From singular Architecture to unscheduled Architecture

There have been periods during which Architecture has experienced continuous development, and eventually acquires a certain amount of autonomy. During other periods, however, it would seem to be undergoing a process of anticipation. Changes in basic social conditions have questioned previous standards and ideas, and Architecture is forced to seek new principles on which to base its philosophy.

I suspect we are living in an age in which both phenomena are upon us: the production conditions for Architecture are still conservative, but are still geared towards adaptation to new social conditions which have made traditional design standards old-fashioned.

These new social conditions are governed by two basic trends:

1.	Mediatisation of daily life.

2.	Structural changes in towns and cities.

Both tendencies pose the question of to what extent it may be said that the new basic conditions are strict or lax, and whether Architecture still has space for manoeuvre within its conditions of production and, if so, what this space is.

Mediatisation

More or less since the nineties, we have seen how Architecture has been linked to a number of out-of-the-ordinary images, which are processed for the media to make architectural structures look like flying saucers hovering over no man's land, like a spell cast by people not of this world.

Many cities have attempted to redefine their identity using these surprising features in order to deal with economic crisis.

This obsession for objects is nothing new to the history of Architecture, and nor is the criticism it arouses. Today, however, there are no "object vs. concept" discussions (following the idea introduced by Manfredo Tafuri), and no tendency to oppose the paranoid justificatory necessity during the eighties to deduce all forms from the history of Architecture and architectural sites.

The media's obsession with objects has a different meaning:

Firstly, within the context of a media interconnection on a worldwide scale, it has generated an international hyperculture which – and this is the extraordinary part – is not linked to any specific place or period of history. This hyperculture does not depend on the actual place, and has also generated a form of architecture which avails itself of international symbols to propagate itself almost exclusively through the media, in the same way as a commercial brand.

Secondly, this obsession with objects relates to a process of individualisation within society, which is in turn related to the mass production which followed the Ford age.

David Harvey has described it as a kind of "flexible accumulation". This means that mass production has reached markets which operate with lifestyle labels and brands.

There is a clear example of this in the individualisation of residence formats and lifestyles.

We are indebted to Pierre Bordieu for showing us that individual identities are not exclusive to sophisticated people with money. It is not so much a question of what is beautiful or ugly, expensive or cheap, but rather the difference between them, the possibility of being different from others, in a kind of democratised luxury.

Being different is also a commodity transformed into an industrial product which satisfies society with the desire for and the promise of individualisation, both apparently, and in real life.

The identity industry, of course, is just as much a psychic business as a kind of freedom option. The freedom component lies in the fact that identities are exchangeable, and this means that they lose a certain amount of power since social and economic correspondence has been relativised.

The same may be said in connection with the power of symbols, which I will set out in more detail below.

The identity industry has produced a form of architecture in a special position in that it is difficult to sell – in other words, an exclusive architectural format found only in the media. Where globalisation and individuality are used as a general standards, this means that Architecture must be processed for exposure to the media, and not for the sake of reality.

It is for this reason that the media obsession with objects causes a considerable number of problems. Not everything, however, is negative, although the first thing we notice is that this new fixation has not been properly thought through, and has led to double self-fascination - Architecture is fascinated by itself, and the owners of these objects are fascinated by themselves.

The above is by way of a mere introduction, since the challenge of this obsession with objects is first and foremost of a social nature, and presents three aspects, as follows:

1.   The differences between global cultures and local cultures.

2.   Symbolic overabundance.

3.   The circumstance that the globalising trend may remove a certain amount of reality from Architecture.

The first challenge has arisen as a result of the disappearance of national borders or, to state it more accurately, of cultural ambivalence, of simultaneous local cultures with a global hyperculture. Simultaneity has only a superficial connection with a contradiction between regional and global. Simultaneity also differs from that International Style which has simplified the world into a single international order. Simultaneity also leads us to

the precariousness of cosmopolitan architecture such as the *Potsdamer Platz* in Berlin, and also to the precariousness of architecture in Holland which, although it is much more innovative, has thrown its entire lot in with the global hyperculture, having discovered recently, however, that the global image market inevitably generates self-limitation and redundancy.

