

The problem of form in modern architecture

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Abstract. The problems of architectural shaping and thinking evolution in the context of the modern society development are considered in the article. The most important issue is the preservation of cultural-historical and ethnonational codes of collective social experience architectural expression in modern Russia. Distinctive features of Russian architecture development on the background of changes in the Western world and consciousness in the globalization era are marked. The contradictions and challenges of establishing a new architectural language in the context of different vectors of the reception of historical heritage and renewal of the cultural layer of Russian society are characterized.

1 Introduction

The topic of the proposed research is primarily due to the fact that the problem of preserving cultural and historical identity is important for modern Russian society. Various projects of the global "reorganization" of the world, which have filled the world intellectual space over the past few decades, and which have largely fed on modernist ideology and the "values" of a mass standardized culture, demonstrate today their obvious inconsistency and even destructive influence. And first of all, for those who stood at the expansion origins of the Americanized socio-political and spiritual model of man and society. Obvious qualitative shifts in understanding what is happening today indicate that the civilization future as a whole is not a completed and ready project.

If the twentieth century was in many ways the century of the heroic march of the world community towards a certain social ideal based on the scientific picture of the world, technology, the principles of "democracy", etc., then the situation of today promises to be in many ways a "moment" of truth - a time when humanity will have to not only theoretically realize, but also somehow practically solve, express for itself the limit of its own historical movement, global *Paths*. The choice and understanding of this limit are necessary like air, like a sip of water to a thirsty person in the desert, for he is the border of *consciousness*. Either it will remain in the circle of the national platform of life strategy and corresponding values. Either the limit will be realized and manifested as something that goes beyond the established forms of culture. This dichotomy is most directly related to *architecture* as a form of existence of cultural and social practices, values and ways of presenting a person.

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2 Main part

The main **problem**, analysis of which is the **target of the research**, is that the trend to revive the national traditions of architectural shaping, which is closely related to the temple and Kremlin architecture, that has emerged in recent decades, does not provide, however, a true renaissance of the spiritual and moral core of domestic culture and its spatial code. The desire to diversify the principles and methods of shaping, which is common with the Western postmodernism, has not yet led to the development of a new model of architectural space that creatively expresses the vital culture nerves. The abundant flow of quotations and receptions of the past, which fills the modern domestic environment, turns out to be very modest from the point of view of the immanent development of the architectural language. A comprehensive solution to this problem, of course, cannot be limited to the framework of one small article. At the same time, it makes sense and relevant to talk about a number of its key aspects that make up the circle of research **tasks**. Such as:

- the features of architectural shaping and design characteristic of postmodernism, influencing the evolution of national traditions of architecture;
- the relationship between Russian architectural thinking as an identification basis for professional activity and Western (globalized) standards of mass construction that meet the large-scale demands and needs of a market-type society;
- the differences between the Russian historical development of architecture and the traditions of European architectural shaping at the level of the spatial structuration deepest universal codes of collective experience and the figurative-symbolic identity for the living environment.

Methodology research includes the traditional general scientific methods of description, comparison, analysis and synthesis. In the course of this work, the author relied on the principle of the historical and the logical unity in revealing the nature and characteristics of architecture evolution as a form of national culture. At the same time, the field observations were combined with the study of theoretical developments in the field of architectural theory, representing the latest trends in nonlinear thinking and postmodern interdisciplinary attitudes.

The issue of architecture today, for all its seemingly narrowly professional orientation, in reality touches the very core of the ongoing metamorphosis. Architecture is a certain experience of spatial mediation of human existence. For several millennia - from the moment of its inception - civilization was a gradual structuring of space as a "place" or "space" (M. Heidegger) selling the very experience of a human (from the primitive mythological and cult to the capitalist era of the industrial revolution and the crisis of classical Western culture).

