

ARCHITECTURE HERE AND BEYOND

On the spaces of Imre Makovecz

Prof. Dezső Ekler DLA
Széchenyi István University
Department of Architecture and Building Construction

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Abstract

Makovecz' architecture is a radical renewal, which cannot be judged purely in terms of the architectural. His buildings embrace influences from outside architecture. They announce that architecture cannot be renewed from its own resources, because it faces a crisis caused by forces wider and more fundamental than its own.

1 CONTEMPORARIES OF MAKOVECZ

In medieval and ancient painting, objects were depicted as they actually were, and not as how they seemed. The whole object was painted, including the elements that were hidden in reality. The proportions of the drawing, too, reflected not the appearance, but the meaning and importance of the objects. This method of representation had to be based on a view of space *from within*. The artist did not divorce himself from the object, but, almost getting inside it, identified with it. Since the Renaissance, with perspective representation, the artist has placed himself outside the object represented and looked at it from his own viewpoint. His viewpoint has become relative. He does not represent the object as it is, but as how he sees it. His method of representation has become academic: it is not the object itself that is represented, but the circumstances of observing the object. That ancient and medieval artists did not follow this approach to representation could only have stemmed from their sense that they existed in a wholeness much greater than themselves, under the influence of a transcendent power.

We are no longer living in the Middle Ages. The forces of myth, religion and a world view denying relativity has waned. The *exterior viewpoint* has become one of our resident faculties. Several great thinkers find here the source of what today we call alienation and objectivization, deriving from the relativity and scientism of our point of view. All we want for our reality is what is "human"; what man sees, and what he is capable of producing from it. In this endeavour to create our reality ourselves we have, despite our intentions, ceded decision to something that is ultimately non-human: the criteria of reality now are the knowledge and use of the physical world, technical generality and, stemming from this, the generality of the social world, power, organization, the nobody of public opinion. The *Somebody*, Heidegger's *Das Mann*. We have thus made ourselves exterior too. Man now views himself as an object, a stranger.

The question is not, of course, what caused the "loss of essence". It is much more whether man can return to the essence of his being, whether he can re-find his inner sight in the world and in himself. Is he capable of once again seeing the facts as reality, reality as the truth, the truth as his own truth? Is he capable of finding the status where he is an actor and not a victim in the world? It has been the task of the arts, if they have had a task at all - from Hölderlin to Cézanne and Dostoevsky to Musil - to recognize and proclaim that this is the issue on which everything depends.

Today's "classic architects", the contemporaries of Makovecz, reveal a kind of non-perspective vision. This can be detected in Aldo Rossi's collages, with their distorted proportions and laid-out objects, in Robert Venturi's or Charles Moore's facades constructed out of contradictory viewpoints, or Rob Krier's personally-tuned, fish-eye-lens elemental spaces: an attempt to *bring things closer*, to acquire an inner

viewpoint. The polemic of their art is *with everything for everything*. In the wake of modernism's abstract, distancing, hurray objectivism, it is a desperate effort to see things from an inside starting point, and to arrange things from the inside. The differences between them derive more from their different world views than from their basic positions. Venturi, and what took off from him, the Anglo-Saxon postmodern, only registers the cultural aspects of "objectivization". They admit that the wholeness of the past is alien to them, and only identifiable in its elements. The *whole* remains obscure. Aldo Rossi and the rationalists embrace *loss of essence* in its comprehensive social sense and historical depth. At the same time, they identify the culture of architecture, extensively, as does their orthodox Marxist ideologist, Manfredo Tafuri, with its material-historical production. Nonetheless, extending the validity of the profession in this sense - paradoxically - results in them creating a peculiar *isolative architectural vision*. I am thinking of their concept of *architectural autonomy*, whose obscurity carries with it the danger of distancing reality and voiding values. Their distilling typological methods, their poetics moving between the polarities of "destruction" and "fulfilment" in fact display the negative of architectural "production" - ultimately the architectural forms of alienation¹. Using a Nietzschean expression: they are the committed practitioners of an architecture beyond architecture. The question is whether they achieve the heights of autonomy they so desire².

I see the conflict between strictly postmodern and Latin rationalisms as lying ultimately in their attitude towards the alienated-society theme that pervades architecture: the former *experiences, and as such denies*, it, while the latter builds it into its program and shows it off. The Europeans see the Anglo-Saxons as commercialized publicists, who in turn see the others as offended intellectuals, and clearly not without reason. This is a dispute over the mission of architecture, a polemic on its nature and meaning³.