Regardless of whether motivation lies in *naïf* globalised euphoria, in neo-liberal pathos or in a kind of market-friendly pragmatism, it is erroneous to believe that the worldwide connection is automatically doing away with all local and social points for guidance. National and local peculiarities do not disappear. On the contrary, they are more monumental, but at the same time they are superseded by transnational cultures

The challenge is a double reality – the media and real life. This dichotomy must also be confronted by architecture, with two harsh conditions: the range of meanings of a particular culture has shifted, and it has become just one of many, many concepts.

Today's Architecture has become a kind of medium. This means that within the global context it is just another cultural product. Its reference features are present everywhere, they are interchangeable and are at the mercy of any hedonists or reporters who examine them in accordance with their stimulus criteria.

The media trap

What have been the consequences of mediatisation over the last ten years? I believe that it has had a double contradictory effect – firstly, an inevitable international media slant on Architecture, a point we will return to later, and secondly because there has been an opposing phenomenon, resistance, a kind of encapsulement of the debate on Architecture. I suspect – my thesis may be surprising, but it can be checked empirically - that all discourse in connection with Architecture – the whys and wherefores – does not arise globally, but merely appears and can appear in each of the countries.

This is probably our only means of aesthetic defence against the domination of global hyperculture. This is not counter-culture, and it would be naïve of us to call it so. It is, in fact, cultural co-existence – i.e., the Architecture of Difference. Within architectural theory, this concept is related to the well-known dissociation between location and space, and between space and time. This concept may also be interpreted as a challenge – specifically differentiating between time and not-time, between places and the world, between nostalgia and memories, between real architecture and virtual architecture.

Architecture which does not, therefore, concern itself with opposing currents, but rather focuses on differences, and the paradox between the reality of the media and the reality of real life. It is in this context that we must take due consideration of the enormous importance attached to architectural debate.

We will provide an example. In Switzerland, no development of Architecture would be possible without the very debates it creates. We might even say that these debates have gradually made an item out of Architecture.

In the modern age, the organisers of debates on a world scale – the Pontresina or Any conferences, for instance – admit that they have not achieved anything, except to declare that no global statement exists. Thus it is understood that global architectural events – the Venice Biennial, for example – at the present time are no more than product fairs promoted by architectural firms.

Switzerland is another example of how the media images are used, and of how regional architecture becomes international architecture. The method consists of exploring architectural images in the mediatic state of something *which-previously-never-existed*, in an image which could be employed for its novelty value or as a global symbol.

What appeared in Switzerland as the result of purist traditions – reductionism taken to its ultimate consequences – suddenly became something really *chic* and *radical* for dinkys in London, and finally – perhaps as a kind of feedback – later became the attire of globalisation in Switzerland.

These media transfers flatten cultural differences, leaving them rather one-dimensional: history then becomes the story of the world, museistic visions etc..

This has also allowed a global catalogue to be drawn up of unrepeatable architectural objects. Very few cities undergoing structural crises did not sign building contracts in the nineties. The most important part was not the building itself, but what I have termed superficial media detonation.

Meanwhile, doubts have been raised as to its effectiveness. The attention economy is ruled by its own laws, which are not at all simple.

Perhaps a media trap, in fact. A few examples are the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao and the Lucerne Cultural Centre.

Since the media arrived on the scene, both these cities have encountered nothing but problems with their global symbology: patrons are leaving, operating costs are rising, and the politicians are presenting themselves as the victims of this architectural boulevardisation.

The glory of the moment loses some of its lustre over time.

The attention industry has also proved fatal to Architecture for other strategic reasons. The basic factor here is that there can be no comparison with the flow of media images. The images go out of fashion in a very short time - Architecture is always much too slow. And all that which cannot be repeated is inevitably destroyed by repetition. Bilbao was at the same time the beginning and end of a unique architectural feat. In other words, a project adapted to the media will never find its own style. It is more successful on television than in real life.

