RE_CONFIGURED REALITY

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| Abstract

One of the major issues of the capital of Macedonia, Skopje, nowadays has been the definition of the public space phenomenon and the recognition of the autopoietic discourse of new public buildings. We are facing the construction of "neoclassical" buildings as well as facade reconstructions of the existing buildings originating from the socialist era in Macedonia.

An assumption can be made that this change of the objective social reality derives from decade long political, territorial and cultural influence of neighbouring countries that has caused a disappearance of the national identity in the public space. This type of influence has contributed to the dominant presence of modern architecture in the city of Skopje.

The historical architectural elements that have been implemented in the construction of the new public buildings represent timeless fragments of past styles that do not exist any longer. The elements that have been taken and adapted lead to the possibility of their explicit relation to the language of the constructed buildings that has been reinterpreted in the new objective reality.

Analyzing the phenomenology of the new architectural form/space, we make an effort to establish a correlation between the signification and the meaning from recipient's point of view, who observes the world as a symbol where the distinction between reality and truth is by itself unreal.

A conclusion will be proposed that the neoclassical architecture in the city of Skopje is a media projection, an attempt to re-establish the long lost identity where the building has no need of ideological content of the national identification. It has

to represent a piece of work with incorporated historical meaning. The historical evolution of the terms mimesis and simulacrum will display that architecture in plural societies today is a medium of mass culture and populism.

The consequent analysis is expected to show that in the communication process the architectural work as a medium represents a symbol in which the conoted has an a priori meaning i.e. the architectural work hasn't got a phenomenon interaction with the recipient, it only means information instead.

The final considerations are expected to realize that the phenomenon transformation of the new architectural space/building of "Skopje 2014" Project does not have a dialectic relation with actual reality. Instead of representing the reality architectural work is a simulation rooted in history. It is immanent to the reproduction layers where one cannot find its beginning, not until the moment when the difference between the truth and the lie disappears.

| Keywords

autopoietic, objective reality, simulation, simulacrum, medium

When we speak of architecture in public spaces that is its social function the idea of the so called "antiquisation" of architectural opus in the Macedonian capital, the City of Skopje becomes more than clear. Why public space architecture is becoming the subject of massive construction and why making monuments of persons from the Macedonian revolutionary history?

Before going into the theoretical consideration of the new social-public space phenomenology, it is necessary to point out the reasons for its appearance.

The key premise of this case is that the architecture of the "Skopje 2014" Project has not drawn from the phenomenology of the architectural language of today, but from history, as media simulation on the path towards retro-utopia. In order to confirm this premise it is necessary to see the historical framework of the Macedonia's national identity as part of the global developments.

The architectural work as part of the material culture represents the basic element of recognising the national identity of a nation and it is expressed through its existence/ presence within the objective reality. It is evident that the phenomenological aspects of architecture will be recognised more in the area of communication that is architecture as the medium of mass culture and populism within the plural social structure.

We will try to show that the architecture of the neoclassical buildings in the city of Skopje represents a media projection with an attempt for re-establishing the desire for the Macedonian people identity that has been lost for decades. As a result the historical classical styles are applied in order to restore for the lost identity.

The final considerations should show that the architecture in the "Skopje 2014" Project is an attempt for re-creating the national identity, and not a subjective reflection of the author.

THE ARCHITECTURAL LANGUAGE ON THE TERRITORY OF MACEDONIA UNTIL ITS DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE!

The period of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the period of the national romanticism was crucial in expressing the national identity of the states in Europe and it brought many new architectural and theoretical characteristics. Macedonia at the time was still under the Ottoman power and apart from the struggle for confirming the national identity one cannot speak about any promotion of that identity in the material culture, architecture or art. Apart from expressing the national customs of the vernacular art as a more organised form, at that time the building crews ("tajfa')[1] operate around Macedonia and the region. While at the end of the 19th and the 20th century in Europe and in the neighbouring countries Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece the construction of buildings goes beyond the architectural styles of national romanticism, neoclassicism or neo-romanticism, Macedonia was still part of the Ottoman Empire. During that period the strong building activity of the imperial architecture of the Ottoman Empire on the territory of Macedonia is evident.

