

Architecture—Being Given

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In this presentation I would like to argue about temporal qualities of design process in architecture. The heading “Being Given” has been borrowed from the book by Jean-Luc Marion (Marion 2002). To my mind it creates a powerful epistemological setting that is worth discussing in the context of architectural design.

In some architecture schools, including mine, architectural design is seen as a worldview. Probably it not the worldview in its full spectrum, but it is at least a special approach to reality. We can say it is a taught epistemological and axiological attention towards reality. It is an awareness for the cognising mind of the world around us. This awareness can be understood, interpreted and transformed in the process of design. We can even say the designing becomes the process of conising.

However, a bitter criticism of this general direction of reasoning can be found. It is found at the cutting edge of the science of information technologies—the investigation of artificial intelligence in design:

“This assumption, that any theory of design process must be a cognitive theory, is so widespread that often it is not even made explicit. ... The problem is that Cognitive Science does not yet have any well established theoretical understanding of the cognitive capacities used during design, ... As a consequence, the terms and concepts used to present theories of Design as Cognition cannot be operationalised well enough to support the construction of effective explanations of human design behaviour: why designers do what they do, when they do it, and how they do it—we are not asking for predictions here, just good explanations! Instead, they have a more descriptive folk-theoretic status: they can be effective in describing what happens, but not explaining why and how it does”. (Smithers 1996, 567-568)

In this presentation we try to describe and investigate some possibilities for the design theory in architecture to become more argued as a cognitive discipline. We also believe epistemological content of architecture and its education will have to be constantly represented and developed in the research. Otherwise programmes, aims and methods of architectural education will remain on the level of politics or ideologies, and thus be extremely vulnerable to the rapid changes of economic or governmental policy when in reality, the real challenge for schools would be in preparing the students for the future shifts in the understanding of world and man.

Thus we can formulate the primary question: How can we think of “architectural design” from the direction of epistemology? To be more exact we can reformulate the question: How can I think of “architectural design” from the direction of my experience?

Architectural design is for me an active state of mind, where various problems of space and understanding and evaluating of it are dealt with. Whether space belongs here to the mind or reality, that is seemingly independent of mind; is not our concern yet.

This can be illustrated by the common practise of architectural studios: The whole process of designing takes place between interviews and meetings with the clients. These meetings usually consist of discussions on the bases of drawings. The drawings or mock-ups of the design can be named design descriptions. So the common everyday language as dialogue is used to create meanings for the design sketches or drawings and after that to debate and discuss these meanings. This is the first dialogue.

A dialogue as an imaginary precedent can take place within the fantasy of designing personality when he or she, is developing design sketches and drawings. Then, the possible meanings and interpretations from the

viewpoint of society (client) can be imagined by the designer and the modifications made without the real dialogue going on. It can be seen as a certain self-criticism, or even a censorship, applied by the designer. He or she acts as if from different roles or modes of social being, incorporating means and ends simultaneously. The designer's mind acts as if from different points of view and creates a series of possible scenarios of dialogue as well as a series of possible worlds to adopt to these scenarios. This second dialogue takes place between the design meetings.

The internal dialogue also predicts us the third type of dialogue between designer and reality. In this case, the dialogue is between the possible qualities of objective reality imagined and the designing subject. The foundation for this type of dialogue is the personal experiences drawn consciously or unconsciously directly from the life-world. This dialogue can thus be seen as "touching", reflecting or simulating of objective reality by the designer.

When the first dialogue and probably partly the second are held in common language, the third dialogue is highly subjective and personal. It seldom takes the form of verbal explanation within the focus of the mind as the active process of designing—joining the experiences, ideas and expectations.

Within the parallelism of the language and the design horizons we can thus see three types of dialogues. The subjective reality reaches out to moderate the ideal design on the language horizon with social reality and on the design horizon with the objective reality. The designer as subjective reality is reaching inwards to moderate the ideal design as if with possible partners.

All of these dialogues involve the directedness of thought and duration of time. I believe this constant modification of design ideas is the actual process of designing. As the tense of the word indicates, it is "being done", it is the presence of doing something. We can describe that presence as the experience of present moment—"now". This is the awareness of the ideas and the relationships of these ideas in the focus of the mind. It is only within this particular presence of the moment, "hanging on", that we can imagine the design as a whole gradually being created. This presence as the focus of the mind justifies for us, the abolition of the design personality (in its full richness), especially, of psychological or psychoanalytical directions. Within this presence we can operate with the elements that are conscious, or were conscious. If something is totally unconscious (either of personal or collective type) it

cannot be focused on and has to be investigated by other means.

These dialogues we described in this presentation only to help the temporal qualities to emerge and specify the constant circular return to the series of "present nows" as they make themselves visible to the mind.

We find the phenomenological interpretation of similar problem of time in Husserl's *Lectures on the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, that were delivered between 1905 -1917 and published by Heidegger in 1928. (Husserl 1991, 3) In these lectures, Husserl develops Augustine's line of thought through a criticism of Franz Brentano and Hermann Lotze into a phenomenological interpretation of time consciousness.

