

THOUGHTS ON ARCHITECTURE

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Architecture in the Islamic world is undergoing a more serious crisis and degeneration than has been experienced by any other culture. It is also obvious that this degeneration cannot be overcome by employing the same means utilised in various other cultures. The Islamic world has experienced a rich variety of cultural and architectural achievements during different periods in its history. Such diversity and richness on the local level, in the context of an overarching whole, is a cultural event unequalled in the history of humanity.

Some of the basic difficulties we face today entail the loss of opportunity to express the Islamic nature of these cultures and works of art, and the question of how best to bring new solutions to the problem of regenerating the great elan and ingenuity of those who have made this diversity possible. The cultural stagnation of production today is not encountered in the Islamic world alone as it is also being experienced in non-Islamic cultures.

From the middle of the nineteenth century, self-assured Western revolutionaries disavowed all historical experience and accumulation, asserting that they possessed everything necessary to reconstruct the world anew, and create a heaven on earth within its frame. Nineteenth-century engineers developed cast-iron and steel construction techniques, claiming they were going to change the future of the world by building a completely new one. Whilst it is true that the world underwent a change never before witnessed in history, this change brought disaster upon the world instead of turning it into Heaven. It has been observed that when socio-economic and technical attempts are made at changing the world, the belief that resolution in one area of existence can result in resolution in every area of existence, is actually the result of attributing divine power as both catalyst and resource.

The whole world has been polluted by the grave miscalculation that the cultural lack of rationality of nineteenth-century eclecticism separated architecture from the material aspects of its technical nature. The architecture of the Islamic world has been alienated from the fundamentals of its own culture and beliefs in addition to the pollution experienced in the West. The devastation caused by the attitude which regards solutions devised by others as absolutely valid truths has helped escalate degeneration in these parts of the world.

In the days of emerging totalitarian concepts, when this general degeneration was observed in its major constructs, it was discerned that lack of rationality and detached efforts devoid of 'entirety' would not be able to offer a solution. It became necessary for important steps to be taken in the history of art and the philosophy of art. It was recognised that Hellenistic culture was not the sole cultural achievement of humanity, and by the beginning of the twentieth century it was also accepted that cultures outside the framework of Hellenistic-Christian cultures deserved to be surveyed and measured within their own evaluation systems.

The fact that the quality of art could not be determined with the form of description of archeology was appreciated apart from the contributions of the psychological, aesthetic school. Heinrich Wölfflin, by comparing the Renaissance and Baroque arts and starting with the considerations which provided the stylistic attributes, presented the art which he thought had universal validity. He also pointed out that the form categories determining Renaissance and Baroque arts belong to two different systems of belief. He then asserted that it was imperative to enter into the relation between the culture, its system of belief and art forms, to remain within the sphere of art.

In the dynamic thinking environment of the beginning of this century, the German historian of art Alois Riegl, determined the relationship between the changes taking place in the Roman culture and art form. Ludwig Coellen posited the second important explanation to the genetics of aesthetics. He approached it from three perspectives: the creation of the form characteristics of the work of art; the factors which bring about its style; and the genetics of how art and style originated in Western Europe.

Ernst Diez's study, 'A Stylistic Analysis of Islamic Art, Simultaneity in Islamic Art' (1938), followed the work of Riegl and Coellen in the area of genetics of aesthetics. While his study offered new horizons for understanding the genetics of aesthetics, it also contained the outlook of linear evolution contradictory to reality. The latter had been developed by the Archeological Institute of Vienna (of which Diez was a member), and was a dominant idea in Western Europe. It asserted that works of art could only be evaluated together with the basic beliefs and judgements of the culture in which they had evolved.