Macedonia territorially and politically was part of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenians until the end of the Second World War. In the period between the two world wars, in the 1930s, in Macedonia the social architecture was created by architects with already defined stylistic language that originated from other countries, mainly Russian or Czech emigrants or architects who moved to Macedonia.[2] The city residential architecture is the work of civil engineers whose style was reflection of the European architecture movements. Until 1938 in Skopje's central city area, where usually representative national architectural buildings were built, the architecture of the public buildings of Viljem Baumgartner, Vladimir Antonov and Velimir Gavrilovic emerges with some stylistic features of romanticism and architectural elements of the neo-Byzantium style.[3]

The main public buildings in the central city area of the City of Skopje were done by foreign architects.

The Russian emigrant and architect Viljem Baumgartner erected the Officers Club in a Serbian neo-Byzantium style in 1929. (Fig. 1-2)
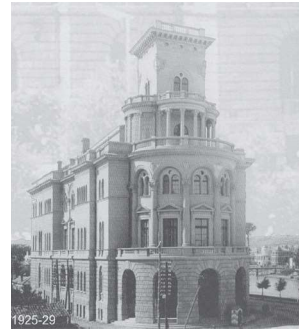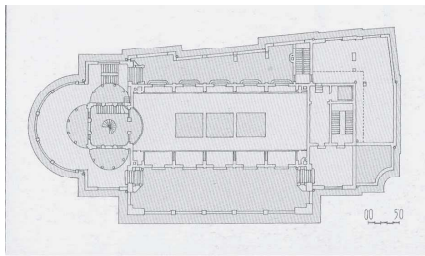

Figure 1-2. Viljem Baumgartner, Officers Club erected in 1925-29
(*Builders from Macedonia, 18-20 century*, Skopje: Tabernakul, 2001, 34).

The Belgrade architect Velimir N. Gavrilovic constructed the Skopje Railway Station in the late Serbian neo-Byzantium style in 1938. (Fig. 3-4)
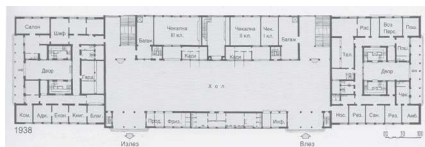

Figure 3-4. Velimir N. Gavrilovic, Railway station erected in 1938
(*1oo years of modern architecture: contribution of Macedonia and Yugoslavia, 1918-1990, book 3*, Skopje: Data Pons, 2006, 49).

The Belgrade architect Bogdan Nestorovic constructed the National Bank in 1927-33, and the Belgrade architect Milan Zlokovic constructed the Chamber of Commerce in 1933 next to the National Bank. In the corner pillar of the building of the National Bank that stretches as high as two stories we see the contemporary approach in shaping the building (Fig. 5-6-7).
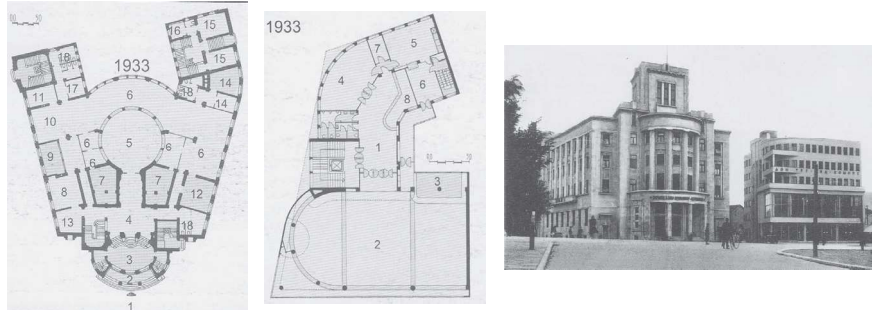
Figure 5-6-7. Bogdan Nestorovic, National Bank erected in 1927-33;
Milan Zlokovic, Chamber of Commerce built in 1933
(*ibid.*, 50).