2 MAKOVECZ' MISSION

We can say much about Imre Makovecz if we can express what architecture means for him. His architectural achievement can only be measured in terms of problems he puts forward himself, the tasks he sets himself. Makovecz is just as concerned with broadening the validity of architecture as Rossi is (or as the modernists were), but he is pursuing, rather than an extensive programme, an *intensive wholeness*. It sounds paradoxical, but it is true that *for Makovecz, architecture by itself, as an autonomous professional culture, has to be secondary*. He does not regard it as a value in itself, presumably because he cannot see it as relative. From Makovecz' point of view, Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche holds for the rationalists: "...declaring as value deprives value of its dignity"⁴.

Makovecz has no theory; his thinking is effectively anti-theoretical. His artistic intention is in way not directed at architecture itself, but to things beyond (or before) it. He dispenses with theories and ideologies (modernism), and also avoids style-oriented culture sociological approaches (Anglo-Saxon postmodern). Neither does he have time for the structuralist language analogy approaches which today offer the most attractive ways of tuning poetics to the laws of architecture (rationalists). Makovecz stretches the string between the personal and the general discourse tighter than his contemporaries. On the surface, his approach seems arbitrary, perhaps with shades of expressiveness. His life's work is more poetic than almost any other this century; one must look to Frank Lloyd Wright to find a near comparison.

At one point, he appears to have a common denominator with contemporary innovators, with Venturi, Rossi and the Krier brothers: their work proclaims the sovereignty of architecture. However, Makovecz visibly takes the autonomy of architecture to be natural and expresses it in a wider context. The differences in fact stem from their understanding the subjective function of architecture in its poesy. *Makovecz' architecture teaches us that poetry inherent in architecture can only be authentic if the subject of architecture is understood as wider than the personal: together with the community content of spirituality and existence*. With this, Makovecz retraces the architecture's original calling, from which it has

¹See, for example A+U 76/5, articles by Vittorio Savi and David Stewart, or Aldo Rossi - Projects and drawings 1962-79, Florence, 1979. Introduction by Francesco Moschini, p. 7-11.

²"He does not want to manufacture prejudices about prejudices, he assumes a distance from morality, something beyond Good and Bad, to which he must grasp his way..." Friderich Nietzsche: La Gaya Scienza, Book V, Item 380.

³See: Irrational Rationalist, Charles Jencks. A+U 77/4, p. 110-113: 77/5 p. 85-88; and: architecture, criticism, ideology, Princeton Architectural Press 1985.

⁴Heidegger: Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit, mit Beilage: "Brife über der Humanismus", Bern, 1957, p. 99. - "Namely, if we wish to judge culture as culture, value as value, rationality as rationality (because we regard them as things created by man alone), we remain the slaves of culture, value and rationality, and we end up saying no more than that for us, these things are problematic."

receded so far, especially in the twentieth century, mostly as the result of the spiritual and intellectual disintegration of communities⁵.

But how does Makovecz understand the organic society, organic culture and organic architecture? His approach cannot, I think, be interpreted without Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy. His architectural creed rests on a wider base, conceived in terms of the anthropological revolution that took shape from Steiner's captivating visions. Anthroposophy sees man's calling on Earth as a continuously-progressing, self-creating process. Man is not yet complete, he declares. He is part of nature, but also the carrier of primary elements that are *not of this world*. The meaning of our existence lies in the experience of the conflict that we can think about what is natural and given within us only from the most general, from the higher powers that can be reached via our intellectual faculties. We are only able to find the meaning of our existence by re-creating ourselves. This is the pre-condition of freedom, the truth that is born within, which is as unique as the earthly existence, and the existence, and truth, of the Earth.

3 HIS HISTORICAL VIEWPOINT

Makovecz draws from Steiner's teachings a viewpoint that reinforces both his fundamental tendencies and the heightened experience of community and transcendence that he grew up with. In tracing what he has stated about his own vocation, we find his historical viewpoint to be of primary importance. He sees events of the past alongside what happens now, and brings them into simultaneity. Following Steiner, Makovecz regards history as the destiny of existences great and small. As if he was assessing the life of a single person, in which a series of victories and failures, exaltations and humiliations have accumulated irreversibly. He sees the destiny of his people and the past of his wider homeland, Europe, from this personalizing viewpoint. He looks on the failings with understanding and pity, seeing in them what happened and what might have happened. Makovecz' poetics and patriotism are in sympathy with the finest traditions of Hungarian literature, the lyricism of "hope drawn from hopelessness". It is only from here that we can understand how he approaches Hungarian folk art. *He is delving into a life that is part of what we are but which our fate has forced out of our memory: the silent truth of the subjected, the reality of the "might have been", lost through failures*. He feels that there must be a wider, fuller reality, that allows room for "the organizing power that history, victory, and the prevailing power have left out, the world of AS IF, so commonly overlooked or regarded as dangerous". He finds this in the motifs of folk art: the vision of a sunken world that shone age in the age before memory, "another sun of a secret ancient cultural sub-world under the sun of European culture".

