

On some theoretical questions of folk architecture

ANTONIN KURIAL

What is the aim of and what does the protection of folk architecture mean for the modern architect? It is known that the term monument as a too general term of many meanings would not suffice to justify the protection and that its past meaning has been replaced by the term art which is closer to the present. However, is folk architecture also art and in what sense?

This question has been answered by the recent exhibition *Architecture without Architects*, which since its opening in the New York Museum of Modern Art in 1964 has travelled all over the world and stopped last year also in our country. Examples from the far corners of the world demonstrated most interesting forms of folk constructions. Our architects, too, were in doubt whether this was architecture as it did not have any "artistic aim" — any plan as the idea of the final shape of the construction. But in spite of this the exhibition was an emotionally artistic event. The shapes of the buildings were touching in their naturalness, harmony with the environment and structural logics. Everything seemed to be a more reliable guide than the typological, technical and artistic norms of the professional architects. At the end one could perceive that the dominant aspect was the lesson about the real sources of architecture. About the unequalled unity with the environment. About the shapes growing from within experiences of life and work, from the intimate knowledge of the building material and building processes, and not from without, from the dictate of abstract architectonic recipes.

According to the author of the exhibition, architect Bernard Rudolfský it was time to reject the narrowminded official history of architecture. Its one-sided interest in the magnificent ostentatiousness of power and riches in the architecture of the noble and its slight of the dwellings of the simple people. It was necessary to uncover the social twistedness of the theory of architecture and to introduce a comparison of the world of architecture of humble birth with the architectonic catastrophe of our industrialized, mechanized world. To show the pure source of the art of building which deserves to be understood, admired and protected. And to

give the lesson that contemporary architecture, too, could come close to the truth of folk architecture if its creator is able to raise life to poetry. Folk architecture cannot be copied, but its lesson must not be forgotten or even lost in the work of the modern architect.

The philosophically founded art-history theory of art and its protection, as it was conceived by Václav Richter, presumes that the object of protection is art as a work of art and therefore truth revealing the world. If the work of art reveals the truth then truth occurs only through the created work, is founded on this work. If the work is thwarted, truth is thwarted, which is needed for the present. Contemporary art could not exist without the works of art of the past, which again cannot be understood without the contemporary creations. The point therefore is not the cognition of the past, but is a fundamental question of the present.

If art is truth appearing through work then the folk architectonic work is also art, but in what sense? The folk building would be hard to identify with the current idea of beauty as the perfection of artistic architecture. Is, however, beauty and perfection the essence of art? We can receive an answer to this only from history. As is well known there have been two kinds of art since ancient times. One, art in the proper sense of the word, classical by its beauty and perfection, directed towards the improvement outside any time sphere and towards the abstract standardization of reality, towards universality, the speculative termination of regular and stylized monuments, divided from nature and subjected to the laws of composition. And the second kind of art — the regional one, faithful to specific reality in multi-shaped works merging with nature by the irregularity of organic structures, uncompositioned and creating the antipole of classics — “anti-art”, to which belongs also archaic and folk architecture.

Out of this historical background rises most urgently the problem of the architectonic space which personified life and the general outlook on life and art of historical man. Even today architecture is considered “spacial art” in agreement with the classical idea of universal space as the complete, all-sided, connected and infinite void in which material matters dislocated; whereby it is sometimes space and sometimes matter which is stressed. However this geometrical conception of space has been philosophically queried right at its birth and rejected with final validity by the discovery of “timespace”, the relativistic conception of the physical spacematter, which has been confirmed mathematically. It is of importance that the clairvoyant presentiment of the new world-outlook conception of space was reflected already in the works of the artists of the 17th and 18th century and mainly also in modern art. Even though the old conception corresponds with our daily experience it is not true as can be proved by the shattering of the three-dimensional geometry by mathematical physics and by the instalment of the fourth dimension “time” in creative art. Then it became naturally also ne-

cessary in the science of art to exclude the historical term — abstract space as indefinite and replace it by a clearer term — polarity of the “inside and outside”. This new conception of Pier Kaufmann was applied in the history of architecture most clearly by Václav Richter. The following part of this paper will attempt at least briefly to outline Richter's conclusions and to apply them in the relation of folk and historical architecture.

