

THE SITUATION AND TWO DESIGNS (REFLECTIONS)

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Abstract

Human being was not satisfied with the natural world of natural objects, therefore it created more and more artificial objects ordered in for him acceptable system. By and by the objects were connected with semantic contents: they became signs and – with the interpretation – formed complete three-unities. Having exploded the three-unities a confused situation took shape. The professional ‘object-makers’, so the architects too, have been attempting to find the right solution. They are the ones who intervene in the existing world of objects and ideas. This kind of activity requires humility and sense of responsibility. The architects’ behaviour and influence are of great importance. Designing and building are the last phases of their activity, only. Leaving out the previous phases, false objects are born. Extensive explanatory work and education are badly needed, too. The example of Kodály can or should inspire us. What I mean is shown by two designs.

Keywords: object, sign, semantic content, interpretation, architect, design, building

1. The Situation

*‘All the words have already deserted me
or I have become like an overflowed stream
so aimless, shoreless and undecided...’*

(M. Babits)
(Author’s translation)

‘Words and objects have already been irrecoverably separated. There are things which can be made comprehensible by words only and there are objects remaining silent forever. They do not give you a single word nor are you able to get nearer to them by words.’ (I. Janáky). Although objects are unable to start speaking, they have always been carrying messages after all. They make us steadily acquainted with their announcements from the very moment of their birth up to death. Despite their speechlessness they express themselves and let us know – unnoticed and refined, permeating into our subconscious – everything that wording has proved to be phraseologically unable, although in the course of time the semantic content of their message has (and can be) altered according to ‘the sense of hearing’ of different ages.

At the very beginning there were exclusively natural objects in a natural order, only. But human being was not satisfied with this natural world of natural objects. This is why man left no stone unturned creating more and more artificial objects by his intervention and ordering them in an acceptable way, at least for him. By and by the objects were connected with semantic contents: they became signs and – accompanied by the interpretation – formed complete three-unities.

The simple and peaceful – so to say intimate – coexistence broke into pieces, at first slowly, then more and more intensively, and finally exploded. By this time the distance between the basic elements of the three-unities has not only become larger and larger, but they have also fallen away to their fragments. At the same time, ‘there has been a claim for decades concerning the human objects of our age to discover their real forms being connected in a single organic order.’ (I. Janáky)

Professional ‘object-makers’, so the architects too, behave differently in the present situation. In the past centuries the architects, having felt and being conscious of the process of disintegration, attempted to go back to the signs and interpretations of previous ages (Greek, Roman, Renaissance, Classicist, Social Realist etc). They did it in their despair or perhaps nothing else came to their mind or acted under pressure. Both the selection and the definition of the means of expression were the privileges of an exclusive circle: it was a dictate. The result is well-known. It is not resumable.

In our time many of us – I am sorry to say ‘the conspicuous majority’ – pile up signs, senses and semantic contents not corresponding to each other. The random and incoherent pile is explained by subtle pseudo-science. The choir is extremely loud for the army of customers reinforces their parts. The natural order has been violated by their arbitrary individualism. Their architectural principles (=lack of principles?) are the slaves of certain artistic mannerisms and sanctimonious theatrical attitudes and they try to verify all of them with imaginary or real misled or unpolished public demand. Considering the final result you can catch many architects trapped in the view of this false romanticism of glorious eternity composed by material and form.

Others are obliged solely to practicability: manufacturing should be economical, products should be cheap, etc. decorated with some fashionable ornaments. Semantic content does not exist for them. In this course we reached the point when architecture – previously a work of art – has deteriorated into a branch of industry. Certain mystical semantic contents are declared by others as extremely important. They are inclined to think that ‘way-out’ can be found in the very deep layers of ancient times.

It is a significant fact that the builders of our age have found accomplices using the artificial materials of the last two centuries. In this sense reinforced concrete should be included here too. The limits of constructional possibilities were so greatly broadened out by the technical and technological development of the 19th and 20th centuries that the single elements and systems of the world of objects overgrew far beyond human reality. These possibilities encouraged a great many among the ‘object-makers’ to create deceptive objects with false meanings and misinterpretations. The situation is worsened by the very legacy of the historical

architecture which always suggested – led by the false illusion of the glorious material and formal eternity – some sort of heroism of the building itself. Cacophonous hurly-burly with a flourish of trumpets – here we are now concerning mass building.