Makovecz' world-view and past-view is thus deeply rooted in a dramatic epochal awareness. He sees the history on which present-day civilization is built as a series of losses. He considers that our present age increasingly cripples the organization of our inner selves and prevents us from developing our individual and community existence. He writes, "Fear in the soul and automation in production, the planned and controlled fabric of information woven by the instruments of mass communication, the international chain of computers, like the jaws of a vice, squeeze us down into mere consumers, neurotic and without destiny, blind to nature and to our own natures". His architecture represents the drama unfolding in the modern world, in which the human reality struggles against the reality that is inhuman. "The task of the organic world-view is to make people aware of their ability to choose, and to show an example against the way that the automated world compels them, a specific personal example of autonomous destiny and personal initiatives". But how does all this take shape in Makovecz' work?

4 MAKOVECZ' SPACES

Makovecz' architecture is defined by a conception of space which, by implication, is his own conception. It is an original and consistent space ideal, and pervades his entire architecture. It is perhaps the first architectonic space-principle of universal validity since the "flowing spaces" of modernism, derived from

⁵Looking from here, we can see that the social relations embraced by modern architecture are reduced to empty and mechanized relationships, to raw power. Finding its way out of the postmodern, or in the wider sense, technocratic, traps, architecture is turning towards its fundamental calling, but becomes bogged down in its desired image (autonomy), because it cannot get past the comprehensive spiritual-intellectual existence that can only be produced by a true community, an "organic" society. That is why the postmodern is critical, culture-centric, and elitist.

Cubism, and their variants (from Corbu to Kahn)⁶. Makovecz' space is an *existential space*. Existential (Existenz) in the Kierkegaard, Heidegger sense. The space of a person *living the authentic life*, and awaking to his own reality. Makovecz set out its basic terms in an experimental, uncategorizable work that he produced in 1972⁷. In this sketch, entitled *Minimal Environment*, he expresses the basic formal and poetic terms of his spaces. The double-walled envelope depicted in the drawing sets out the boundary situations, the states of consciousness that are the conditions for "modern man to understand and admit his destiny".

In the text written around the drawing he sets up the demands on man living "within the manipulation of money, threat and the moral laws", telling him "not to lose himself"; to admit that his personal faculties and social sensitivity are objective realities; to be aware that the main content of his environment is other people and that "objects are only the dead images of the human condition". The double-walled minimal environment on the drawing is intended - in a figurative sense - to protect the content of these realizations, but at the same time to "ensure change at all times". In his interpretation, this minimal space is the "personal specific reality, which draws the events of *destiny* around the person". "The *inner wall* consists of time sensitivity and the substance of a particular life ... it fends off the attacks from reactive interconnection of the past and the future. This protects us from error ... in time it only has *local value*". "The exterior wall is set in time: it stretches from the turns of life's destiny up to the next fundamental change. It essentially shows a concordant opposition with the person delineated by the inner mesh. This always appears as the future, with unknown content and specific personal course. The *external wall* therefore comprises the person's future content, and its inner boundary is the border of consciousness of the present person, according to his destiny..." The double-wall minimal space represents the boundaries of consciousness, where the person, recognizing the singular and mortal nature of his existence "cast in time", can "grasp the meaning of his existence", as we might explain with Heidegger⁸. At these boundaries, man's innermost self, his "now" and his possibilities are just as real as things, the exterior world. The authentic space of existence - as we might say with Heidegger again - is delineated not by things but by that special time in which man knows himself as an entity, and whose distinctive points are the states in which he understands his future and admits his destiny. Makovecz makes this special time of the authentic life the synonym of space creation, when the person registers the changes of consciousness of awakening to spirits. *The ability to create space is thus for him equivalent to the spiritual power of creating destiny, the admission of inner existence*. If we note that all of his work, the plans produced both before and after 1972, can be attributed to this spatial form set forth in the conceptual drawing and its "spiritual objectivity" (Makovecz' terminology), we may conclude that the secret of Makovecz' architecture is that *it magnifies man's most personal space, the aura of his existence, to an architectonic space*. ... Viewed from today's architecture, this is a topic completely beyond architecture. It is fundamentally a new beginning, in which every dead material has had to be rejected.