Post-functional and post-semiotic concerns

The first effect of mediatisation ensures that Architecture falls into the media trap.

The second is of a different nature, and in my opinion it concerns the harsh production conditions. I refer to the fact that, amid the daily whirlwind of images, we find it increasingly difficult to provide a meaning for all the symbols we contemplate. It is well nigh impossible to set out all the interpretation work, and so symbols tend to become dissociated from their meanings.

The disadvantage of this is that the symbols and the images become almost inexpressive and practically useless. It does, however, offer the advantage of removing some of the power of symbols.

A system of linking symbols cannot continue to exist, and this is the special way in which it occurs in Architecture. This is why we are talking of a post-semiotic or post-representative context, within which Architecture moves.

This is where the second challenge comes in, which I shall refer to as symbolic overabundance. Or, more specifically: symbolic overabundance as a strategic query in relation to Architecture. This challenge operates as a complement to the first – i.e., the difference between local culture and global culture.

An example will show us how we can avoid such challenges. According to the architect, the Jewish Museum in Berlin has architectural connotations which are supposed to convey the sensation of threats, and thus create an emotional experience totally at odds with reality. The same connotations are used by the architect for shopping malls, art galleries and museums. This method is not just a waste of images. It also shows the pointlessness of trying to force or handle certain emotional states using architectural shapes. This obviously has a soothing effect, since even intentionally critical shapes are transformed into a mere distraction or leisure slot, and the architects themselves destroy peculiarities which have become a nuisance.

We must never forget the public. They are increasingly a part of the installation, and take part in accordance with their own interpretation, a process which Umberto Eco described some time ago in *Opera aperta*. As Michel Foucault might say: "... the face of the author is slowly disappearing into the sand".

Finally, mediatisation has had a third effect, rather more gentle this, time, on professional profiles. Mediatisation has helped de-politicise Architecture.

Firstly, for quite understandable reasons, since in the case of globalised architecture there is no room for cultural or political commitment.

Thus Koolhaas at the Prada shopping malls may quote graffiti such as the old communist Gramsci, or not allow the unions in because they do not really match the design. It is not important at all that we see all this as something trivial or as a kind of new "superDutch" trend.

This does nothing but document the extent to which the Global Players have lost touch with reality, and in any case it is made worse by what is meant to be irony applied intentionally. It can only arouse curiosity as to how long this loss of reality can move around the media until it is forgotten and spurned like a bad global joke.

Town planning as a journey along the boundaries of one's own artificiality

In years to come the changes in conditions will impose another set of standards on Architecture. The architecture of the nineties has lost its standards by neglecting social reality, and is now a mere historic episode. Architecture is becoming increasingly subjected to the pressure of social legitimation – it is being asked to show that it can do more than simply renovate the outer appearance of the fashion factories.

This relates to social matters, and the structural transformation of town planning is an important example. A broad outline could be as follows:

1. At the present time, infrastructures and buildings are required to have a swift adaptation capacity. In Japan, the cycle of depreciations and amortisations now stands at twelve years and this obviously does not constitute a paradigm, but rather sets out the dynamics and instability of the functions. Increasingly, the classical functional separations into dwelling space, work space and space for rest and leisure are disappearing. The spatial and functional structure of a city does not fit any idealistic ordering principle, nor does it seek a unitary image. A city must, rather, be understood as an area of organisation in which islands are built for different communities and ideas for housing. Local links become transitory, and nowadays there is also a stable context needed to incorporate the context. The dynamics of economic utilisation are not explained only in accordance with the "container" idea (Rem Koolhaas); it is not limited to the architectural object, but takes place within a much larger space. It is for this reason that we talk of a permanent reconstruction of the city. Cities have not only become post-industrial – they have also become post-functional.

