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THE INTERSECTION OF CONTEMPORARY ART AND CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE IN THE ‘AESTHETICS OF PROVOCATION’

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Abstract. The article explores the intersections between contemporary art and contemporary architecture within the framework of the so-called “aesthetics of provocation”. By entering the “expanded field” of art, architecture transcends its traditional functionality. The text analyzes how architectural deconstructivism deconstructs traditional binary oppositions (inside – outside, wall – opening, center – periphery, form – function) and helps dismantle power hierarchies in space. In this way, contemporary architecture acts as a transgression against the established order and asserts itself as a public stage for key debates regarding individual autonomy, ecology, and memory.

Keywords: contemporary architecture and art; aesthetics of provocation; deconstructivism; transgression; autonomy; power

In the Bauhaus’s ideas on the synthesis of the visual arts, architecture serves as their unifying focus – ‘The ultimate goal of all visual artistic activity is building!’, wrote Walter Gropius in 1919 in the manifesto (Gropius, 1919) of the school that gave rise to one of the avant-garde movements of the early 20th century. Today, the visual arts continue to grow closer to architecture, but rather in the opposite direction – they have expanded their scope to such an extent, and architecture has changed its character so much, that architecture itself has entered that sphere. At the end of the 20th century, in 1988, the exhibition ‘Deconstructivist Architecture’ opened at MoMA, featuring projects by Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, Peter Eisenman, Daniel Libeskind, Rem Koolhaas, Bernard Tschumi and Koop Hempelblau, which illustrated the trend for architectural works to become part of contemporary art by transforming into habitable sculptures. In his review of the exhibition, the architectural critic Sam Hall Kaplan, whilst expressing scepticism about the trend itself, confirms it: ‘Most of the projects treat the buildings as sculptural objects, without sufficient indication of how they would function as inhabited spaces...’ (Kaplan, 1988).

The visual arts are broadening their scope in such a way that, in their contemporary forms, rather than depicting reality, they become (acquire) reality – a quality that architecture, for its part, has always possessed. Sabina Vacarino Bremner (a researcher into contemporary art in the light of Immanuel Kant's **Critique of Judgement**) says of “the new role of art: no longer to represent reality, but to create it” (Bremner, 2021, p. 538) and, as such, is no longer referred to as ‘visual art’, but simply as (Contemporary Art). In her famous essay ‘Sculpture in the Expanded Field’ (Krauss, 1979, pp. 30 – 44) Rosalind Krauss argues that expansion arises from ‘the problematisation of the oppositions between landscape and non-landscape, architecture and non-architecture’. Sculpture, according to its classical conception, belongs neither to the landscape (it is non-landscape) nor to architecture (it is non-architecture), whilst in its contemporary form, what we might think of as sculpture – a three-dimensional form with an aesthetic purpose, which has acquired the genre name ‘installation’ (its broad scope even includes the wrappings of Christo and Jeanne-Claude) – lies on the borderline between landscape and non-landscape, and architecture and non-architecture. And so it expands the field of contemporary art with a newly emerged ‘third’ category, which is situated within everyday reality without losing its aesthetic predetermination. Since, as Krauss puts it, ‘the very way in which a work can be a sculpture has changed’ (Krauss, 1979, pp. 38), it remains within everyday reality to compel you to experience it beyond your habitual ways, to disrupt the stereotypes of its perception, to overturn the sanction of the ‘established order’ and to replace it with conceptual reflections on the right to impose it.

Christo explains that “every day, 24 hours a day, we move through a highly structured environment – streets, pavements, traffic lights – everything is carefully designed by landscape architects, urban planners and so on. We don’t think about it, but the truth is that we are constantly controlled by these spaces. And what do Jean-Claude and I do with the space provided to us? We ‘borrow’ it and, for a few days, create gentle disruptions to the established order. We are not engaging in politics at the Reichstag or environmental activism in Biscay Bay, nor are we talking about a photograph or drawing of them, but about the real Reichstag, about the real bay” (Lozanov, 2017). Thus, with the poetic phrase ‘Gentle disturbances’, Christo effectively articulates the sole essential condition for contemporary art – that it should provoke generally accepted norms, the viewer’s expectations, and the very concept of art itself.