The Czech architect Viktor Hudac constructed the building of the Vardar Ban's Regional Office in 1938. It had simpler geometrism in the decorative facade elements, a kind of academism. (Fig. 8-9)

Figure 8-9. Vikotor J. Hudac, Vardar Ban's Regional Office erected in 1938
(*Builders from Macedonia, 18-20 century*, Skopje: Tabernakul, 2001, 55).

The penetration of modern architecture in Macedonia is evident from the building of Drago Ibler and his District Social Insurance Office constructed in 1928-34. In the period after the Second World War Macedonia was a republic within Federal Yugoslavia and part of the so-called architectural scene of the socialist era. After the catastrophic earthquake in Skopje in 1963 the architectural expression of the contemporary Yugoslav scene still existed.

From the previously presented short overview of the key style and social-political situation in the Macedonian history one can conclude that the architectural work in the period from the late 19th century until the beginning of the 20th century, apart from the church or residential urban architecture, there were no more significant architectural and urban building activities of national public importance. During

the same period in the surrounding countries within the framework of the national romanticism an eclectic architecture of neo-Byzantium style emerges in Serbia or secessionism and romanticism develope in Croatia and Slovenia.[4]

NATIONAL ROMANTICISM-FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF ITALY BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS

One of the forms of national romanticism apart from architecture is also militarisation that we recognise in Fascism movement in Germany and Italy in the first half of the 20th century. This national and socially cultural direction at the end of the 19th century, before the beginning of modern society in Europe and here, is expressed in the architectural language of various baroque and neoclassical stylistic elements. In the case of Italy, the need to express the national cultural heritage is directly linked to the epochal achievements of the Roman Empire. The penetration of the historical architectural elements in the formal mannerism can be recognised in the construction of the new public buildings. This historical approach is also evident in the Italian rationalism of the architects Giovanni Muzio and Giuseppe Terragni from 1919-23.[5] The architectural ideology of Giuseppe Terragni is closely linked to the metaphysical experience of the early age, especially with historical elements of the metaphysical art of painting. In the works of Giovanni Muzio and Giuseppe Terragni we recognise the idea of a city built in fragments that are interrelated, following the neoclassical order, in the case of Giovanni Muzio and the classical order in the case of Giuseppe Terragni. The rules of shaping grammar and elements that they adopted and adapted represent timeless fragments from past styles that no longer existed.[6] The architectural elements or the shaping procedures are explicitly linked to the language that could be brought back once again in the objective reality by using a different syntax code. The architect applies rules of lining up the elements in a whole in order to get a new coherent wholeness. (Fig. 10-11)
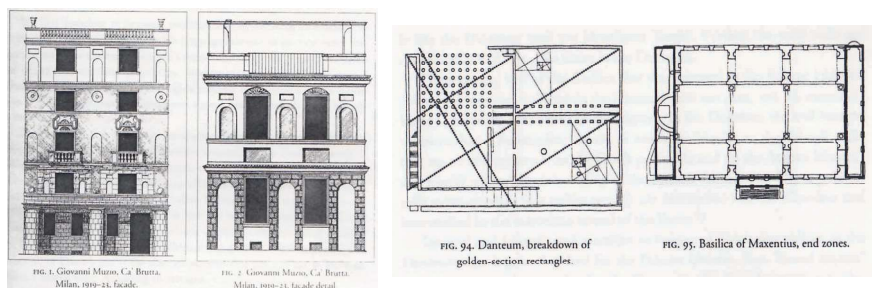

FIG. 1. Giovani Muzio, Ca' Brutta. Milan, 1919-23, façade.

FIG. 2 Giovani Muzio, Ca' Brutta. Milan, 1919-23, façade detail

FIG. 94. Danteum, breakdown of golden-section rectangles.

FIG. 95. Basilica of Maxentius, end zones.

Figure 10-11. Giovani Muzio, Façade built in 1919-23; Giuseppe Terragni, Danteum built in 1938-40 (*The Danteum: Architecture, Poetics, and Politics under Italian Fascism*, Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1985, 23).