AKAA, 1992, Demir Holiday Village, Mugla, Turkey



AKAA, 1989, Rehabilitation of Asilab, Asilab, Morocco

Such an attitude is also present in describing the native cultures of Africa and America as primitive and backward, a similar approach displayed in a series of misconceptions of value expressed by Diez, which has led to other misjudgments connected with this process. The Wolfflin categories take a similar view, limiting themselves to analysing the form features of the shape of the works of art and leaving out the relation between the work of art and human beings, and the problems connected with the creative period of the work of art. It is also not sufficient to find an explanation for the problems of art in all the epochs with figuration categories, based on the form qualities such as 'definiteness' and 'indefiniteness' – attributes of both the Renaissance and Baroque cultures.

However, the assertion was that replacement of the expression of art with those belonging to the sphere of culture would make it possible to move outside the sphere of the essential problem of art, thus moving away from the sphere of the essential problem. This assertion has proven to be a grave misapprehension. The appropriateness of the criticism directed towards psychological aesthetics is due to the fact that psychological aesthetics regard this aspect of the work of art as the only factor constituting the style of the work of art. It is also a result of not taking into consideration the entirety of the various problems related to different existence levels. In the atmosphere of these misapprehensions and the voids which have lasted throughout the century, it is obvious that the contributions of the genetics of aesthetics and existentialist philosophy have been considerable and of special importance.

Throughout its history, Western philosophy has been confronted with unsolvable problems because of the concept of existence as consisting of two strata, the material and the spiritual. In actual fact, the new ontology has defined existence as material, biological, spiritual and moral. In addition to the explanations concerning the order of the relations between these strata of existence, it is obvious that the concept of wholeness forms the most important basis for genetics of aesthetics. It contributes greatly to the history of art and, even more importantly, to the solutions that can be brought to the problems of art and especially to the problems encountered in the project phase of architecture.

In particular, there is the simultaneous contemplation of Diez regarding 'place' and 'time' throughout history: the structure of the whole, the relationship between the part and the whole, the organic and the cumulative wholeness, the static and the moving, the simple and polar compositions formed through the direct and the indirect polar reflections of the transcendental structures on the objective universe. His explanation of the ornamental subject, while introducing invaluable principles for the comprehension of the history of art anew, based on these foundations, considerably facilitates the comprehension of Islamic art and architecture.

Apart from this event, there are the studies of Amanda Coomaraswamy and Titus Burckhardt on the problems connected with the relation of man as spectator or as a living being when faced with works of art, and especially when facing architecture. Their work, emphasising the religious and cultural attributes gained by the work of art according to the faith of the artist creating it, has revealed new dimensions of this problem. Since the beginning of this century, the relationship between the quality of the work of art, and what it is made of, has remained on the agenda. Specifically in architecture, construction materials, technology and the reality concerning the importance of the factors belonging to the material sphere of existence, while becoming almost a sole determination and a divinity which would solve everything, the invalidity of the claims to absolute perfection, was brought to the agenda in the 1960s. The myriad of coincidences that occurred during the emergence of the work of art and architecture replaced the central reason and authority. It also had an effect on the quality of the work of art, on the contributions of human beings at every level, and on what the role of the human beings who are elements of the emergence, and consequently, what their rights are going to be. All these were also on the agenda.

The criticism brought to the raising of the collective work of Walter Gropius and the architects in his circle, to the status of a 'prima donna' at the beginning of the century, has remained ineffective throughout the century.

On the one hand, the image of the architects of 'prima donna' architecture dominates – which emerged as a result of the approach of central decision and preferences which reigned. On the other hand, after the Second World War, as a result of the socialism which was the outcome of Anglo-Saxon empiricism and pragmatism, the problems of linguistics in connection with those of the symbols appeared on the current agenda. Research on the mechanisms of production of man in reaching the level of being a work of art, and the genetics of the work of art, has been removed from the agenda completely in the years following the Second World War. After the War, while the question of what the new structure of Islamic art and architecture should be – with the zeal obtained when their political independence on the scene of the world politics was placed on the agenda – the habit in Islamic countries of following the stride of one or the other developments mentioned above continued.