Provocation is non-architecture and non-landscape within real architecture and the real landscape. And today it is being implemented in a strategically purposeful manner by architecture itself in the projects of architects such as Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas, Frank Gehry, Santiago Calatrava, Thomas Heatherwick, Daniel Buren, Robert Irwin, James Turrell, Richard Serra... who, in order to create architecture-non-architecture, do everything possible to ensure it does not resemble architecture,

as was already noted by the curators of the 'Deconstructivist Architecture' exhibition, Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley (Johnson, 1988).

Architecture enters the expanded field of contemporary art and is embraced by it, because it transforms its aesthetic 'economy of volume'. Firstly, by rejecting the two-dimensionality inherent in representation in favour of the three-dimensionality inherent in reality. And secondly, by rejecting the three-dimensionality of sculpture with its figural potential in favour of the three-dimensionality of the installation with its conceptual potential. The latter is the basis on which Ila Berman and Douglas Burnham argue that, as they have evolved, installations have created 'a new and branching network of relationships between architecture, interior design, sculpture and landscape' (Berman, 2016, p. 8).

It may be argued that the aesthetic transition from representational art, which depicts reality, to conceptual art, which makes use of reality itself (appropriates it), culminates in 'new realism', as formulated by Pierre Restany, and that is precisely where contemporary art begins. According to the movement's manifesto (Restany, 1900, pp. 704 – 706), reality is no longer the subject of representation or transformation; rather, its objects are used directly, just as they are. Artistic images are not created; rather, through selection and transformation, everyday objects, industrial materials, the urban environment and even rubbish must acquire aesthetic meaning. The New Realists are deeply suspicious of any form of embellishment, fiction or sentimentality... Even Christo's wrappings do not strike them as realistic enough. He recalls: 'I was very young when I met Pierre Restany in 1959 in Paris. I was only 24. At the time, Restany was working as a critic and was officially recognised by the French government. At the same time, I also met Yves Klein and Arman. Together with Jean Tinguely, they were working on a manifesto for a group of 'new realists' they had selected; it was being drafted in Yves Klein's flat, and only a very exclusive group of artists had been invited. I, of course, tried to get involved, but I wasn't accepted. When I asked Restany why, he criticised my 'packaging' as being too artistic; he said I hadn't grasped the true essence of the movement, that my works sounded like sculptures rather than being real objects like those of Klein and Arman.' (Lozanov, 2017).

The aesthetic potential of everyday reality stems from the duality inherent in its objects, which Jean Baudrillard formulates as follows: 'Every object has two functions: one is to be used, the other is to be possessed... the pure object, abstracted from its use, acquires a strictly subjective status...' (Baudrillard, 2003, p. 89). Just as, in the paintings of the modernists express the artist's experiences through the figurative distortion of the image, so now, according to Baudrillard, the object itself ceases to be identical with its presence and becomes an inner state, a passion, a myth... Its 'ready-made' uses by New Realism emerged at a time when the trauma of the Second World War had gradually been overcome and consumer society, with

its overproduction, was flooding the free world with beautiful, desirable objects mythologised by advertising. Their secondary function – to be owned, admired, collected, to signify – now dominates over the primary one (to serve a practical purpose) and, by implication, transforms them into the material of art.

The path to New Realism, which dominated the art scene from 1960 to 1963 in order to draw the public into ‘the thrilling adventure of reality taken in and of itself’, is a long one and, in fact, begins with Giotto’s sheep, which he drew with a stick on the ground whilst tending his flock at the age of ten. If we are to believe the legend, this drawn sheep would prove to be a cultural dividing line between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance – when Giovanni Cimabue, the last significant figure of medieval painting in Italy, who happened to be passing by, saw it, he exclaimed: ‘This lad will become a great artist!’, having realised from his drawing that he was ‘seeking the inherent volume of every body’, in the words of Ortega y Gasset. Unlike in the Middle Ages, when bodies did not belong to reality but ‘float-ed in a symbolic environment’. The objects in the paintings acquired their volume, and ‘from Giotto until the nineteenth century, European painting sought to affirm the stability of the world, the weight of bodies in space’ (Ortega y Gasset, 1993, p. 454). Until the paintings of Paul Cézanne, through whom ‘conversely, the stability of the world is shaken: the world becomes a matter of perception’ – again according to Ortega y Gasset – and now ‘volumes no longer correspond to objects; they have only a conditional, almost metaphysical connection with them’ (ibid., 455). Subjective conceptions of reality have entered, in a distorted form, into its figurative images, so as to reproduce it not in its objective given nature, but in the overlaying, in the perception of objects, of the ‘external’ and ‘internal’ world as experienced by the subject. The ‘human subject’ (‘the totality of elements that make up our everyday world’ (Ortega y Gasset, 2026, p. 506) disintegrates in art, and therein lies the aesthetic rebellion of the modernists. They realise that they do not depict things as they are, but rather their own conceptions of them; and the more faithful they are to these conceptions, the more faithfully they depict the essence of things. This is the basis on which they refuse to follow the illusions (illusionism) of classical art, just as classical art itself refuses to follow the canons of medieval painting. Their aesthetic rebellion is supported by the prevailing ontological view that the existence of things is not independent, but comes into being only through ‘being-in-the-world’, according to Martin Heidegger (Heidegger, 2020, pp. 77 – 78), and in this sense things are a manifestation of the human and are presupposed by it. Philosophers and artists alike began to view the world as a construct of their own imagination.