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE "SKOPJE 2014" PROJECT – THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF RE-CREATING THE IDENTITY

In the case of the "Skopje 2014" Project the eclectic architecture of the national romanticism expressed through the architectural language of the public buildings, gets its motifs from the ancient periods on the territory of Macedonia. During that historical period Macedonia stretched beyond its territory of today, much farther on the conquered territories of Egypt to the south and as far as India to the east. For the Macedonian people that period in the history represents the era in which Macedonia achieved enormous military and territorial success. The military commander Alexander the Great, who led the ancient Macedonian armies today is proudly called the Warrior on a Horse (Fig. 12).

Figure 12. Zarko Basheski, *Alexandar*, 2010, Source: http://zarkobaseski.net.

Today, in the pluralistic social system, the Macedonians through the language of architecture need to establish the lost cultural identity that has not been exercised for centuries. This position is declared according to the current ruling structure, and implemented through state and cultural institutions. Most of the population in the Republic of Macedonia also support the stylistic definition of the project. Certain theoretical and art critics, supporters of the project, elaborate that it is a belated realisation of national romanticism that Europe outlived at the beginning of the 20th century.

THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE "SKOPJE 2014" PROJECT

Every culture has its own particular way of developing the rules and the forms of the cultural tangible heritage. They depend on the past and on the tradition, but also often on the cultural relations and communication with other cultures. Since every society goes through its own process of development, it also creates its own methods of visual representation of tangible culture.[7] At this moment the Republic of Macedonia is going through a period of national re-identification, where the

code of semantic representation is referenced based on the cultural concept of the classical period on the territory of Macedonia. Within that process of auto-referencing, in the history of architectural representativeness we can recognise numerous paradigms and the most important one for us is whether the architectural work is under the influence of the cultural and communicational concept. In regard to the current paradigm for us the question is: how to express the national identity of a nation through a work of architecture? Throughout history there have been numerous concepts to achieve that, evident from various examples around the world and here. In the case of the "Skopje 2014" Project there is a massive construction of public buildings in the central city area with stylistic features of the ancient Greek elements, reflecting the classical European architecture. Analysing the phenomenology of the new architectural form / space, we have been trying to establish a correlation between the signification and the meaning. Due to the application of the classical style elements in the "Skopje 2014" Project, the architecture is analysed from the point of view of a man who has been observing the world as a symbol where the distinction between reality and truth is in itself unreal.[8] Using the linguistic paradigm from the aspect of the architectural language as a medium for communication we will try show that the building has no need of possessing new ideological content of national identification, but it represents a piece of work in which the historical meaning exists from the very beginning.

ARCHITECTURE AS COMMUNICATION MEDIUM – Umberto Eco

When we talk about the architectural symbol in the process of communication, the denoted meaning of an element, which is its function in the process of communication, may connote also various ideological concepts. (Fig. 13).
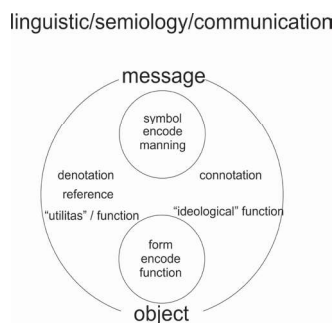

Figure 13. diagram by the author, *Semiology circle*, 2015.

From the aspect of communication the item that is used is the symbol of the correct and by convention denoted meaning that represents its function. For example the notion of a building denotes housing i.e. the architectural form denotes a housing type/typology. But when we look, for instance, at a religious building, a church, we usually do not think about its function because we already know its meaning. What we notice apart from the building's typology is the type of spatial organisation, the type of constructive elements or the stylistic language, elements that have connotative ideological meaning. In this sense Umberto Eco underlines:

[...] However when we look at a window on a facade we often do not think about its function, we think about the meaning of the 'window' that is based on its function, but because its function has been so well absorbed in it, we start observing it in relation to the other windows. But the shape of the windows, their number and arrangement do not denote only function, but they also point at certain concepts, to the way the function is used. The arrangement of the windows denotes a global ideology.[9]

The architect applies this global ideology as a recognisable way of shaping in a given period of time.