In contradiction to the institutionalised endeavours of various social systems the phraseological demand of the self-identity, the independent mind, has always been active in human being: the spontaneous activity coded in genes, the internal pressure of the instinctive ‘object making’. In this sense, spontaneous and instinctive should not be confused with the accidental realisation of the craze of the moment. Not at all. Here and now the spontaneous and instinctive activity searches and investigates the accuracy of the mind, feeling and emotion and, furthermore, their meeting points. Like peasants built and remained anonymous, being high-minded and nobly humble. This spontaneous ‘object making’ (building) seems to be the determinative power of all object making arts in past ages. And the natural material: the ‘once lived’ materials are compatible to each other in every situation. And something else: the pleasure of creation. The object being brought into the world radiates the indefinable sense of pleasure and love which the creator possessed in the course of creation. Peasantry was the very layer which was not infected by the chaos originated from the disintegration of the three-unities (object–sign interpretation). The very layer which could remain immune in the storms of fashion-crazes and pseudo-theories. Peasants (the folk) felt the universality of ancient times instinctively and perhaps were aware of it: there is no reason of living when the forces of the three-unities are refused to act spontaneously, in compliance with their self-determination. In our civilised (?) world it is more and more difficult. There are fewer and fewer in the mental dictatorships of tastes, movements and fetishized beliefs who are capable and inclined to do so.

The interception between ‘professional’ and ‘amateur’ building has never been precluded, of course. While in earlier times professional architecture (‘great architecture’) had effects on folk (spontaneous) architecture (‘small architecture’), in the last century it could be observed that the tendency has turned back. Nowadays, architecture, both professional and spontaneous, has been falling prey to daily pragmatism in the deadly compression of politics, money, industry, media, ‘professionalism’, and it is impersonal.

Site, space, spatial structure, form and mass – building, blocks of houses, spaciousness, settlement...

The chosen point becomes a site, a microelement of the earth space transubstantiates: a site surrounded by a cover-space, mass, three-dimensional structure. The covering itself can be positive or negative. The very site where we live, work, curse, swear and pray, make love and die. The space where our life is accompanied by the army of mostly artificial objects. Responsibility is huge. Having chosen the point a course starts in which everything will always happen at the expense of the self-determination of the ancient, natural spatial and objective reality – and everything will be done in order to transform this point into a site. This is why the choice, the marking out, the participation in the course and at last, the phraseology and interpretation itself require humility and committed sense of responsibility.

In this case humility is not equal to subservience and servility. It means the

intention of learning the previously formed and existing objective and intellectual surroundings, furthermore, the intention of understanding, appreciating, acknowledging, then accepting or refusing its regularities. First of all, humility is the very way which leads us to the solution of the task: we may put it as the architect's creative ethic. In the situation formed previously, the fresh element of the world of objects, the building itself, can take its place with positive or negative attitude. It does not mean a qualitative valuation, of course, but it implies the acceptance or negation of the present signs, semantic contents and interpretations, or the appearance of newer ones.

Little by little we have reached the point where artificial objects – and in this way buildings, too – have already lost their self-identities, if they had it at all. At the very beginning of the 21st century, having left behind innumerable artistic movements searching ways and means and surrounded by confused and chaotic social structures, we hunger for sincerity, the straightforward declaration of truth, and for undertaking and phrasing self-identity. This is expected not only from people (friends, team mates, politicians, etc.), but, this kind of demand works in us concerning the world of objects with exactly the same intensity, too.

However, the architect's creativity is not limited to 'finding out' spaces and forms – and sad to say, in many cases with the obligation to apply predetermined and thought-out canons. Creation is the very case when the meeting points, mentioned above, are searched. The way is very long. The realisation – designing, building – is already the end of the course, the last stage.

Analysis, evaluation, acknowledgement, reception, taking up, wording, ordering: these are the desirable phases of the course preceding the designing and building themselves. These are the phases concerning both the existing natural and artificial, objective and intellectual surroundings and the inner and outer regulations of the new-born spaces and space-systems as regards the given commission. Then the right interpretation will be found: the proper composing and shaping way will appear adequately. In the same way as peasants built something – consciously or instinctively, with conscious instinctiveness or instinctive consciousness: to get mastery of the way of thinking, to know the why and the wherefore of the approaching of the task. I consider it the very thing with uppermost importance that has to be followed. The same kind of basic law as the Euklidian postulates are.

