

The Invisible Link - The Golden Thread

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Art does never just copy nature. There exists always a transcendental added value due to the intervention of the artist himself. In some forms of art, such as in painting or sculpture this is more obvious. However, the more abstract and non-figurative the form of art the less obvious this becomes such as in the case of architecture and music where the starting points are not from motives that already pre-exist.

Architecture has many things in common but also many differences with the other arts. On a theoretical basis many similarities exist such as issues of proportion, harmony etc. On an actual procedural basis the closest relation is with sculpture in the sense that every piece of architecture is to begin with a piece of sculpture. However, I believe that it cannot stop there although we tend to ignore this issue in too many a case. The moment one adds to sculpture the issue of function or utilitas, then it is something different, it becomes architecture. But that too is not enough. Let us assume that we have a beautiful sculpture somewhere in an urban setting. I suggest that that same sculpture could appear just as beautiful if it were to be set in a park, at the seashore etc. However, the same cannot be the case for a piece of architecture and not because of the practical difficulty of moving a building around from one place to another, but because - even if we were to do so - the building would just not be the same, and that would be because of the different climatic, cultural, topological and other conditions of each place. This signifies that architecture is related to and generated by far more external parameters than sculpture. Of all these parameters I believe the most important to be that of climate with all its different components. Thus I would say that:

Architecture = sculpture + function + climate

I believe architecture to be a great Adventure in the same way as when one sets out for an exploration. However much one has previous experience one is never sure of the outcome or the exact way to get there. One thing only is sure and that is that it is a wonderful, creative and rewarding adventure.

Another particularity of architecture which makes it differ from the other arts is that architecture is a mixture of pure art of the most abstract and technique of the most concrete nature. It has been said in older times that "it is not worth talking about architecture if one cannot build a fireplace which does not smoke". So, we architects have the difficult role of having to merge two different personalities: that of an artist (with hardly any constraints) and that of a true technician. And if the balance of these two, like in so many other matters in life, is not the appropriate one, then the result will not be architecture. Architecture can only come to be, can only have a heart and soul of its own, when the end-result is something more than the mathematical sum of all the parts of which it is composed.

I believe there are three main issues that inhibit architects. Namely:

- their fear of mathematics, calculations and the laws of physics with the result of them trying to avoid these issues or leaving them to be dealt with by the different specialists,
- their over-inflated EGO which leads them to forget that they are not designing for their own selves and the promotion of their own being,
- and thirdly their disdain for any constraints

and turning them into the starting blocks and not the stumbling blocks of design.

The above in the end leads us to the dominance of what I wish to call the “dictatorship of form”, in which the main and in many cases the only concern is the search for novelty in form giving.

Architecture being that wonderful adventure, or beautiful game that Le Corbusier has called it, implies that in order to play this game, indeed as in all games, one has to have rules, procedures and players. And this too is in my opinion another issue that we architects tend to ignore.

I wish to remind ourselves that all architecture depends and is generated by a number of parameters that - even though they vary in importance from case to case - always exist. I call them the Decalogue of architectural design, although - depending on the actual grouping - one could define fewer or more. It is my strong belief that an architect cannot pick and choose those which interest him or suit him better with the sole purpose of creating preconceived solutions for the promotion of his own person and to the glory of his own ego.

In broad terms the ten issues of which architecture is composed are:

- History/Culture
- Social considerations
- Symbolism
- Function
- Place/topos
- Sustainability
- Climate
- Laws of physics
- Time
- Cost/Benefit

Instead of trying to work in a sense of creating recognizable forms to serve a constant presence of the ego of the architect, I believe that the constant issue should be the consistency of his convictions throughout his work - the search for that wonderful hidden, “golden thread” of architectural design.

