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DIACHRONIC CHALLENGES IN ARCHITECTURE “THE FIRST FACTORY – THE FIRST TEN” MUSEUM COMPLEX

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„*The architect* represents neither a Dionysian
nor an Apollinian condition: here it is the mighty act of will,
the will which moves mountains,
the intoxication of the *strong will*,
which demands artistic expression.“¹

Friedrich Nietzsche

Abstract. Contemporary architecture is in crisis. The text examines the transformations taking place in the field of architectural creation. Transformations resulting from commercialization, the pressure for quick financial profit, the loss of identity and historical memory, the advent of digitalization, and the new AI world. The philosophy of the “permanent present” – architecture, trivialized and mass-produced for the “here” and “now” – is losing its spatial and temporal bearings. Are there any possible alternatives? The approach taken in creating the project “Museum Complex ‘The First Factory – The First Ten’” illustrates possible alternatives in the choice between copy-paste architecture and architecture that provokes the layering of spaces, the integration of meanings and memory over time – architecture that opens doors to new interpretations in the future.

Keywords: architecture; diachronic challenges; art; philosophy of architecture

Is contemporary architecture in crisis? Is it ceasing to be art? Has digitization turned the architect into an operator of digital programs – *AutoCAD*, *Archicad*, *Revit*, and others? What is AI doing in architecture? Has contemporary civilization not settled into a perpetual present – “here and now”? Why is humanity increasingly choosing an individual “exit” focused on preserving the physical body, while the intellect is viewed as a superfluous overtone and an unnecessary whim of the spirit? If architecture is the great storyteller of time, is there a place for its contemporary narrative? A stream of questions leading to a sort of “quiz” on the values of the new

era. Are we facing architectural astigmatism, and what survives from the previous values of civilization and the profession?

Which of them do we preserve, build upon, and carry forward through time? The architect today stands, like a hero of Jean-Paul Sartre, before the choice to merely exist or to develop his creative “essence.”²

Looking at the history of architecture over the last century, we observe an intense shortening of the timeframes for the development of architectural styles – “modernism” lasted about 40 – 50 years, followed by “postmodernism”: 15 – 20 years, “deconstructivism” – 10 – 15 years, “Neo-Corbusianism,” “parametric architecture” for about 10 years..., and this leads to the most current styles and developments, in which modernism returns as “metamodernism.” The pace is becoming increasingly intense, the compression ever greater, and the need for the architect to create rapid and cost-effective final solutions is completely transforming the system of development. We can no longer speak of a linear progression, alternating between “Apollonian” and “Dionysian” principles – that familiar alternation of the rational and the emotional in art over time.

There is no longer a recognizable, unidirectional span of time. Time that gives meaning to and provokes the creation of adequate spaces, responding to public and social reflections. If in previous stages of the development of architecture and art we distinguished diachronic models and the smooth movement of their equivalents, represented by a sine wave or “+,” “–”, now the most current dynamics and the architect’s need to avoid falling into the wave of “burnout” lead to momentary “ad hoc” solutions.

There is no room for iterations, no room for mistakes, no excusable constellations. This leads to the results that surround us in the built environment – shiny white boxes, reminiscent in character of the prefabricated apartment blocks of the recent past, finished with glass railings, PVC wood imitations, and a flirtation with nature in the form of floral motifs on the facades. To all this we can add the ever-growing presence of the digital industry in architectural creation and the penetration of artificial intelligence on a scale that was unthinkable until recently. The time for conceptual thinking is increasingly shortening. It is easier to tear down buildings, to erase the historical environment and culture, clearing the way for one-off architectural projects that provide a short-lived advertising asset.

These analyses form the basis of the constructive approach in the creation of the project for the “Museum Complex ‘The First Factory’ – The First Ten” in the city of Sliven. The first industrial factory on our lands, established by Dobri Zhelyazkov in the 1830s, built of stone, wood, ceramics, and swift mountain waters. The factory, which has miraculously survived to this day. An impressive structure, a symbol of the ability to overcome the apathy of the periphery and look toward the future. In just a few years, the Factory laid the foundation for an entire “cluster” of textile factories. Years later, this architectural masterpiece, transcending its time and place,

underwent a peculiar transformation, becoming a physical prison with cells where successive generations from across the political spectrum were held. The open space in front of the factory still bears memories of executions. Later attempts to preserve part of the building as a repository for textile-weaving prototypes were superimposed here. Today, some of the floors house exhibits and artifacts from the Regional History Museum. Let us also mention the not particularly professionally executed renovations in the building, where laminate flooring, PVC window frames, and standard electric radiators have been installed in the prison cells.

The architectural design for the museum seeks to open a broader perspective on the space-time continuum, drawing on individual historical events while also addressing the contemporary challenges and solutions facing a museum complex. How do we preserve the relative autonomy of the individual fragments and portraits of the time, how do we layer them, how do we speak of the present and the future, and simultaneously overcome that all-too-common phenomenon faced by the visitor, known as “museum fatigue”? To a certain extent, this challenge seeks a solution in the project through the construction of a museum foyer in front of the existing building, in the form of a glass cube measuring 10x10x10 m. This metaphorical cube touches the existing factory building. Via glass bridges, the visitor chooses where to enter – to the exhibitions on the floors, which unfold like a weaving thread leading upward, or to the “underground” – the subterranean ramp that leads to the former prison.