Vulgarly and simply: once building is anthropomorphic, it performs its mission. The measure should always be the human building. But all this is not enough after all: people ought to be taught how to sing – in the voice of the world of objects: it is in their interest to have concern with 'music'. At least the youth should do so. And it is hoped that the work will be continued by them. As it was done by Kodály regarding music.

Epilogue: *'Oh, I wish the Lord gave a bed
for the current of my stream
to find....*

...the ancient voice.'

(M. Babits)

2. Two Designs

2.1. *Exhibition Pavilion (1970)*

The competition was made to the recent Elizabeth square (then Engels square) where the National Saloon (Nemzeti Szalon) already destroyed stood before the World War II.

The square is one of the last green areas, spaciousness, in the city. A huge value. My opinion was: the square would be ruined if the mass and shape of the 'museum' building stood on the ground level.

The service and secondary premises and the service traffic were put under the ground as well as the outdoor park of sculptures and the rest park – an honour to the existing surroundings. But passing by you can cast a glance into it, so you have a visual contact from the street to make you wonder (Are there any intimate secrets inside?).

The two main functional elements – the exhibition pavilion itself and the artists' club – grow out of the sunk park with their cantilever shapes and concealed lights from underneath. From the street level you can feel it is a floating mass that draws your attention: you should enter!

You enter the institution through a staircase leading downstairs to the cross point lit by a small opeion – disengagement from the outside world, leading in and preparation. The exhibition rooms can be found on the right (outdoors and indoors), the artists' club on the left and over the way the cloakroom and the toilettes (it is impossible to lose your way).

The exhibition halls form a set of cantilever shapes hung up on a cylindrical core (the circular stairs) rising stepwise upwards. Going up you enter smaller and smaller rooms and finally from the top you get back to the starting point down the circular stairs: the staircase also forms part of the exhibition rooms. Why?

How do I see an exhibition? I enter the room and take a look round. My attention is drawn to one or two things, but I will not rush up to them. I walk round and look at and see everything more closely and in detail. Before leaving the room I turn back to memorise the ones that I liked. Then I go to the next room, etc. Finally, going down the circular stairs and peeping back through the small openings cut in the cylinder wall, I will look for the greatly loved objects. The intention was: to catalyse receptivity. Step by step I reached the higher regions of the mind and spirit then I arrived back to the reality of everyday life. But first, I shall have a coffee in the artists' club.

2.2. *Cemetery Chapel (1984)*

The funeral and sepulchral chapel was designed for a village near the river of Tisza. A roman catholic priest born in Mezőcsát intended to present with it his native village. Considering that the building contractor bent and welded the steel bars of