The polarity of the “internal and external” started already with the primitive life of the most ancient people — under the overhanging rocks, in caves and tents, as the “outside” of the world of moving bands of hunters, later of bersmen's tribes and groups of warriors and sailors. Their constant wand ring made the world look uncertain, unfirm and infinite, with an undefinable movement of the skies over the changing horizons. The primary, unconfined “outside”, in which there was no firm place, also marked with its ungrohicness also the building structure of the mobile tents or temporary dwellings on wheels — canopies, penetrated by the outside. With the survival of movement in military campaigns and sea expeditions of tribes in already settled seats, the dominance of ungraphichness prevailed a swell as the external character in the structure of the firm buildings and later also in the fully historical architectures.

A completely different world-outlook existence constituted at the movement when the herdsmen settled down as farmer. The place of a tent was taken by an artificial cave — a permanent primary “inside” firmly divided from the unfavourable outside. In the north it was also a tent, erected over a man-made hollow and covered with soil. Near great rivers of the near, middle and far East, especially in agricultural cultures of the dry zone the primary “inside” developed as an enclosure later as a yard and house with a flat roof. For the settled farmer, living the course of sowing and harvest, the whole world was an inside, as over the unmoving horizon the sky turned constantly the same way with the regularly traveling celestial bodies. In this way of life the outside was only an abstract opposite of the primary inside. The first great architecture, created by the agricultural Mediterranean, was installed in mythical archaism as the intrinsic inside on the web of the simple folk abode. The Sumer, Egyptian and Greco buildings are only different modifications of the archaic inside.

In the northern parts of the agricultural cultures there developed with the Indo-Europeans an Euroasian type of cell freed from the artificial cave and covered by a flat roof as the primary inside. Thus the architectonic structure of the Caucasus and Greek antiquity was founded. Today there does no longer exist any doubt that the Georgian “darbazi” and the Armenian “tun” which are still inhabited, are completely identical with the Greek archaic “megar”. The house, freed from the artificial cave under the tent and later covered by a saddle roof became,

as the primary outside the basis of, at first, folk and later historical architectonic structure of nordic Europe.

The history of both ways of the Euroasian type were not independently direct and led to mutual overlapping. Thus the archaic Greek cell with the flat roof, even though divided by columns into two, later three naves, remained permanently a non-spacial inside, but was, in the classical period surrounded by the external peristyle and covered by a baldachin roof with open gables. The outside of the peristyle as well as the roof were only the outer side of the forbidden inside of the mysterious cell. The discovery of the "architectonic space" in the Hellenese, Roman and Byzantine art helped to elaborate and stress mainly the enclosed and uniform inside; its enclosure became later less defined. At the beginning of the Middle Ages the Barbarian north had the opportunity to continue from the late antique tradition or to reject it. The discovery of space was incomprehensible for the ungraphic myth of the barbarians and that is why the archaic significance of places and their hierarchy appeared. Only in the early Middle Ages, through the systematic definition of "places" in a rationally bound system was space revived as the intrinsic inside with the respective formal outside. The ancient latent outside of the Trans-Alp Europe was only discovered by the Gothic period. The space of the Gothic hall is the inside, which, however, is only part of the intrinsic "outside" — the infinite space of the universe, which can be understood as the collective multiple of the gathered community — as the possible subject.

Thus also in monumental architecture the structure of the Nordic large-space room, defined by the substantial outside of a massive roof, developed from the original tent, was introduced. As compared to these Gallian and German large-family houses the Slavs constituted a family house the structure of which remained a primary intrinsic inside of the original flat-roof cells covered by a baldachin of the secondary roof, permeated by the outside. And both in secular and sacred architecture. The tradition was also introduced and maintained in the building of small wooden churches.

Modern open tents and baldachines of light construction, permeated by the outside, are the seal of the variability in the graded movement of the inconstant presence.

Even these brief remarks clearly show that the truth of building art does not consist of a formal mask, be it ever so perfect and beautiful, but of the truth of existence, which is revealed by the primitive human constructions in this world, feeding history and overcoming the ages — folk architecture. In this also lies the lesson for the path of architecture of our time. It would be a great pity if this lesson could not be preserved.