When we have not the things themselves, but only our ideas of them, our ideas can be synchronised (made to coincide) only through language, whose concepts give them universal validity. And it is precisely through communication with others

that the Self acquires a cultural identity, becomes a personality, whilst language, in providing this, exercises an inherent power over the Self. Michel Foucault refers to the institution of power within language using the concept of 'discourse', which is 'conditioned by rules and commands that precede any statement' (Foucault, 1972, p. 60). In this sense, its power, insofar as it precedes and gives rise to other forms of power, is such that because the 'discourses determine what is true or false, and what it is even possible to think or say' (ibid., 49). Roland Barthes, because of this ontologically inescapable power of language, calls it fascism – 'not only in what it does not allow me to say, but also in what it compels me to say' (Barthes, 1982, p. 461). This compulsion stems from discursive norms, which are accepted as the boundary between reason and unreason, whilst compliance with them serves as a certificate of normality: 'madness is excluded in order for reason to be constituted' and for only 'that which can be understood and said' to remain (Michel, 1988, p. 31). Crossing that boundary may lead you to the madhouse, to prison, to the stake... yet at the same time it is inherent to art, and within the strategy of provocation it has been transformed by contemporary art into an aesthetic dominant.

According to Jacques Derrida, the power of language is exercised through the 'concept of structure' as a series of substitutions of 'centre for centre' by changing its names, so that there is always a relevant word ('race' or 'class', 'evolution' or 'unconscious'), which predetermines 'that which exists as presence in all the meanings of that word' (Derrida, 2001, p. 353). The result is an inhabited utopia in which discourse has imprisoned its subjects, and which made possible the great repressive ideologies of the twentieth century (fascism and communism), because, as Karl Mannheim states in **Utopian Consciousness**, 'we call ideologies those representations that transcend existence and which, de facto, never come to realise the content represented in them' (Mannheim, 1991, p. 49), yet insist that they do. And Derrida prevents their emergence right from their genesis by deconstructing the logocentrism inherent in the Western cultural tradition, which posits a primary, stable and self-evident centre of meaning, introduced through concepts-as-presences. The founder of deconstructionism declares: 'I challenged the authority of linguistics, of language and of logocentrism' – he does so in order to free the Self from the utopian power of the 'self-forgetful' speech, yet with the awareness that deconstruction had been taking place long before and independently of his own ideas about it.

One of the major offensives of deconstructivism prior to deconstructivism was waged by conceptualism within the practices of modernism and, subsequently, postmodernism, by subjecting abstract concepts such as meaning, truth, memory, context, subjectivity, sexuality, space and originality... In this way, it prevents their signifieds from utopically growing into presences, transforming them into signifieds of physical presences (everyday objects), directly subsumed under art by the