2. Structural change is also related to the fact that the traditional city, in relation to its location, is merely one option among many. 70% of Europeans live in a built-up landscape. Many urban agglomerations have grown and become overcrowded areas. This may be demonstrated by the increased flow of transport around European cities, whilst the flow towards city nuclei has remained stable or shown a certain amount of decline. A circle of autonomous municipalities has been created around the cities with their own infrastructure. Thus we are no longer talking about suburbanisation, but rather about the landscaping of large agglomerations. The population structures are more integrated within networks, more egalitarian and less centralised.

3. Town planning is no longer restricted only to city centres, and can also exist without any history at all. In other words, urban locations are technically manufacturable. Heidegger spoke of the technical availability of the home, thus promulgating his concept of *genius loci*. Local links no longer emerge by way of pure local shapes, culture or materials. We might speak of hybridisation of city life, in such a way that urban culture comes into contact with a new boundary to its own artificiality. The result of this is spatial encapsulement of cityscapes. At Malls, Event Cities, the city is simulated by separating the space from local areas. We may easily criticise these genetically modified urban cells, but that will not change the fact that they reflect irreversible social processes and development of sites which relate to concepts such as, among others, new ways of working and living. We would do better to concern ourselves with the question of whether an architectural space can exist beside the virtual space (I will return to this point below).

4. The political weakness of the city is due to the fact that its users mainly live in that region. They are customers of the city centre, whether as employees, tourists or those seeking culture. There are hardly any real citizens to occupy themselves with the city on a day-to-day basis, and the offer is geared towards the ultra-specialised desires of customers in the city. Many city centres with populations of between 300,000 and 500,000 are now being used by one or two million customers.

In addition to the various political responses, these matters and questions pose other concerns relating to architecture and town planning. Against this backdrop, it is essential to find new definitions for terms such as density, place, district, scenery, typology, morphology, authenticity and identity. I cannot go into any details here, although I wish to say that these concepts do not require only a new approach: they also need a different attitude.

We must confront confusion and ambiguity. The conceptual standards gradually become diffuse – authenticity is no longer a determined concept, but rather a paradox; a place is not simply a type of culture or an image. Perhaps some places exist as a memory or a hybrid. It must also be borne in mind that all these upgradings are possibly also downgradings of the city. In any case, in Architecture we cannot now talk of solutions, but rather of possibilities – nor may we speak of spatial arrangement, but of probability spaces at the very most.

Even the mystic Louis Kahn claimed that an architect is not a person searching for shapes, but a person searching for concepts. The explanation of concepts, in fact, constitutes the first step towards an architectural viewpoint.

Power and space

What is the response of Architecture to mediatisation and structural changes to city life? One response lies in the well-known architectural formats of adventure, spread worldwide as urban simulations, malls, theme parks etc. Despite all the predictable criticism of these adventure worlds, we must bear in mind that they are social institutions. In other words, they are not so much architectural creations as the expression of modified life forms, of daily subjection to the media, of a new artificial city character which has reached its boundaries, and of many other aspects of social change which, in the depths of its very nature, is irreversible.

The corresponding typology was an original part of the suburbanisation process which creates not only its own surroundings, but also its own patterns to be used for identification. In an "unchangeable whirlwind ... with hallucinations and memory lapses", where images transmit nothing, the places offer the effects of recognition and offer their various identities" (Kai Voeckler). The actual typology depends on whether the site is to be taken over completely to encapsulate it within the urban surroundings, which would create a situation whose every detail is monitored. An attempt is being made to give public spaces in cities another kind of value: functions, behaviour patterns and accessibility are subject to strict regulations, and all uncontrollable or strange features are excluded.

Malls, theme parks and other similar structures are the perfection of social segregation, not in the same way as gentrifications or gate communities, but they use almost invisible methods which not only suggest social permeability, but are, in fact, socially much more permeable than the methods formerly used for segregation.

