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Everything Is Architecture

Hans Hollein (Bau 1/2 – 1968)

Limited and traditional definitions of architecture and its means have lost their validity. Today the environment as a whole is the goal of our activities—and all the media of its determination: TV or artificial climate, transportation or clothing, telecommunication or shelter.

The extension of the human sphere and the means of its determination go far beyond a built statement. Today everything becomes architecture. “Architecture” is just one of many means, is just one possibility.

Man creates artificial conditions. This is Architecture. Physically and psychically man repeats, transforms, expands his physical and psychological sphere. He determines “environment” in its widest sense.

According to his needs and wishes he uses the means necessary to satisfy these needs and to fulfill these dreams. He expands his body and his mind. He communicates.

Architecture is a medium of communication.

Man is both—self-centered individual and part of a community. This determines his behavior. From a primitive being, he has continuously expanded himself by means of media which were thus themselves expanded.

Man has a brain. His senses are the basis for perception of the surrounding world. The means for the definition, for the establishment of a (still desired) world are based on the extension of these senses.

These are the media of architecture—architecture in the broadest sense.

To be more specific, one could formulate the following roles and definitions for the concept “Architecture”:

Architecture is cultic; it is mark, symbol, sign, expression.

Architecture is control of bodily heat—protective shelter.

Architecture is determination—establishment—of space, environment.

Architecture is conditioning of a psychological state.

For thousands of years, artificial transformation and determination of man’s world, as well as sheltering from weather and climate, was accomplished by means of building. The building was the essential manifestation and expression of man. Building was understood as the creation of a three-dimensional image of the necessary as spatial definition, protective shell, mechanism and instrument, psychic means and symbol. The development of science and technology, as well as changing society and its needs and demands, has confronted us with entirely different realities. Other and new media of environmental determination emerge.

Beyond technical improvements in the usual principles, and developments in physical “building materials” through new materials and methods, intangible means for spatial determination will also be developed. Numerous tasks and problems will continue to be solved traditionally, through building, through “architecture”. Yet for many questions is the answer still “Architecture” as it has been understood, or are better media not available to us?

Architects have something to learn in this respect from the development of military strategy. Had this science been subject to the same inertness as architecture and its consumers, we would still be building fortification walls and towers. In contrast, military planning left behind its connection to building to avail itself of new possibilities for satisfying the demands placed upon it.

Obviously it no longer occurs to anyone to wall-in sewage canals or erect astronomical instruments of stone (Jaipur). New communications media like telephone, radio, TV, etc. are of far more import. Today a museum or a school can be replaced by a TV set. Architects must cease to think only in terms of buildings.

There is a change as to the importance of “meaning” and “effect”. Architecture affects. The way I take possession of an object, how I use it, becomes important. A building can become entirely information—its message might be experienced through informational media (press, TV, etc). In fact it is of almost no importance whether, for example, the Acropolis or the Pyramids exist in physical reality, as most people are aware of them through other media anyway and not through an experience of their own. Indeed, their importance—the role they play—is based on this effect of information.

Thus a building might be simulated only. An early example of the extension of buildings through media of communication is the telephone booth—a building of minimal size extended into global dimensions. Environments of this kind more directly related to the human body and even more concentrated in form are, for example, the helmets of jet pilots who, through telecommunication, expand their senses and bring vast areas into direct relation with themselves. Toward a synthesis and to an extreme formulation of a contemporary architecture leads the development of space capsules and space suits. Here is a “house”—far more perfect than any building—with a complete control of bodily functions, provision of food and disposal of waste, coupled with a maximum al mobility.

These far-developed physical possibilities lead us to think about psychic possibilities of determinations of environments. After shedding the need of any necessity of a physical shelter at all, a new freedom can be sensed. Man will now finally be the center of the creation of an individual environment.

The extension of the media of architecture beyond pure tectonic building and its derivations first led to experiments with new structures and materials, especially in railroad construction. The demand to change and transport our “environment” as quickly and easily as possible forced a first consideration of a broad range of materials and possibilities—of means that have been used in other fields for ages. Thus we have today “sewn” architecture, as we have also “inflatable” architecture. All these, however, are still material means, still “building materials”.

Little consequent experimentation has been undertaken to use nonmaterial means (like light, temperature or smell) to determine an environment, to determine space. As the use of already existing methods has vast areas of application, so could the use of the laser (hologram) lead to totally new determinations and experiences. Finally, the purposeful use of chemicals and drugs to control body temperature and body functions as well as to create artificial environments has barely started. Architects have to stop thinking in terms of buildings only.

Built and physical architecture, freed from the technological limitations of the past, will more intensely work with spatial qualities as well as with psychological ones. The process of “erection” will get a new meaning, spaces will more consciously have haptic, optic, and acoustic properties, and contain informational effects while directly expressing emotional needs.

A true architecture of our time will have to redefine itself and expand its means. Many areas outside traditional building will enter the realm of architecture, as architecture and “architects” will have to enter new fields.

All are architects. Everything is architecture.