Until the twentieth century, architecture never performed only utilitarian functions (safe living environment, ergonomic housing, etc.). The functional dimension remained secondary in the classics. Modern times have driven a wedge of discord between the gene of architectural thinking and the external socially dictated need to "build for everyone." "Architecture, obviously, reflects what society considers important, valuable both spiritually and materially. In the pre-industrial past, the main objects of architectural expressiveness were the temple, church, palace, agora, meeting house, country house and town hall, and now huge funds are spent on hotels, restaurants and all ... the commercial types of buildings" [1, p. 36]. In this sense, the preservation of the collective experience traditional layer, its bearing symbolic paradigmatic basis, has become in the most direct way the reverse side of the medal for the architecture preservation in the classical sense of the word, the formation and morphological contour of "living space". In other words, the question is relevant - can the traditionally understood architectural creativity as the birth of new masses in space, new spatial "bodies" and volumes, new forms and configurations not

only express the birth of a new world as a new social image of society, but also to become a *conductor* thus opening the horizon of meanings? The point is not only the inevitability of the transformation of the modern area of human existence into one big “city without borders”, as the Russian scientist writes about it [2, p. 8]. But also, in the fact that the prevailing trends in modern architectural shaping are obviously aimed at a specific “alignment” of all architectural (symbolic) *plots*.

It is obvious that the new architecture seems to strive to stop being itself. Architecture without architecture! The poorer its form, the more significant its weight will be in the vastness of an actively globalized society. Such a form will tend to express *Nothing*, emptiness. But which one? The emptiness of the modern inhabitant *Cities*, the place of which annihilates itself in a stream or vortex of tremendous speeds and growing tension of constant changes. The new architecture deliberately relieves the individual from the experience of experiencing his own *presence* in the world. This directly applies to both the architecture of the home and the construction of “public” buildings and structures associated with social and cultural infrastructure, transport, economic facilities in trade and production, and the entertainment industry. “Such active urbanization processes, inherent mainly in the second half of the 20th century, continue now and every year they are gaining more and more momentum, which inevitably leads to quality problems in two interrelated trends. On the one hand, there is a movement in the form of general universalization and globalization in the form of environmental compliance with global requirements, ideas and standards. As a result of the new global connections and mass migration formation, a new international culture is developing, subject to the market economy rules and direct citation of popular attitudes in architecture and design” [3, p. 57].

The fact is that already at the beginning of the last century, the voices saying that architecture inevitably goes to the end of its own historical existence were actively heard. Numerous projects to rebuild the appearance of “old” European cities and towns involved more than just “demolition” and new construction. The claim was for the creation of a completely new type of architectural design of the living space. Most of them, however, remained either on paper or did not expand beyond one or two buildings. Within the postmodern thought framework, already in the second half of the twentieth century, the thesis about the “death” of architecture became concomitant with other diagnoses of our time (“the end of the social,” “the death of the author”, etc.).

Here are some typical judgments:

Jean Baudrillard writes: “Was there not something in the architecture [architecture of post-industrial modern society] that led to the following state of affairs: everything that now happens in it occurs on the basis of the disappearance of architecture as such - its history, the symbolic configuration of society? This hypothesis should seduce architects: a hypothesis about the reverse side of their activities. ... This hypothesis is completely pessimistic. What happens on the other side of the end can be much more inspiring than simply extending the history of art. This gives originality and originality to everything that may arise as a result of the disappearance” [4, p. 401-402]. In this regard, C. Jenks is undoubtedly right when he writes that “modern architects ... spend their time trying to design for some universal person, Mythical Modern Man” [1, p. 31]. And this “man” - the hero of our time - is clearly in no hurry to focus on his own national roots and the deep foundation of identity. Will architecture be able to survive the coming or already coming “era of emptiness”?

How does the situation in modern Russia look against this background? It should be agreed that, despite the public and state efforts that have recently been aimed at preserving the national elements and traditions of the Russian society associated with the metaphysical code of Eastern Christianity, the trend towards the living space architectural structuring symbolic aspect destruction and shaping is becoming the leading one. In this case, we do

not consider the individual populist projects that rather play “against”: their falsity and imitativeness only further destroy the foundations of the independence and self-worth of architectural thinking, which has been developed over the centuries. Originally architecture in Russia expressed a certain existential *the truth* of life. The truth, concluded not in the official communicative space, but behind its ceremonial sign in the very vastness of the universal semi-conscious (archetypal) world, which made it possible to distinguish the fundamental root points of cultural existence within the “Russian world”. That characteristic of modern architecture that J. Baudrillard gives - "architecture no longer indicates any truth, originality, but rather only the technical availability of forms and materials" [4, p. 399-400]– is directly related to modern Russia. Neither the numerous compositional quotes and receptions that many architects are keen on today, striving to build another temple or another “city”, nor projects simply issuing “square meters” to order from the state, nor anything else today acts as a voice coming from within - from what is actually happening in our society at the collective mentality and self-awareness level. Architectural narrative as a sequence of meanings, like any other *artistic text*, turned into a game.