‘ready-made’ tradition that originated from Dadaism. It is a symbolic coincidence that it was precisely in the year of the October Revolution – 1917 – that Marcel Duchamp’s urinal appeared: the first significant ‘ready-made’ work. The urinal, titled ‘Fountain’, was submitted as a work of art to a gallery in New York and, of course, rejected on the grounds that it was not art; it thus entered the history of art directly, raising the question of who can (and has the right to) define what art is at a time when the ‘established order’ is already undergoing ‘gentle upheavals’ and art ‘borrows’ from reality whatever it desires: cars, arches, jerry cans, jewellery, bolts, bottles, barrels, forks, shop windows, chains, fans, loudspeakers, pillows, ropes, wardrobes, beams, globes, boards, documents, clothes, trees, labels, coat hangers, coat hangers, toys, boxes, crates, keys, books, buckets, cones, cables, light bulbs, beds, spoons, tables, microphones, sinks, monitors, bridges, knives, shoes, mirrors, blankets, islands, glasses, monuments, passports, parks, pens, benches, letters, nails, projectors, radios, traffic lights, buildings, shelving, chairs, signs, televisions, telephones, saucepans, pipes, bricks, streets, umbrellas, cups, clocks, plates, sheets, brushes, cupboards, fridges, cameras, flowers, dials, irons...

In the contemporary aesthetic landscape, anything can be art, owing to the disappearance of pre-established norms, criteria and authorities capable of guaranteeing that a provocation is art, precisely because it is a provocation against them. Arthur Danto, in *‘After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Limits of History’*, writes that ‘at first, only mimesis was art; then several different movements were art, but each sought to destroy its rivals; and finally, it became clear that there are no stylistic or ideological limitations. There is no particular way in which works of art ought to be.’ (Danto, 1997, p. 47). In this context, each of them need only prove that it is (belongs to) art by triggering an event in public discourse and being recognised by those involved in it, regardless of their area of expertise. For contemporary art, which is aesthetically subversive towards authorities and institutions, is by its very nature a form of expertise without boundaries and a provocation; and you must step outside your own sphere to become its viewer, connoisseur or collector... Just as, for example, the Chinese entrepreneur Justin Sun paid \$6.24 million in 2024 for a banana taped to a wall – a work by Maurizio Cattelan called ‘Comedian’. Or just as Christo and Jean-Claude managed to persuade parliaments, governments and local councils – whose remit is entirely different – to step outside their area of expertise and declare that their projects were works of art, which they would help bring to fruition. The relationship between the contemporary architect and investors is similar – the architect must not only challenge their tastes and their notions of architecture, but also convince them to pay for this provocation and then to live in the result. The extent to which contemporary architecture will exist at all depends on how successful the architect is in this endeavour.

This ‘competence-without-competence’ on which contemporary art relies brings it closer to media publicity and the ‘event effect’ that defines it – you understand

what is said or shown, not because you are prepared to understand it, but because it affects you. The aspiration of works, in this sense, to become events causes, in turn, their spatial imagery (the image) to give way to its unfolding in time (the action), and the aesthetic detachment of the themes to their journalistic topicality. Contemporary art participates in, and often leads, the major debates on the media agenda: social inequalities, environmental issues and climate change, freedom of expression, propaganda, discrimination, violence, wars, dictatorships, intercultural communication, consumerist attitudes, transhumanism...

On what grounds, however, given that ever since Duchamp's urinal anything can be art, is it called such, when it is no longer possible to conceive of art (in the general sense) as preceding the work of art (in the particular sense)? In answering this question, authors such as Clive Caso and Sabina Vaccarino Bremner draw on Immanuel Kant, who, in his **Critique of Judgement**, posits that aesthetic judgement (such as whether something is art) can arise not without a preceding concept, but rather through a reflective faculty of judgement that has arrived at the general on the basis of the particular (Kant, 1980, p. 50). It does so through 'the mutually enlivening capacities of the imagination in its freedom and of reason in its regularity, whilst encouraging their cognitive interplay' (ibid., 107). Aesthetic judgement does not exclude established concepts, but in identifying what is common to contemporary art, they 'are applied not definitively, but reflectively: they do not serve to determine the nature of the object, but rather to explore the possible combinations between them, so that the work may be revealed in its fullest understanding' (Cazeaux, 2021, p. 645), says Kazo.