Figure 1



Figure 2

The project also envisions the cube's foyer as a space where images, 3D mapping, immersive reality, VR, and other contemporary media can be projected onto its glass walls and roof, illustrating the past, present, and future. Parts of the cube's walls open onto the adjacent green spaces, which transform into a unique plaza – an amphitheater – with the cube serving as its stage. A panoramic elevator takes us, at our choice, to the ground-level space leading to the prison, or through glass floor slabs inside the cube to the “first floor” – temporary exhibitions, the “second floor” – the Museum of Industry, History, and Textiles – and to the top level, where, alongside the exhibition halls of the historical museum, spaces for creative workshops, lectures, and conferences emerge, and an exhibition dedicated to “The First Ten” unfolds over time. Those “firsts” who transcended the scope of the Sliven and Balkan regions and set out from here to create a future and future industries of culture. Authors such as Boris Gendov – creator of the first Bulgarian film, Sirak Skitnik – an almost Renaissance-style writer and artist, the first director of the National radio, and others. This marks the beginning of a gallery of figures to which more and more will be added...



Figure 3

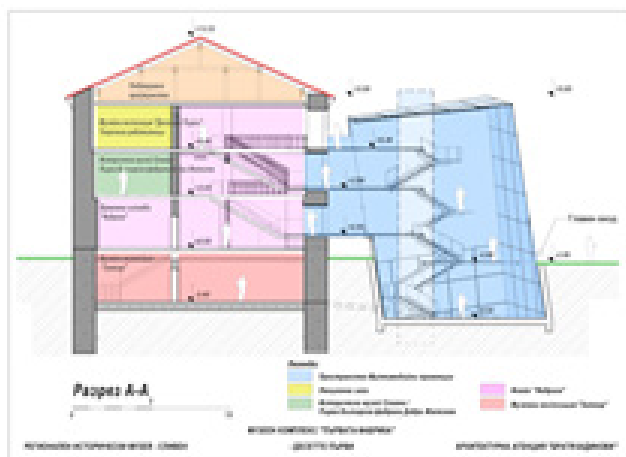


Figure 4

Thus, the semantic and spatiotemporal continuum are open not only to the narrative of the past, but also to the possibility of the latest contemporary interpretations of history and their “upgrade” through the addition of a new reality – one that is not merely virtual.



Rather, the principle of a “buffet” is established in time and material – you can choose what appeals to you and leave the mandatory, often museum-like exhibition route whenever you wish. The use of various architectural elements from the lexicon – such as stone, wood, touchscreens, stainless steel, ceramic, and cutting-edge digital technologies – leading to augmented reality, immersive exhibits, transformations of glass, and more – are part of overcoming these boundaries that are simultaneously semantic, philosophical, historical, and temporal.

Contemporary architecture has the potential to avoid being subject to the speculative in art, which often leads to routine end products. It retains the right and role of a “metanarrator” – a narrator who, today, as we witness the dismantling of familiar hierarchies, when the intense rhythm leaves no temporal pauses for a meaningful and emotional transition from the “Apollonian” to the “Dionysian,” and at the same time helps us retain the right to a breathing space for evaluating and perceiving the contemporary and the “over-designed.”

One of the most important tasks of contemporary architecture is not only to give meaning to cultural-historical memory, to build functional spaces and exciting facades, but also to open doors to subsequent interpretations. These new functional, sometimes momentary transformations of the architectural image in public space allow architecture to continue speaking and entering into a dialogue with time. Thus, the familiar postulates regarding architecture as a finished, once-and-for-all final object in public space can be transformed into architecture that simultaneously narrates the past and, at the same time, opens doors to future messages and interpretations. Diachronic principles of analysis become diachronic challenges, and regardless of the growing commercialization in art and architecture, they can lead us to multi-layered architectural works that are open to the passage of time.



Figure 9



Figure 10

Examining the models through which contemporary architectural creation functions, we could identify two distinct approaches. The first, which we can attribute to the copy-paste, TikTok, and Instagram phenomenon and which relies primarily on the captivating advertising image, is more of a reflection of current trends and commercial strategies. We would call this approach “reflexive.” Its character is distinguished by the ephemeral, the adaptive, and the reflective in the current market socio-cultural situation.

Certainly, the more complex and challenging approach is the “generative” one, which attempts to transcend certain declared boundaries in art, to combine history, memory, and the present, to provoke ambiguous functions – and perhaps even errors – while simultaneously creating contemporary architectural works that are significantly more meaningful and engaging to experience, open to future interpretations.

NOTES

1. Nietzsche, F. (2004). *Twilight of the Idols*, Zahari Stoyanov, Sofia, 6, p. 106.
2. Sartre, J. P. (2015). Existence precedes essence. In: *Book of Philosophy*, Knigomania, p. 269.

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