Nevertheless, if we wish to characterize his buildings and spaces from an architectural perspective, we could have recourse to a formula of movement. Makovecz shifts and opens up the elemental single-focus central space right up to the frontal opening of the shell enclosing the inner space⁹. These spatial forms incorporate expression of human gestures, embraces, acceptance, birth, starting in life, dedication, and the moments of turning to a higher order, with an inexhaustible plenitude of symbolic meaning. Anthropomorphic spaces? Undoubtedly. The question is what we understand by this. Makovecz writes thus: "anthropomorphic architecture ... is only anthropomorphic in the way that human speech can only be made with a human mouth"¹⁰. This transformation can be clearly followed in the instinctively-drawn forms of his early work from the 1960s (Szekszárd, Sió Restaurant, 1964; Budapest, Restaurant, 1966.) but we also come across the basic-concept-like expression of the same problem in one or two of his later works (Visegrád, Camp buildings, 1977; Dobogókő, Ski House, 1980). All of his buildings essentially carry some variation on this approach to space.

The significance of the new beginning inherent in Makovecz' space forms can be understood by com-

⁶The postmodern has no space, to put it in bald terms. It only has "points of view". The objectivist poetics of modernism has lost its validity for them, but they have not reached a universal space ideal.

⁷The competition by virtue of which this creed was born was initiated by him for his artist friends. (See: *Minimal Space*, Budapest, 1972. Private publication by Imre Makovecz, László Sáros and János Gerle.)

⁸Heidegger: *Sein und Zeit*. Erste Hälfte. Halle, 1927

⁹This can clearly be traced in his works, Sió restaurant, Szekszárd, 1964; Restaurant, Budapest, 1966; Restaurant, Tatabánya, 1969; Holiday camp, Visegrád, 1977, Ski house, Dobogókő, 1980, etc. See: A+U 84/3

¹⁰Imre Makovecz: *What happened and what would have happened*, 1985. (OMF exhibition catalogue, 1990.) See also *On Experiments in Moving form*, Dezső Ekler's conversation with Imre Makovecz, A+U 84/3. p. 51-58.

paring them with the spaces of historical architecture. It appears to be a fusion of the faculties of two basic forms, central and longitudinal spaces. However, they cannot be derived merely from these geometric forms. Although they are arranged around axes of symmetry and central nuclei, their shell forms are irregular. They essentially synthesize the space forms of historical and modern architecture with what is from one viewpoint a formal (central, symmetrical, frontal) and from another informal (dynamic, asymmetrical, plastic) character. They are anthropomorphic spaces, space metaphors and, in a wider sense, world metaphors, of man.

For Makovecz, the "inner man" is more than a purpose, it is a tool of his art. His creative method is based on Goethian and Steinerian monism, which faces up to modern scientific thinking on the plane of epistemology, and focuses on intuitive vision and recognition not divorced from mental-emotional faculties. This approach attempts to avoid the divergent explanations of abstract conceptual thinking and transcendental belief by taking a direct view of things. "The world is understandable through love, as a cognitive power. I do not believe in the dialectic unity of objects and ideas, ... I reject the cool, often ironic remoteness of rationalism, I reject the cognition of cold hatred that is alienated from things. ... He claims, along with Steiner, that the world is whole together with us, and it is only our nature that is double". We know that we are inextricably parts of nature but have nonetheless been cast out, because we carry something that is different.

The fundamental current of Makovecz' art is this peculiar "nature belief" that seeks out the human in nature and a higher-level meaning in man, and thus invigorates the manifestations of nature. (In this he is perhaps close to Bartók, who was attracted in the same way by the fundamental unity of the natural in folk art.) His works radiate a restless seeking, which starts from the emotional phenomena of the world and drives towards an indivisible whole, an "oceanic feeling" of childlike instinct, an image of God, and a special insight, perhaps preserved and extrapolated from childhood, a certainty that behind the diversity of the world there nevertheless lies a hidden whole. His nature metaphors - branch-like supports, flower-cup pillars, house-creatures evoking tree foliage and the human form - speak of a striving towards the inexpressible.