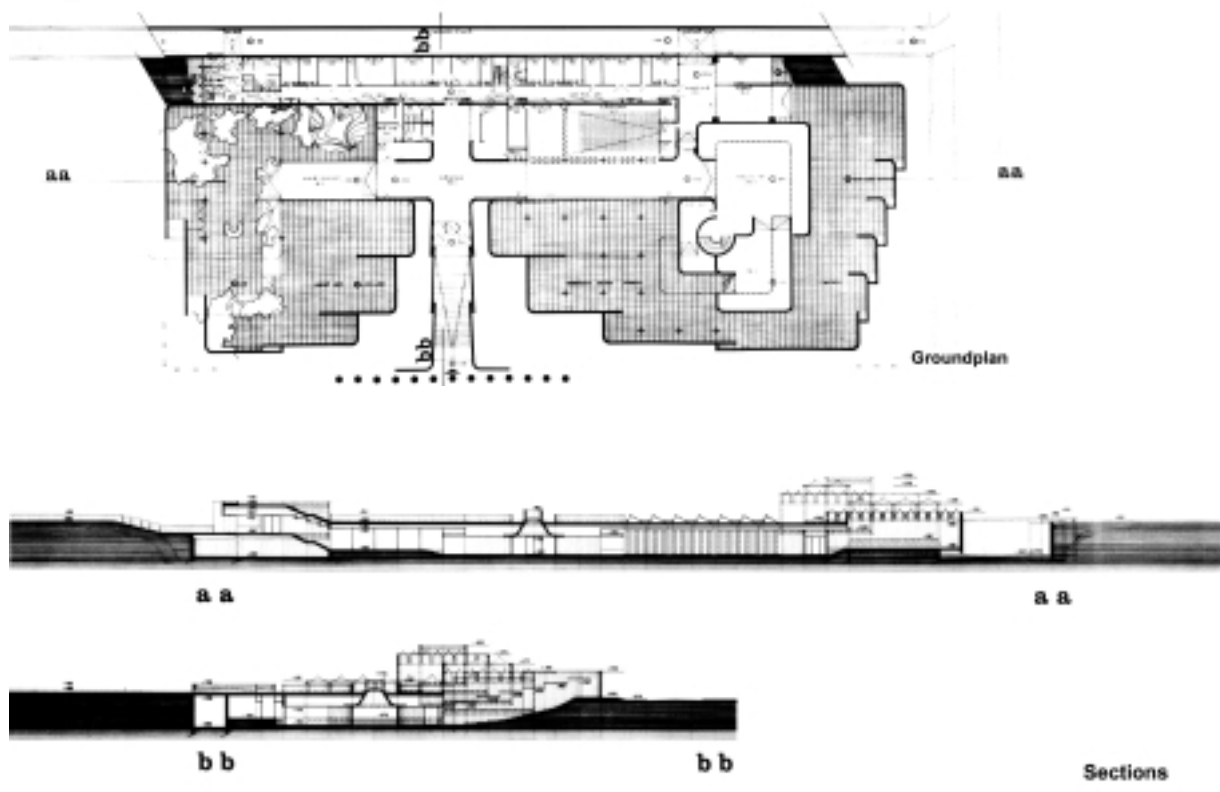


Fig. 1. Exhibition Pavilion (1970)

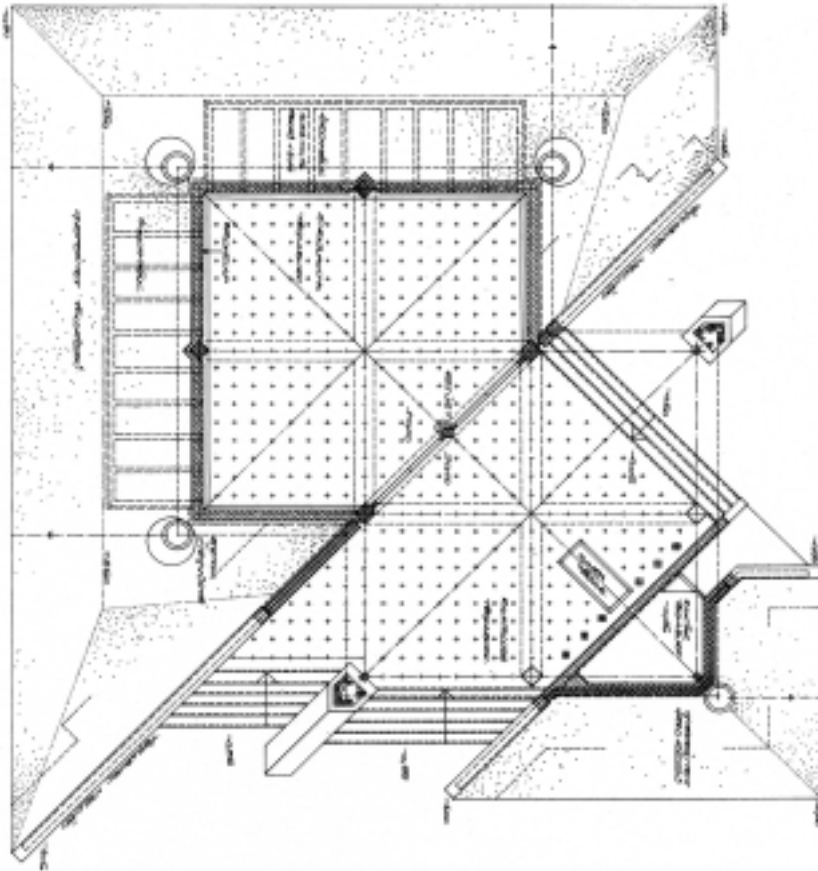


Fig. 2.

the reinforced concrete structures with gas flame, the construction works had to be stopped. Shortly afterwards the priest died. Finally the chapel was not erected.