This typology of space also shows us the decline of a social model based on Fordism: from "social integration" directed by state and paternalist regulations to a different social homogeneity, self-regulated within its own boundaries, in such a way that explicit physical exclusion criteria replace a predictable self-concept: accessibility or inaccessibility to adventure worlds is understood in the sense of a prior selection of social and ethical concerns and in accordance with individual tastes.

This is plausible insofar as we are well aware of what awaits us in those worlds: a "panoptic of global hyperculture", represented as a performance, within the context of spatial encapsulement. A fictitious world which emerges from itself and within itself. International worlds, where national and local contexts have disappeared.

The genre includes not only the Disneyworlds, the shopping centres or the Hotel Bonaventura in Las Vegas, but also other exclusive architectural projects such as the Liebeskind Jewish Museum, the Koolhaas Educatorium, and in particular "genuine" architectural adventures such as the Vals Thermal Baths by Zumthor and city centres which have been transformed into museums.

This context produces mediocre criticism focusing only on architectural aspects, mediocre and apparently restricted to attitudes typical of cultural pessimism. It could be made into a trap like the *Potsdamer Platz* in Berlin, where a consumer-driven city of 21st century adventures has been given a 19th century cladding. The only thing achieved by this reconstruction, which considers itself "critical", is to objectivise a yearning for a past bourgeois society which – and it is here that the trap shuts – has nevertheless long formed part of the repertoire of fictitious adventure worlds. These worlds gaily show us the eternal decadence of European cities, a method which is today one of the most boring events and imitations going on within the sector.

The trouble is that these scenifications are no different architecturally in any other aspect than the matter of taste. Their destiny is to be found in the need for repetition. I wish it to be known for the record that I am no critic of adventure architecture, but one must know what one is getting into, and frankly substitutes are just that - substitutes. It comes, therefore, as no surprise that adventure architecture and retro architecture are increasingly governed by communications and advertising businesses, in view of the obvious efficiency in marketing all manner of fakes.

Spaces with possibilities

However, I also feel that there must be room for manoeuvre in which we may address the same topics in a different fashion, with no need to resort to *posts* or *-isms*. We could talk of "unscheduled architecture": this provides no aesthetic guide, nor does it have the potential to act as a teacher of life, nor is it functionally predetermined. It is in opposition to creative power, and offers spaces with possibilities.

With regard to this type of architecture, the criterion is dictated by social processes. These cannot, of course, be planned, and leave many questions unanswered. Architecture is more akin to a kind of background. It does not seek any pre-set shapes, but attempts to add as much information, fact and other topics as it can, and subsequently arrange them within a spatial structure.

A spatial structure which will determine as little as possible, and which leaves a wide margin for appropriation and its various forms. Shape eventually becomes a supra-shape: sufficiently complete to allow it to be used, sufficiently incomplete for subjective appropriation, and sufficiently complex to be able to anticipate. Both city space and architectural space acquire character since they may be interpreted on a continuous basis of appropriation.

In comparison with the prefab atmosphere or the aesthetics of the effect - the supra-shape finally also provides room for manoeuvre in relation to interpretation, and this is likewise a valuable consideration from the aesthetic viewpoint. Those who produce overabundance by drawing and designing shapes are barking up the wrong tree, because they are contributing to overcrowded city flows and architectural flow. This is, then, the lesson to be learned from unscheduled architecture.

Even there were other architectural styles which could survive better in commercial terms – I beg to express my doubts – the price they would have to pay for the privilege consists of a radical reduction in meaning both in relation to aesthetic concerns and utility. In relation to educational and cultural policy in particular, those forms of architecture have now become obsolete, since they regulate themselves within the fashion industry and the bright lights.

It may, then, be quite pleasant to wave goodbye to the architecture of the nineties. In any case, a connection with society must be found – whether we want it or not – and this may not prove an advantages only for architects, but will also be an essential requirement from the existentialist viewpoint.

Ernst Hubeli

Finally, a few examples of buildings and designs may provide an idea of what has been said.

Documents attached.