5 HIS STRUCTURAL FORMS

Makovecz' structural solutions embrace considerations as profound as his space forms. His architecture has developed along lines that essentially trace the mutual interaction of these two elements - space and structure forms¹¹. Flower-cup-like monolithic parapets forms are found in his very earliest works (e.g. Sió Restaurant, Székszárd, 1964), followed by pillars holding outward-branching brackets, also evoking plant forms, at the centre of his interior spaces (e.g. Agricultural Fair, Sheep Hall, 1966). He magnified this flower form to a monolithic whole in several works produced at the beginning of the seventies (Bodrog Store, Sárospatak, 1972). Later, the interior pillar-bracket structure and the space-enclosing cladding almost merged into each other (Gyulavár Restaurant, 1969 - unbuilt) and there appeared the peculiar ribbing that is most familiar in the funeral chapel in Farkasrét Cemetery (Budapest, 1975), and used in several monumental plans (Visegrád Youth Centre, 1973 - unbuilt). Summing up the course of his work is the Sárospatak Arts Centre (designed 1974-77), where the duality and interrelationships of plant-like support frameworks and anthropomorphic space-enclosing cladding are presented in their full richness. In his work of the seventies, the plastic-outline ribs simplified to curved rafters and the branched brackets to angle-braced frameworks (Visegrád holiday camp, 1977-78). In the nineteen-eighties, he started using "living" branched trees, not as any kind of gimmick, but, as we have seen, as the fruit of his earlier work and expressing its symbolism more clearly. (Laczházi Restaurant, Tatabánya, 1980, Funeral Chapel, Vác, 1981 - not built).

The forms and proportions of Makovecz' structures thus follow the make-up of living creatures. His method originates in Goethe's well-known metamorphosis doctrine. Goethe, by his theory of archetypes, summed up his quest for the ideal and the general, by scientific investigations and aesthetic theories, in experience, in the one. His archetypal plant unifies all variations in forms of plant life, and thus embodies the shared principle underlying the variations. It is really the ideal of the necessary type, the symbolic occurrence. Makovecz applies Goethe's concept to his buildings as a whole. His structural forms do not just copy plant forms, they follow the model of plant development, and thus give a vivid, one might say burgeoning, form to the general tectonic forces (that exist both in the plants and the buildings¹². Thus

¹¹See: Sur l'architecture d'Imre Makovecz, Dezső Eklér, Techniques & Architecture juin-juillet 1985, no. 360. p. 110-005.

¹²"The materials in the building always change in accordance with the laws of transformation... Organic architecture is

they provide appropriate solutions for his anthropomorphic spaces and creature-like building forms, and activate archetypal images of architecture like the ritualistic branched trees of folk architecture or the florally-ornamented Antique capitals and their predecessors.

6 MAGNIFICATION AND MYTHOLOGICAL OUTLOOK

We may note that nearly all of Makovecz' work contains magnifications. The anthropomorphic space-forming method is none other than the gestural magnification of personal space. His structures - the oblique buttresses, the cup pillars, the rib-like rafters - are magnified building elements, magnified roof structures, giant flowers, branches, skeletons. The creature-like skull-, arm- and eye-forms of his houses are all magnifications. But what is a Greek temple or a Greek capital - in terms of origin - judged purely in terms of the architectural. His buildings embrace influences if not magnification? The magnification in stone of primitive shelters, plant elements, rough carpentry structures. Or an Indian stupa, a Rietvelt or Corbusier house? Miniature (or cosmic) models, sculptural contours, painter-like gestures magnified into space. But what really is this monumentalism, the 'flourishing of styles'? Not so much magnificence as magnification. Inherent in Makovecz is something that is perhaps only present in the style of the truly great. Finally, what is the manifestation of Makovecz' figurative view of space from within that I mentioned at the beginning of this essay? I would say it is a mythological outlook. On considering his structural forms or the shapes of his buildings, it is hard to imagine that they could have come about without that personifying animist view that is the hallmark of mythology (and childlike thinking). "... I always wanted to make houses that in some way resembled man...", "... my buildings are creatures that appear from a forgotten world...", "Makovecz has declared. His branched brackets are the trees of the Celts, who may have been people. His building-creatures could be parts of the body of the Germanic Ymir, the god-giant, whose body became the world (and there are equivalents in many cosmologies); his anthropomorphic spaces are the spatial world of the myths, where everything is arranged around centres, where the world is finite and space is proportioned according to human directions and places (the opposite of Euclidean space, not homogeneous, not infinite, not continuous) and where men and gods reside at the same spot, the place where the world- tree also stands, i.e. the centre of the world, or at least in the same spatial reality (opposite of the fourth Euclidean axiom: many things at the same time at the same place) 'Makovecz' spaces, in the same way, arrange the spatial world anthropomorphically by projecting on to it man's bodily organization and his undivided spiritual reality. For him, tangible and imaginary space are not distinct, neither as objective and subjective spaces or as real and transcendental worlds. His buildings attempt to connect man's bodily and conscious reality (existence) with the world, projecting on each other the microcosmos and the macrocosmos; the is and the origin.

the architecture of pure pressure. It is the elemental formation growing out of the earth, yielding to the Sun and the Earth just as the trees do". Makovecz Imre: On Organic Architecture. ms. 1983.