Funeral and sepulchral chapel: the site where we meet the Lord, and the site where we take last leave of our loved people. The building consists of three basic functional parts: the chapel itself – a closed room, the mortuary – open, but roofed space, and the burial vaults – in the side-walls under the side-hill. In later times the burial vaults will provide coverage for the maintenance and reconstruction works.

Mezőcsát is a poor village where a lot of old peasant houses can be found even now. The logic of the architectural design is shown in the figures. In the course of meditation and design we attempted to dig down to the roots (couple roofed peasant house, Greek cross plan) and to transform the symbols took shape and developed previously (cross in a grave, crucifix, interpenetration of simple forms) into architectural motives.

Building materials and structures: natural brick-masonry, wood carpenter's

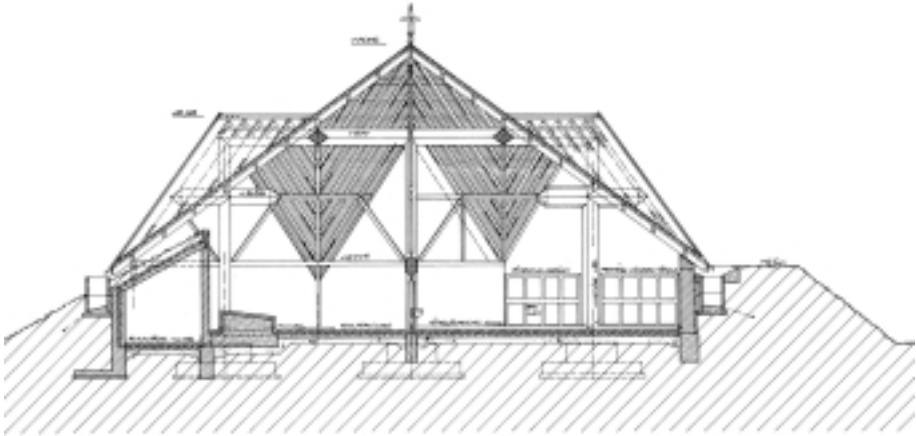


Fig. 3.

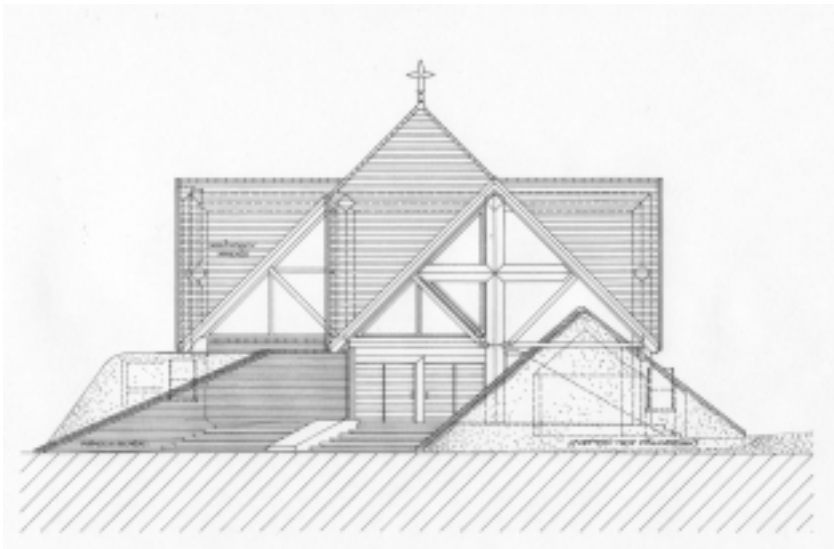


Fig. 4.

work, doors and windows, shingle roof. The framework structure is made of reinforced concrete columns and beams of quadratic section. They are turned away from the wall-face respectively the horizontal plane by 45 degrees: dissimilar form to the general (everyday) solution, more graceful shape effect, more sensitive cross motive both in the inner rooms and on the elevations.