Bremner goes further, arguing that contemporary art 'has sought to redefine the boundaries of the very concept of "art" (Bremner, 2021, p. 531): As a result, we are faced with artistic objects for which the existing concept does not apply and must be reconsidered, because it can no longer ensure their 'objective self-identity'. Descartes gives an example of this with his famous piece of wax, which, when heated, changes beyond recognition but remains the same: 'We must admit that it continues to exist, and no one doubts this. But then, what was it that we knew so well about this piece of wax? Undoubtedly, nothing of what I perceived through my senses, since all the things that could be perceived through taste, smell, sight, touch or hearing turned out to have changed; yet the same wax remains.' (Descartes, 1978, p. 326). Unlike wax, however, the transformations in contemporary art, according to Bremner, make the use of the term by which art prior to them was designated a matter of debate. And this is part of the aesthetic programme of contemporary art itself – to problematise its own concept, to be art that can no longer be called art, to be a total provocation concerning its very identity. And in this sense, it is always self-referential and, as Jean-François Lyotard puts it, does not conform to rules and categories, but seeks them out. The territory

of art is not delineated so that it must fit within it, but rather it stands where it is and delineates that territory around itself. The concept of art no longer precedes the work, but is its result; the work does not build upon a pre-existing answer to the question ‘what is art?’, but must itself provide the answer. And more precisely, it is the viewer who provides this answer, if the work has succeeded in stimulating their capacity for judgement and they have attributed meaning to it in accordance with their cultural experience. And by this very act, the work has asserted itself (has become) art.

A real-world object becomes a work of art when its cultural context is altered upon being placed in a museum (behind a red cord), owing to the transfer that takes place from its surroundings into the field of vision. This distinction was made by Mikhail Bakhtin and is exemplified in the dual role of objects, as articulated by Baudrillard – to be used (to serve) and to be possessed (to express). ‘Man’s relationship with the world is twofold: from within it – as his horizon – and from without – as his environment.’ (Bakhtin, 1979, p. 86), writes Bakhtin. In its context, the semantics of an object derive from its function (one sits on a chair). However, when this connection is severed – because the object is an exhibit, such as Duchamp’s urinal, or has been wrapped by Christo and Jean-Claude, like the Pont Neuf or the Reichstag – it must derive its semantics from the viewer’s cultural experience, which situates it within their field of vision. There, the object begins to evoke associations, to enter into metaphorical connections, to acquire symbolic dimensions (when one does not sit on a chair, it becomes an aesthetic sign, so to speak, of culture, because in nature there is no sitting position – animals are either standing or lying down). Architecture, in particular, is a subject in which the way it is perceived coincides with its surroundings and the wider context, just as the way it is perceived coincides with the way it is inhabited.

Contemporary art (and architecture, insofar as it falls within this realm) transforms objects into a text, prompted by the artist and created through the viewers’ interpretation of them. In this sense, the work does not belong to the person who signed it below (in the case of Duchamp’s urinal, this was a certain R. Mutt) – he is merely a ‘cultural porter’ who hauls fragments of reality through public space, whilst the true author is the viewer who has seen the object outside its usual context and begun to layer meanings upon it within their own horizon, until they have created a different semantics for it. This requires, on the viewer’s part, a ‘reflective capacity for judgement’; without it, the work will not attain the status of art, and Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s wrappings will remain ‘buildings covered in rags’, as some continue to claim. Contemporary art is possible only thanks to the new rights in the production of meaning that the viewer has acquired by taking them away from the author. The birth of the viewer must be paid for by the ‘death of the author’, as Barthes states in his essay of the same name. Contemporary art

draws, firstly, on deconstructivism in relation to logocentrism with its resulting discursive norms, ideological sanctions and moralising pathos, the elimination of which gives the author scope for arbitrariness and provocation. And secondly, from the deconstruction of the author himself, brought about by the 'interpretation without boundaries' (Foucault) that has naturally emerged on the horizon, which in turn has given the viewer scope for arbitrariness and provocation following the 'death of the author'. It is precisely in this way that the readings of the work become equivalent to the work itself; and insofar as it is a 'fragment of reality', transferred from the environment (centred on the fatalism of things) to the field of vision (centred on the freedom to interpret them), reality itself is experienced not according to the 'principle of reality', but according to the 'principle of pleasure'.

Contemporary art, as an event in reality in which the viewer is drawn in, acts as an antidote to the banality of their own existence and as a stimulus to discover unexpected meanings within it. It sharpens the viewer's social sensitivity by provoking a reaction and inviting them to 'enter' the works, following the trail of their own interpretation. Seen in this light, all contemporary art is, to a greater or lesser extent, a happening – an action performed before an audience with its active participation. And deconstructivism in architecture – through which architecture itself can become part of contemporary art – integrates it into the aesthetic space of contemporary art, which knows no national boundaries: the artist 'speaks' the universal language of images, and what the artist conveys is independent of where the viewer comes from or where they are located. And this is not a disregard for national identity, but an expression of the changed conception of it within liberal democracy – from xenophobic to cosmopolitan. It is no longer based, as it was during the National Revival, on hostility towards foreign national interests, but on overcoming the contradictions between them within communities founded on tolerance of differences.