Fig. 1. The Great Arc de la Fraternité in Paris' new business district of La Défense

The most surprising thing is that the "fashion" for the national as one of modern Russian culture facets is not at all evidence of the real *revival* deep symbolic and iconic layer of society's life at the level of architectural shaping. The national as a mass consumption object, as a label or "trademark", deprives the individual - the consumer - of the possibility of being correlated with the true cultural spiritual potential. Primordially Russian, truly national, today is not a moment of mediation of one's own individual and unique expression of the culture spirit, the civilizational "gene" of the ethical and aesthetic platform of the worldview. The architectural appearance of a city, a village and a separate building is the spatial-structural code of anthropological experience (individual or social, group, ethnic, national). Its preservation and translation include the evolution of objective structures and "texts" of the cultural organism as a whole, as well as the change in architectural thinking itself.

If we talk from this point of view about the difference between the Russian architectural experience and the classical or modernist European experience, the following should be noted. The development of architectural morphology, aesthetics and axiological accentuation within the framework of the European civilizational and historical focus has always been an experience of free creative discovery of new semantic horizons and formations as outwardly expressed spatial dimensions in culture. The architectural thinking of antiquity (the origin of the order principle), medieval Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and

Rococo are the examples of the human spirit greatest effort to master the worlds that open up in acts of consciousness as a supersensible reality. Classical Western architecture has always been a bridge connecting the earthly existence of society and the world of the Other. Moreover, the internal vector of development of the architectural form within the framework of Western culture was associated with the expansion of the self-assertive potential of the architectural constitution of space.



Fig. 2. One of the facades of Reims Cathedral. The 'text' of the self-examined form is clearly visible

On the contrary, architecture in Russia has never aspired to affirmation of its own internal shaping codes. Whether it is the temple architecture monuments of Kiev or Moscow Rus, the Kremlin buildings of the era of the centralization of the Russian state in the XV-XVII centuries, or the architecture of the period of the Empire and the Petersburg "style". If we talk specifically about the temple architecture, then, of course, the historical trace of the Greco-Byzantine influence and presence played a huge role here. For example, the principle of poorly differentiated structuring of the intra-temple space, in contrast to the Western European Gothic or Baroque cathedral, was originally a distinctive feature of the Byzantine "high" style (traces of which, by the way, were preserved in the Basilicas of Rome of the High Baroque period, suffice it to recall the central nave of Santa Maria Maggiore). "The aspiration for undifferentiated and undifferentiated external masses and internal spaces, which is very typical for the Eastern school of Byzantine architecture, prevails ..." [5, p. 472]. Meanwhile, it was the breakdown of space, the creation of a counterpoint polyphonic conjugation of different spaces that constituted the main sign of the architecturalism very principle formation as an autonomous code and *method* formatting the culture itself. This principle received its maximum development in baroque architecture, in which constructive and "material" engineering solutions were completely subordinated to the movement of the form itself as an integral and internally completed *the Imagea*. The phenomenology of such an architectural mass, such a spatial body is entirely set by the very stream of "reading" (contemplation) of formal unity *text* stone work. As V. I. Loktev emphasizes, "the baroque version of infinite space is an endless series of its structural transformations, and in this series, hierarchy is not so much valuable as the process of transformations itself and the polyphonic opposition of structural elements" [6, p. 380].

The situation is different in Russia. Space, as a participant in a single social dialogue and communicative exchange in Russia, has always played the role of a "middle link" in the general ideocratic mechanism of social and cultural regulation. This trend persisted and even intensified in the architecture of Soviet Art Nouveau, both in the early era of industrialization and in the later period of mass housing construction in the 1960s and 80s.

Is there today, in the conditions of creative freedom and openness of architectural thinking different traditions and schools, the possibility of expressing the cultural identity of Russian society in the language of spatial structures of the national level? Undoubtedly, a positive answer to this question primarily depends not even on the potential of the architectural community (which itself needs to be provided with a development program), but on the readiness of the society itself to accept a certain self-portrait for symbolic "armament", which is very problematic today. The more actively such a desire is declared, published and replicated, including by the media (they play a huge role in the formation of "public opinion"), the less chances those sprouts will have *authentic Words*.