However, there were attempts to elucidate the questions relating to the origin of the Abstract Geometrical Ornamentation, which is a manifestation of Islamic art unequalled in the history of humanity, using Islamic cosmology as the starting point. This approach did not include the form qualities inborn in a being, although it had been possible to be aware of them, manifesting the divine command of the Prophet, who said in connection with these natural qualities, 'look at everything, look at

the Sun, the Moon, the stars, the earth, the water, and the grass'. Apart from the reality that these holy qualities imparted to Islamic art, departing from this reality could only elucidate a limited aspect of Islamic art. Neither did it include the concept of place-being, which was brought to the agenda through the genetics of aesthetics and subjects such as organic or cumulative wholeness, movement and statism, simple and polar compositions, ornamentalism, and so on. Besides these, the material, technical, bio-social forms and the qualities of the shapes that have a decision-forming significance specifically for architecture, and which Paul Klee defined in gross outline as silence, peace, harmony, contradiction, etc, correspond to psychic states, manifestations and faiths regarding the concepts of the creation of man, the universe and existence, and how the choices determined by cosmic sensation came to be and how this determined the style of art.

The topic of how the universe created by God and the will of God which is manifest in every sphere of existence, could be reached and conformed to; how the rule of Islam that the command of God is to be obeyed unconditionally is to be actualised; and how this could be achieved by making whole the information about the formation of exigence, and the information about the genetics of art – all this could be cleansed of its misconceptions and not brought to the agenda.

The truth of the oneness of God and, consequently, the unity of existence needs to be emphasised. It needs to be said that the solutions offered which are based on limited subjects and spheres turn into idols, each and every one. It is observed in the West as well as the Islamic world (which has been inclined to follow the stride of the Western example, especially during the last 150 years) that these solutions are the result of the gravest misjudgement, which most definitely needs to be overcome.

During periods of twenty to thirty years, the pulling

down of the idols of these false solutions that are almost worshipped by everyone, and the new ones being constructed to replace them, has been praised. This procedure has been interpreted as dynamic and creative, and the resulting state of irrationality has dragged the world down into a swamp of pollution. The way to overcome these short-term analyses and solutions can be found in examining history in its entirety, thereby searching for solutions which have a genuinely lasting effect.

Solutions which are long-lasting can only be founded upon a mutual basis of consistent totalitarian information and faith. It is obvious that a comparative history of art and architecture could offer great contributions.

In order for lasting resolutions to continue between the contrasting characters of the cultures of the wholly colourless and uneasy, and the human cultures of the Middle Ages and the Baroque which devoted a lot of time to dramatic and tragic subjects, solutions have to be found which take into account the realities of coming into being.

The realisation of these two poles together constitute the source, the unequalled phenomena in the history of mankind. It speaks of variety, regional differentiation, and the entirety of the Islamic culture.

Instead of a self-centred, static, dull entirety, a dynamic, open, cumulative entirety is motivated to meet the needs of the aspect of the existence, located forever in a state of becoming. Produced with the tectonics that are the foundation stones of entirety, taking place in the infinitive space as responsible beings, there would be an imperative and a reflection of the concept of 'Complete Man' which will illuminate mankind again.

It is absolutely necessary that the effects directed at offsetting the destructive conflict caused by the turmoil of the individualistic approach to the twentieth century, and the standards formed based on narrow points of view, should proceed in the direction suggested by this analysis.

FURTHER READING

- 1 Ludwig Coellen, *Der Still*, Der Bilqenden Kunt Arkaden Verlog Traisa, Darmstad, 1921.
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- 5 Amanda K Coomaswamy, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy*, Dover Publications Inc, New York.
- 6 Mazar Sevkert Ibsiroglu, *Gotik San'at*, Guzel San'atlar Mecmuasi, Istanbul, 1942.
- 7 Titus Burckhardt, *Principes et methodes de l'art sacre*, Devry-Livres, Paris, 1976.
- 8 Fusus Ul-Hikemr, *Mubiddin-i Arabi*, Milli Egitim Basimevi, Istanbul, 1952.