It is precisely this transformation of identities that serves as the substantive focus uniting contemporary art and architecture, governing not only their messages but also the forms of their socialisation. Consequently, today we can speak ever less of national contemporary architecture in the sense of an ethnic style, although its 'tropes' are reproduced with postmodern irony in its postmodern examples. The highlights of contemporary architecture, for their part, are a privilege for any national culture, charging it with cosmopolitanism. At the same time, architecture sets the spatial framework for the aesthetic textualisation of everyday life, which gives rise to lifestyle as an identity by choice, in contrast to identities imposed without choice, such as ethnic, religious or sexual identities... The label 'contemporary' stems precisely from, or is a consequence of, the transition from an imposed identity to a desired one.

Contemporary architecture can be thought of as part of contemporary art because, whilst it expands its territory beyond non-architecture, it also – in the opposite direction – begins to exert an influence as non-architecture. It is ready to free itself from its own ‘archi-’ foundations, and this is where comes into play Derrida’s deconstructionism, which called into question architecture as archaeology in its search for the ‘pure beginning’ and relieved the architect of the burden of ‘the only correct solution’ in a liberal defence of pluralism in his thinking. Can there really be such a ‘pure beginning’ or such an ultimate goal that stands outside the structure and justifies it, regardless of whether we are talking about the world – in metaphysics – or a building – in architecture? Deconstructivism in architecture is based on the paradox which claims to be inherent in the very concept of ‘arche’, understood as the primordial centre that defines the architectural structure. However, the centre can only be defining for the structure – if it is not one of its elements – if it lies outside it; at the same time, it can itself be defined and acquire meaning only within it, in comparison with or in contrast to its other elements. This paradox, by its very nature, challenges the exceptional role of the centre and subjects the architectural structure to deconstruction. In thinking about the building, the oppositions traditionally regarded as archetypal: centre – periphery, inside – outside, wall – opening, roof – floor, support – load, stability – movement, function – form, presence – absence, cease to be mandatory... The elimination of this final opposition is indicative of Derrida’s tendency to view the present as a trace of the absent.

The centre of deconstructivism is not the foundational basis (generating principle) of the structure, because its meaning, too, is not primary but derived from shifting concepts-presences, in accordance with the logocentrism of European culture. And the centre can be both within and without; it can just as rightly be called a beginning as an end, just as much an arche as a telos...’ (Derrida, 2001, pp. 352 – 353), that is to say, a projection of the power of language, according to Derrida. For him, ‘arche’ functions as one of the figures of the logocentric metaphysics of the centre: a privileged beginning, origin or primary foundation which claims to organise and justify the structure. And it is precisely this claim that is subjected to deconstruction, which is a continuation of (and draws on) deconstructivism in language, insofar as it relates not to the concrete and glass of buildings, but to the thinking (in concepts) of their architects. Space prior to architecture is indeterminate; architecture organises it and imposes a certain order upon it: public/private, accessible/inaccessible, open/closed... and every system of order has something it places at the centre and something it pushes to the periphery; its hierarchy rests upon this. Deconstructivism disrupts this, so that it is no longer obvious what is primary and what is secondary, just as Duchamp’s urinal challenges the obviousness of what is art and what is not.

Contemporary (deconstructivist and post-deconstructivist) architecture does not conform to the definitiveness assumed of it and serves as a provocation to the very concept of architecture, which, 'in short', classifies contemporary architecture as contemporary art. And just as in contemporary art, this provocation transcends its aesthetic origins and transforms buildings into 'stages' upon which the major contemporary debates unfold. In architecture, these debates primarily concern nature and ecology, power and autonomy, public life and privacy, futurology and transhumanism...