The curved Roman arch and the broken Gothic arch have a function of a bearing element that is both denoted and connoted by various concepts of that function. In that way these architectural elements apart from the primary constructive meaning also get symbolic and secondary symbolic function, such as establishing the historical period, the religiousness, etc.[10]

In the modern architecture which is rich with many innovative models and prototypes there is a new aspect of an architectural form, and that is "lack of knowledge" that a certain form refers to a certain function. The well-known paradigm of modern architecture that the form follows the function imposes too big domination of the denotative functions on the connotative symbolic meanings where the form could remain secretive if the process of encoding is not known. Due to the too great domination of the function in relation to the symbolic meaning of the architectural form it becomes abstract and recognisable for a small number of individuals.[11] One can assume that going back to the historical styles with the appearance of the post-structural theories is exactly because of the aspect of losing the semantic connotative meaning of the modern architectural form.

When we speak of the semantic meaning of the architectural object, it may denote a certain function but also to connote a certain ideology. And it is hard to say whether its connotative and symbolic "function" is less functional than its first one.

When looking at the reasons for going back to the classical architectural elements in the buildings that are part of the "Skopje 2014" Project one realises that in the system of communication the connotative symbolic meanings become more important than the denotative functional and typo-morphological features of the buildings. In the social reality the "symbolic" connotations of the items are not less "useful" than their "functional" denotations. The symbolic connotations are understood as functional because they enable social application of the architectural object that is not directly identified with the "function". It is clear that the function of a crown, a throne or an evening suit is "symbolic", and thanks to the complex conventions that it connotes the social relations and meanings are possible.

Umberto Eco points out:

[...] The notion of the symbolic function transfers the features of an object because in the social life the "symbolic" connotation of the object is not less useful than the functional "utilitas" denotations. It is necessary to clarify that the symbolic connotations are understood as functional because they communicate "a possibility" for social use of the object that is not directly identified with the function in a verbatim sense.[12]

Every society goes through its own process of development and in doing so it creates its own methods of visual representation of the tangible culture. The semantic representation is under the influence of the cultural concept. It is necessary to establish a memorandum in regard to the important semantic criterion when shaping the plural society.[13] In this sense Umberto Eco underlines:

[...] Architecture as a system of communication in a certain cultural environment does not establish the symbol semiologically, based on real objects (denotations) that would really confirm it, but on encoded meaning that a certain cultural context prescribes to the symbol.[14]

When entering into polemics about the gothic broken arch that Umberto Eco elaborates on, whether it is the bearing constructive element or it is the revetments that are the bearing constructive elements, nobody questions its denotative function of a bearing beam. The polemics refers more to the reference of the denotation that is whether there is a denoted function. However, in the process of communication remains the information that the gothic broken arch communicates a function, but it does not enable it. Hence, the historians and the critics of the middle ages conclude that the communication code of the gothic architecture has symbolic value i.e. the construction of the gothic cathedrals bear symbols of a message that connotes complex secondary functions. One can conclude that the same symbol in regard to different sub-codes throughout the centuries may connote different meanings. In the 19th century we witnessed a code-artistic style, a way of shapping, which

irrespective of the connotation of its individual manifestations in the message, connoted certain ideology. At the time identifications were established: "gothic style – religiousness"[15].

The previous considerations point at the fact that the reference to the architectural language used in the messages communicated in the "Skopje 2014" Project are located in the ancient history of Macedonia and its material cultural heritage. In regard to the semantic representation of the ancient style forms their role is to decode the reference where in the process of communication it is necessary to communicate the message that the Macedonian people throughout history has not been only in the current position of being denied its identity and statehood, but there were periods during which Macedonia achieved significant military success and territorial advancing.

ARCHITECTURE AS A MEDIUM IN PLURAL SOCIETIES, BETWEEN REALITY AND TRUTH

In the final considerations we will try to establish a correlation between the information/message and the sense/meaning of classical architectural styles used for the public buildings built in the central city area of Skopje at the present time of the plural Macedonian society.