We have found three main elements of his theory that can be used to explain the inner temporality of the design process in architecture: Firstly, the unity of temporal objects in retentions and protentions; Secondly, double intentionality within the re-presentation of temporal objects; Thirdly, the different modes of re-presentation. Interplay of these elements can give us an explanation of how the mind works within the architectural design.

We assume that while designing, an object of this activity is held within the focus of mind. This means that when the mind deals with it, it does this as "now", in the present moment and here. During a certain period the "now" is clear and vivid, then other thoughts follow, sometimes these are related to previous thoughts, but not necessarily. The new thought "covers" or "shades" the clarity of the previous ones and establishes itself as another "now", pushing the previous to the "past". In every "now" the thought is held steady and focused, having a structure and identity of its own.

This "running-off" mode of an object, whose identity and entity can be held in the focus of mind, is described by Husserl as a **reverberation or retention**. As long as the retention lasts, the thought or experience has its own temporality; it remains the same and its duration can be perceived as the same. This "now", the "source-point" from which the object of thought starts its enduring, is called a primal impression.

As the thought endures and changes, we can return again to the once primal impressions that we are aware of. That is, to return to the object previously thought and then abandoned for a shorter or longer period of time. This is a memory. The **primary memory**, the reverberation of the moment, as the "comet's tail", is a

series of retentions and the object still has the identity of its “now”. **The secondary memory**—the true recollection—is quite different, it must be distinguished from the primary memory as retention.

Husserl distinguishes at least three different modes of secondary memories (referred to also in his text as reproduction or recollection). They can be described as:

1. Flash—a memory rises to the surface, as a slice or flash. The remembered is a vague, probably intuitive and momentary phase. The object of thought is not repeated.

2. Continuum of re-presentation—a memory in which the temporal object is completely built up afresh in a continuum of retentions and in which we perceive it again, as it was—but only “as it was”. The whole process is a re-presentational modification of the perceptual process with all of the latter’s phases and stages right down to and including the retentions: but everything has the index of reproductive modification. (Husserl 1991:39)

3. Fulfilled reproduction—an object of thought is completely built up. This remembered object can be grasped as “complete in one time-point”. The characteristics that are built up originally in the temporal process (its duration)—become constituted member by member, phase by phase and can now be grasped in this retrospective as something intact. The looking-toward or looking-back at what is given retentionally—and the retention itself—is fulfilled in re-presentation proper: what is given as just having been, shows itself to be identical with that which is recollected. The essence of the primal impressions object is revealed. This can be seen as an intentional object with its possible meanings.

As there is the primary memory so also is there a primary expectation—**protention**. The antithesis of the “now”—perception—are the retentional and protentional directions of the mind. So perception and non-perception in the form of retentions and protentions constantly blend into each other. The presence of the moment can be seen as a result of weaving together the continuum of modifications of primary memory and the continuum of primary expectations, soon becoming “now”. These primary expectations form a similar continuum of constantly modified objects of thought. The modification takes place on the basis of fulfilment of the expectations.

According to Husserl, the protentional direction is founded by every memory. Recollection is not expectation, but it has an horizon directed towards the future.

In a way, every recollection fulfils its former expectation layer or horizon, but this horizon is fixed. It is fixed by the present moment, when the recollection takes place. The consciousness flows continuously. This also means that memory as re-presentation flows continuously. Everything new reacts to the old, the forward-looking intention belonging to the old, is fulfilled and determined.

There are further important aspects of exposing the immanent time flow that seem to be essential from the viewpoint of architectural design. When Husserl discusses the recollection or re-production he points to the **freedom** involved in it for the thinking subject.

Noteworthy differences emerge between the original and the reproduced running-off modes belonging to the process of sinking backwards in time. The original presentation and its running-off modes of experience is something fixed, something of which we are conscious through affection. Husserl draws our attention to re-presentation. This is something, that is not fixed. On the contrary, we are free to run the re-presentations at will. We can do it at different speeds, with differing clarity and with different articulation. This is exactly what happens during designing—we constantly return to the once thought ideas or objects and play them “off” as different modes of secondary memories—recollections and after that adjustments are made. This is done until the designer is satisfied with the modification and the object of design fully developed.

But this type of approaching to world is common to many human activities. All our being in world as well as being of mind is probably conducted the same way. In architectural design we can point out a clear speciality—the recollections of design ideas and sometimes the development of design are represented in an other medium than language or pure thought. They are transformed into design sketches, scribbles and drawings. Sometimes into models and mock-ups. From Husserlian point of view these are representations of re-presentations. The epistemological sequence is prolonged and enriched: we deal with presence of thought, the secondary memory of this thought, the alienated representation of the memory and the new presence of thought as **being given** again as “now” on this very moment. The new presence as interpretation of one’s own design ideas reacts retentionally and protentionally. This can be seen as double intentionality. The object of design is reflected in the focus of mind as manyfolded and clarified result in different meaning layers. It can be seen as development of personal ideas and goals. It can be seen as a solution of design task. It can be seen

as holistic spatial and structural entity. It can be seen as a social statement ect.