I shall mention two world-famous museums as examples of architecture's contribution in two of the major debates. The first debate concerns the very subject of this article, to some extent: what is contemporary art? Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao provides an answer. Critics regard the building as a sensation that has overshadowed the art it is meant to showcase; yet, paradoxically, it actually does showcase it, because contemporary art relies precisely on sensational provocations that sweep aside all preconceptions of perception. Architecture marks the point reached by contemporary art, whose genealogy is traced through the museum's collection and to which contemporary architecture itself belongs – with the potential even to overtake it, as Gehry quips with his characteristic architectural irony. The second debate concerns the greatest 'shameful secret' of twentieth-century Europe – the Holocaust – and the clash, in its collective overcoming, between the strategies of repression and atonement. Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin does not place you face to face with the victims, whose presence stems from the hyperbole of their absence, achieved through the logic of deconstructivism in architecture: nothing is yet fully itself, but rather a trace of something that is no longer there.

In Bulgarian architecture today, the architect who most consistently draws upon (and himself develops) the deconstructivist approach, both in the academic interpretation of architecture and in addressing its specific challenges, is Arch. Boyko Kadinov. Prof. Elia Zengalis says of him that 'landscape and architecture are in a state of prolonged embrace', which extends visually into the realm of sculpture and also occurs between non-architecture and non-landscape. In his individual projects, Kadinov tends to explore this aesthetic shift with professorial ease through literary narratives. His architecture's entry into the broader field of contemporary art is achieved through a deconstructivist approach that specifically overcomes the oppositions of roof and floor, inside and outside, and wall and opening. Regarding his 'Green Over Gray' national stadium project, Kadinov says that 'across the green, grass-covered shell, parents and children carrying butterfly nets walk across the stadium roof', which has been transformed into a meadow and, in turn, has become the floor. The vertical axis of space, along which the sacred is arranged in a cultural hierarchy above the profane, with its authoritative finality, has been shaken, and the adults, like their children, have regained their playful carefreeness.

A similar approach has been taken with the 'Park Arena' swimming pool in Burgas, where a 'green roof shell – a terrace – is also planned, which will restore to the city the part of the park that was lost over time', explains the architect. "You access this roof-park from inside the swimming pool via panoramic lifts and glass walkways, emerging out onto the green grass under the open sky." This latter feature also serves as an example of overcoming the inside-outside dichotomy. This dichotomy is even more clearly deconstructed in the Opera House, reconstructed from the former Party House in Plovdiv, because 'outside' is no longer just nature, but also culture. Kadinov recounts with admiration that his project 'preserves the astonishing roof structures – the 'sheds' – from the Modernist era, DiKiro's murals, and the natural materials that have stood the test of time – ceramics, stone, marble and wood – whilst, through the new glass and stainless steel display windows, the Opera House opens up to the public, the square and the city". So, when you pass by, the architecture has added it to your sense of belonging to the city, alongside its cultural landmarks that are unmissable for any Plovdiv resident – such as the artist Dimitar Kirov (DiKiro) and his colleagues from the city's bohemian scene of the last century: Georgi Bojinov (Slon), Yoan Leviev, Encho Pironkov... An impressive example – and not just for Bulgarian architecture – of the deconstruction of the wall-opening opposition (wall versus missing wall) is the design for the 'Slatina' sports hall. Commenting on it, Kadinov makes a more general observation: 'Sports halls are usually designed according to the "container" formula – anonymously closed off from the surrounding world, with sports activities encapsulated within them'. And he contrasts this with his own solution: 'The main façades of the sports hall are entirely glazed – 2 by 4-metre windows, suspended almost invisibly on steel "fingers" (pins).' The sense that barriers have been removed from the architectural form seems to make it fluid and helps it merge with the athlete's body in "man's eternal quest to overcome gravity", in the words of architect Kadinov. He devotes professional attention not only to the conceptual messages but also to the poetic impact of his buildings. This is particularly evident in the 'Green Gates of Burgas' – two tall structures/towers right on the seashore, connected at a height of 30 – 40 metres by a platform set amongst greenery, flowers and water features, which recite an 'architectural poem' about the gateway to the city and become their own stylised symbol when viewed from the sea.

Boiko Kadinov's architecture is characterised not only by deconstructivist strategies but also by metaphorical shifts away from the obvious, which extract the conceptual and the poetic from their mutual irreconcilability. The most prevalent seem to be metaphors of the material itself, which appears to transform before our very eyes and become something else – for example: glass-mirror-sky-water... Kadinov's winning concept for 'The Luminous Quays of Geneva' includes: 'From time to time, the glass floors of the walkways break up to reveal, open to the sky and the surrounding landscape, winter gardens filled with trees, waterfalls, cafés

and restaurants. The slabs along the promenade are made of hand-crafted anti-slip glass; they glow at night, whilst during the day they reflect the water, the fountain – a geyser and symbol of Geneva – and the clouds in the sky – lights, signs and symbols of the connection between people and nature”. Nature permeates Kadinov’s architecture in every way – both literally and symbolically.