The most striking example here is, of course, modern temple construction. We are all witnessing an active revival and restoration of churches. By itself, this trend is positioned as a sign of the country's spiritual and historical Renaissance, as a return of society to its civilizational roots and religious foundations of social life. However, the question of whether the number of reconstructed and newly built churches can be an argument in favor of the thesis about the renaissance of national architecture is still open. Firstly, we see that such massive construction and reconstruction most often turns out to be a simple and stylized reproduction of already well-known samples, their *receptions* and a combination of architectural *quotes*. The phenomenon of architectural citation has previously been one of the main ways of broadcasting the experience of architectural design and thinking. Let us suffice it to point out the constant appeal to the Greek classical order principle in the subsequent eras of the development of architecture. However, in the conditions of modern Russian reality, citation can only be conditionally called the sounding of the root beginning of Russian life as a phenomenon of spatial and structural.

The main problem is related to the development of a new *architectural language*, which could become a method of universal expression in a specific spatial text of a certain cultural meaning, the axiological orientation of society as a whole. The last decades in the domestic intellectual and artistic world have been marked by the influence of the Western postmodernist current of thought and art. Without going into the details of this influence and the specific characteristics of the postmodern phenomenon itself as a certain sign of historical time and consciousness, we only emphasize that the feeling of freedom, at first perceived as a gift of the era, very soon turned into a feeling of semiotic emptiness and the destruction of the immanent narrative structures of the architectural "narrative" ... We join the assessment of the situation that has been developed in contemporary Russian architecture, which is quoted by I. A. Dobritsyna in his monograph: "Postmodernism as an aesthetic phenomenon takes root in a peculiar way on Russian ground. Behind Western postmodernism, there is a train of shocking slogans from its first stage - the 70s: speaking architecture, double coding, aestheticization of chaos, a strange mixture of the highly artistic with the non-artistic, which became unpopular by the 90s both in the West and in our country. All this, including the hard-to-digest semiotisation of architectural discourse, gives rise to an ambivalent attitude of Russian architects towards the very fact of their existence in the postmodern culture complex system. On the one hand, there is a desire to distance oneself from the unstable and, as it were, temporary state of postmodern aesthetics with its programmatic eclecticism, and on the other hand, there is an obvious desire to try one's hand in an endless field of possibilities " [7, p. 346-347].

3 Conclusion

The designated facets of the problem allow us to formulate the following main **research findings**:

1. The combination of such completely multidirectional tendencies such as, firstly, the variability of the strategies of postmodern artistic thinking, secondly, the historical

requirement to preserve the national content of architectural creativity as a slogan of today and, thirdly, the preservation of the professional identity of architectural activity and thinking, seems to be today problematic. If the basis of the latter is precisely the canonical structure of the expression text in the space of a certain meaning prevailing at a given time, then the indicated freedom of thought and creativity is rather a factor that significantly complicates the identity of architectural space and semiosis.

2. The fact of widespread replication of Orthodox architecture "citation" today speaks rather of the absence of a new paradigm and a new methodological key of the architectural language as a form of being a national culture. Up to the era of Nicholas I, the development of Kremlin and temple architecture in Russia followed the path of deepening and expanding the horizon of that architectural self-awareness experience, the foundations of which were laid back during the Baptism of Rus.

3. Unfortunately, it is not necessary to say that the modern trend of the widespread restoration of temple architecture, its restoration and reconstruction is organically successive to the historical tradition of domestic architectural form. In this case, and this should be emphasized, a strict distinction must be made between the architectural space deployment *immanent*, the self-movement of architectural thinking and the corresponding structural (linguistic) form, on the one hand, and the reception of the historical and architectural heritage as an expression of a patriotic public mood and a special (possibly genuine) historical consciousness, including in the form of such a "museum" or "Archaeological" interest, on the other. So far, the facts speak only of efforts to revive the people's spirit of culture in such a calculation and replication of long-emasculated quotes from the past.

Taking into account that the dominant characteristic of Western postmodern architecture is *distinguished* as a basic design principle [8, p. 113], the constitution of the spatial and symbolic identity of the habitat [9] also cannot serve as the basis for the platform for building a new identity of domestic architecture, the question of the architecture future evolution trajectory as a field of activity, the search for innovative solutions and thought within the megatrend of preserving and strengthening the national culture.

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