forced creativity.

„We have to make our space more human“

This commonly used saying is praiseworthy, but the realities are dull buildings, streets without pedestrians, parks with poor greenery and crowded parking lots. An expression that is often used in architectural vocabulary, 'human scale' means nothing more than verbal decoration. It might happen that even some spatial chaos is labeled as human one, contrary to the pretentious, ordered, cold, intellectual, dull etc. architecture. Because the characteristics of modern architecture style (light, non-load bearing facades, raising all volumes up on the columns, appearance of cantilevered beam, huge ribbon windows etc.) can be analyzed quite objectively, spatial value is based on many subjective presumptions. So it is not strange that conclusions might be contradicting and confusing. American architect Paul Rudolph is an author of more than hundred realized buildings. Some of them are milestone of modern architecture. He is not working under certain formula; therefore his buildings have quite formal diversities. His only common feature in his architectural approach is the creation of the space where someone is getting part of that space and achieves that by, as he says, 'search for psychological atmosphere of space'. Furthermore, this creator of superb opus in contemporary architecture thinks that it is possible, using modern architectural language, to revive many forgotten values of historic spaces. Part of his personal enrichment was his recent visit to Dubrovnik, when this conversation was recorded.

The calm space and the roof 'drama'

You speak about particular psychological demands certain space should contain in order to get value?

That need always comes with shaping some space. Some architects are a bit insecure about this, partly because modern architecture got rid of some principles like they never existed. Limited approach has produced many inappropriate, dull, monotonous objects, something never built before. Monumentality, symbolism, decoration etc. – once needed, now abandoned for the sake of modern architecture. We should learn how to revive meaning of dignity and luxury, how to create space for contemplation and inspiration, how to make warm, isolated and complete space and in which way space makes and interchange diversity. We need a space sequence that is tickling visitor's curiosity and creates a feeling of anticipation, calling the next one and is pushing forward to find to get space of ultimate tension which will lead us through. It is strange that quite many architects are setting the same room height. They forget or do not want to change the height of ceiling. Limits of unified heights are hard to be understood, especially if we consider the importance of psychological effect when ceiling height is changing.

It seems that in the last few decades' formal values of architecture have been ignored. Does it affect the psychological feeling of space?

We can notice that strict functionalism did not fulfilled spatial need to create a feeling of belonging somewhere, neither to be eternal monument of its own time but to provoke an emotion, something that had always been in nature of architecture. One of the big failures of modern architecture is lack of interest for a relation between object and the sky. Very great number of buildings has a flat roof. For me, it means bad care for solutions where silhouette is of utmost importance. I doubt that poetry has ever been written by the silhouette of flat roof on the sunset horizon. Traditional roofs are often making real drama and our task is to find adequate modern equivalent. If the integrity of form is broken, we usually say that buildings are set up on the principle of contrast. This excuse is only sometimes appropriate. Of course it is very dangerous to literally imitate previous architecture. Every edifice, no matter small or big, is part of wider context. That is why real successful object must be set up in its ambient, surrounded in the sense of scale, proportion and exterior space left in between objects.

When everyone wants to be “creative”...

Some people have been looking for poetry in the past, some are expecting it in the future; on the other hand, there are more demands and needs for art in architecture, more than before?

There is something in human being, some strive and will to put the things in organized, logical and beautiful way. I do not think that nowadays this need is smaller than has ever been. It is probable that there is fewer well organized environments, less harmony, but it is understandable because today we have problems people never had before. Also, today people dedicate a lot of time to achieve something they consider beautiful. Many things are confusing and puzzling because of the ‘fashion’ and we are terribly confused with the ‘something should be modern’ attitude. Something done at one place can be good, but after it is repeated in other place it becomes inappropriate. For instance, one respected movement in architecture called the ‘international style’ had fast circulation through books, magazines, architecture schools and movie screens all over the world. When it comes to Bauhaus, its characteristics were taken in a very naïve way that buildings without importance have been produced. But let me answer your question: I think that people are looking for more art in architecture – an art upon their taste. The fact that architect does not know or does not succeed to always make it fine, does not mean that people do not need it.

In the area of architecture, isn’t that demand more practical and isn’t that beauty subordinated to our needs. Maybe our ancestors had more irrational and emotional feeling of space. Today, people rather consciously and rationally evaluate particular space, is it warm, is it equipped, does it have a telephone connection etc.?

You say that comfort supports an idea of beauty. I think you are only partly right. People have always strived for comfort as much as possible. In the Stone Age, that we often find poetic, people had also been making shelter, protection against rain; they had been making fire and had decorated cave walls. All that supported their human being sense. Nowadays, things are quite similar. I wouldn’t say that only pursuit for comfort is connected with the idea of beauty.

20. Century progress happened to be good in many ways and had brought fantastic possibilities. Affirmation of new materials, exchange of ideas and experience, better organized building process, new programs of building never existed before, isn’t all that a challenge for modern architects? Is that an opening to a beautiful creative freedom, something that every creator is looking for?

True freedom comes with big discipline. Thinking about human freedom, people are sometimes wrong when they celebrate something that is not freedom at all. An obligation that one must be creative can be harmful for landscape and environment. When everyone wants to be 'creative' it is quite common that ambient will be ruined. Personally, I support richness of architectural expression, but it is very important to find out principles and to be disciplined.

The beauty of Dubrovnik is unique. It is based on discipline: stone as a common material, regular street grid, compactness within firm, city walls. These elements made Dubrovnik to be a beautiful place. A relation between need for creativity and search for refined space is quite complicated. There are more solutions for particular tasks, but at the same time we cannot avoid some particular situation and ambient. Many times the feeling of freedom is misunderstood. Architects are not as free as one might think.

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