Another metaphorical use is the one of architectural forms, which once again derives its meanings most frequently from nature: roofs replicate a hilly landscape and blend into the surrounding hills. But Kadinov also introduces more complex connotations. In his view, following the reconstruction of the State Archives building, ‘in the evening, when the institution closes, its main façade – with the aid of 3D mapping, videos and documents – is transformed into a screen, entering into an open public debate with the media flow of “fake news”.’ It is no surprise that, by geometric analogy, the façade is seen as (and used as) a screen; but here the connotation moves to a second level, because the façade-screen is an alternative to the screen-screen and a warning from the State Archives to the public that ‘fake news’ can distort their own past.”

The aesthetic provocations that are defining features of contemporary architecture – and indeed of contemporary art in general – achieve the desired effect when they elicit maximum (unrestricted) freedom of interpretation, which, however, must lead to a stance or opinion on one of the significant debates in contemporary society addressed by the work in question. For Architect Kadinov’s architecture, the ecological debate takes precedence – the protection and preservation of nature, understood as empathy towards others: concern for them extends to their living environment. In this sense, ecological standards are ethical (they follow the moral choice between good and evil) and their violation is a manifestation of evil, including in its most sinister form of ecological catastrophe – war, with the destruction of people and their cities by modern villains in the guise of dictators and autocrats.

For Bulgarian society, which has not yet recovered from the traumas of the Soviet regime, the key debate in contemporary architecture concerning the boundary between the force of authority and the autonomy of the individual is of particular (therapeutic) importance, a debate resolved, naturally, in favour of the individual as early as the deconstruction of the centre from which power hierarchies originate. In the work of architect Kadinov – in dialogue with global models – such a ‘re Disciplining’ of spaces (which ‘by definition’ prevents their transformation into disciplinary spaces à la Foucault) is achieved by prioritising difference over similarity (central symmetry, repetitive elements, right angles...) and infuses a spirit of carnival (an interlude in the established order) into the character of his architecture. This spirit is the ‘cultural antithesis’ of the boredom employed under socialism (alongside the enforced domestic neglect and ugliness) as a form of repression, tententiously embedded in the fabric of daily life. A debate specific to Architect Kadinov’s work concerns the mediatization of con-

temporary reality, to which architectural sculptures (or ‘skularii’, as Kadinov refers to them) simultaneously belong (being receptive to the two-dimensional image) whilst constituting a three-dimensional negation of its virtual relativism. Contemporary architecture is the aesthetic guarantor of the truth about reality and, through its impetus towards intensive interpretative work, is the only thing that can protect individual opinions from manipulation, propaganda, conspiracy theories, fake news... However, Boyko Kadinov participates most passionately, not only through his buildings but also through his words, in the self-referential debate – to what extent architecture is art – and wages battles both against those who dispute this right on the grounds of function and technology, and against those who refuse to practise it as art on the grounds of its mass-production and trivialisation. In and about his monograph **Architectural Skullari**, Kadinov writes that he regards ‘contemporary architecture as an integral part of art. We consider the views, widespread in recent decades, that architecture has left the realm of the arts and is becoming an applied, investment-driven activity to be theoretically and creatively unacceptable’ (Kadinov, 2015, p. 8). For the first time, however, it finds a secure aesthetic refuge in contemporary art, not only because in contemporary art anything can be art (even a banana), but because architecture can fulfil its own claim – to be a provocation to reality, originating from reality itself – in an even more radical way than contemporary art can. Professor Kadinov focuses on this provocation using the more specialised term ‘transgression’ and views the relationship between contemporary architecture and contemporary art as ‘an interaction between two borderline fields within the overall, shared domain of the arts. For us, what is particularly important is what happens as a result of crossing boundaries, of going ‘beyond’, which we define as transgression.’ (Kadinov, 2015, p. 9). Transgression is the principle by which the aesthetic realm of contemporary art expands to infinity, so that contemporary architecture can find its comfortable place within it.

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