We can add one more cycle of similar running off mode to architectural design. It is the building or more precisely what is built. If architectural design is executed according to its description (working drawings, for instance)—it is represented in an other medium, epistemologically not really more different than a sophisticated model. The past, present and future of the built can be seen through the same modes of primary and secondary memory as well as through re-presenting the built in drawings, texts and other types of media.

But a powerful impact can be seen in this second cycle of architectural design **being given** as “built”. The once personal, intimate or veiled is blent to the life-world, to the existence in its raw presence as thingness and spaciality. The two cannot be easily separated.

In the natural attitude of cognizing the life-world no such parallel layers of fantasy and reality are consciously built by the mind of observer. If in the natural attitude, layers of protentional fantasy are indeed built in the process of cognizing, they definitely do not exhibit the same existential power as in the design process. On the contrary, to operate constantly and correctly in the life-world the re-presentations with the index of existence and the fantasies with the index of future, are kept clearly separately.

In the sphere of design, that what will become, is thus treated as **present** (in focus of the mind) and as **past** (re-presentations with retentional modifications) within the very same moment. This is described by Gadamer:

“Being present does not simply mean being there along with something else that is there at the same time. To be present means to participate. If someone was present at something, he knows all about how it really was. ... Thus watching something is a genuine mode of participating. Here we can recall the concept of sacral communion that lie behind the original Greek concept of *theoria*. *Theoros* means someone who takes part in a delegation to a festival. ... *Theoria* is a true participation, not something active but something passive (*pathos*), namely being totally involved in and carried away by what one sees”. (Gadamer 1997, 124-125)

This participation as presence in focus of the mind, is the platform of joining together the different modes of consciousness. In architectural design, it usually starts with watching, not just glancing, but with a systematic and repetitious watching. Within this process the differ-

ent modes of consciousness emerge and complicated time frames are created.

We believe this radicalised attention of blending the actual and the possible, existential and fantasised can be explained through the expression “having-been-designed”. Before any real design project starts, the knowledge of designing has to be there. This knowledge is in the form of a goal or a method: something that is consciously done. It is the knowledge of social and personal practice within doing it before. This goal or method builds on the specific credibility and “latent existence” of design fantasies in advance, as an epistemological setting.

The blending of the past and the future into the presence of designing has another powerful source. It is the knowledge of a social and personal practice of having-been-built as the realisation of design. This gives the design fantasies an especially powerful ontological load, as the possibility of existence in the form of an actualisation. The knowledge of building, either personal or through the practise of the language of social origin, is so powerful that it gives to the design fantasies and re-presentations and also probably to the conventional representations of design, a specific meaning—“memories of the present”. It is probably not a coincidence, that in his account on “being”, Heidegger makes use of the practise of building and dwelling as a powerful archetypal and existential source:

“The entire range of the inflections of the verb “sein” is determined by three different stems.... 2. The other Indo-European radical is *bhu, bheu*. To it belong the Greek *phuo*, to emerge, to be powerful, of itself to come to stand and remain standing.” (Heidegger 1959, 71) “What, then, does *Bauen*, building, mean? The Old English and High German word for building, *ban*, means to dwell. It signifies: to remain, to stay in a place. The real meaning of the verb *bauen*, namely to dwell, has been lost to us.... Where the word *bauen* still speaks in its original sense it also says how far the nature of dwelling reaches. That is, *bauen, ban, bhu, beo* are our word bin in the versions: *ich bin*, I am, *du bist*, you are, the imperative from *bis*, be. What then does *ich bin* mean? The old word *bauen*, to which the *bin* belongs, answers: *ich bin, du bist* mean: I dwell, you dwell.... Building as dwelling, that is, as being on the earth, however, remains for man’s everyday experience that which is from the outset “habitual”—we inhabit it, as our language says so beautifully: it is the *Gewohnthe*. For this reason it recedes behind the manifold ways in which dwelling is accomplished, the activities of

cultivation and construction. These activities later claim the name of *bauen*, building, and with it the fact of building, exclusively for themselves." (Heidegger 1971, 146;147;148)

To conclude this presentation I would like to point out one more possibility of understanding the actual and possible, existential and fantasised or in the context of this text—present and future. In some languages the verb "be" and its form "being" cannot be used to predict the time tense of expression. In my language and I believe in the language of our hosts the future within the realm of verbs does not exist. They are only in present and past. It is usually overcome with the words like "tomorrow", "the day after", "soon" or clearly stating "in the future". On the level of verbs a special modification can be seen giving the verb temporal possibility of the future. It is the addition to verb that constitutes conditional speech. In English it is similar to the double meaning of phrase "would you?".

This grammatical nuance has clarified for me a very trivial understanding: the future is always conditional. It is possible, but not certain—as the presence is in its participation. For architectural design this triviality has a major interpretation. Due to the complex shifting

between presentations and representations and re-presenting of these, the past, present and future are layered together. What **will be** or **can be**—is being given as something that **was**—was described. What belongs to reality, existence, what is **actual**—is being given instead as **possible**. What is **possible**, what is conditional—is being given as real, existential and **actual**.

We believe this radical epistemological shift is the goal of architectural education and constitutes the essence of architecture—**architecture as being given**.

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