In the process of communication the medium represents instrumentalisation of the information that on the other hand has nothing in common with the meaning it transfers. The media information should not be encompassed by some kind of a system of real values, but by intentions. In the pluralistic social systems, the media information is established as a code of its own that imposes itself as the real (true) meaning. Instead of transferring the sense/meaning, the communication through the information is exhausted with staging the sense.[16] Hence, if we observe the classical architectural language as a medium of the newly erected buildings, it becomes the staging of the sense that is its simulation. Communication introduces the architecture in the process of simulation. Hence, the difference between the architectural medium and the reality means inability for any kind of mediation or the architectural language becomes a possibility for free interpretation of the plural social discourse. (Fig. 14)

We can see that the social, political and cultural developments in the Republic of Macedonia until the day of its declaration of independence on 8 September 1991, deprived it from the possibility for its timely realisation at the time of the national romanticism. Hence, it is very logical that today, at the time of the post-structuralist theories, when the national identity is being denied, a new attempt emerges for outliving the national romanticism expressed through the classical architecture of public buildings. The architecture of the "Skopje 2014" Project has no intention of

reconstructing the historical epistemology of the classical architecture in regard to the rules of the composition.[17] The project intends through the classical language of architecture as a cultural media product to communicate the message about the existence of the social identity of the Macedonian people. Every formal analysis would be descriptive unless the social norms that give purpose and meaning to the architecture of the "Skopje 2014" Project are taken into consideration.

Figure 14. Neoclasical facade, *Government of Republic of Macedonia*,
Source: http://m.analitika.mk

The architecture as a cultural product is exposed like no other art to what is called publicly or socially influenced work of art.[18] Apart from the semiological system denotation, connotation, auto-referential poetics (auto-poetics) and code, the architecture represents both ideology, and in the case of the "Skopje 2014" Project, it is a reaction to the many centuries long position of the Macedonians and their identity. The reference of the semantic code is a simulacrum of the classical architecture that no longer exists, but it used to be true. The new buildings through the language of classical architecture represent a simulacrum that originates from the very term "classici" that connotes the highest hierarchical rank in the social order of the classical period.[19] It is sufficient to understand the desire and to accept the truth of the "Skopje 2014" Project because in this period of non-linear time the desire disappears just when you get to it.

NOTES

1 Georgi Konstantinovski, *Builders from Macedonia, 18-20 century* (Skopje: Tabernakul, 2001), 11.

2 Mihail Tokarev, *1oo years of modern architecture: contribution of Macedonia and Yugoslavia, 1918-1990, book 3* (Skopje: Data Pons, 2006), 47.

3 Ibid., 48.

4 Ibid., 49.

5 See: Thomas L. Schumacher, *The Danteum: Architecture, Poetics, and Politics under Italian Fascism* (Princeton: Triangle Architectural Publisher, 1985).

6 Ibid., 22.

7 Ernst Gombrich, *Umetnost i Iluzija: Psihologija Slikovnog Predstavljanja* (Beograd: Nolit, 1984).

8 Ibid.

9 Umberto Eko, *Kultura, Informacija, Komunikacija* (Beograd: Nolit, 1973), 219.

10 Ibid., 220.

11 Kathleen James-Chakraborty, *German Architecture for a Mass Audience* (London: Routledge, 2000), 17.

"Empathy and abstraction, on the other hand, offered architects and their patrons

a path to extend their horizons beyond this narrow audience centered on the

architectural profession and the social class to which it belonged. According to

these theories, even the lower middle- and working-class audiences were now

within reach."

12 Umberto Eko, *Kultura, Informacija, Komunikacija* (Beograd: Nolit, 1973), 222.

13 Ernst Gombrich, *Umetnost i Iluzija: Psihologija Slikovnog Predstavljanja* (Beograd: Nolit, 1984).

14 Umberto Eko, *Kultura, Informacija, Komunikacija* (Beograd: Nolit, 1973), 216.

15 Ibid., 226-227

16 Žan Bodrijar, *Simulakrumi i Simulacija* (Novi Sad: Svetovi, 1991), 83,84.

17 Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre, *Classical Architecture: The Poetics of Order* (London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1986), 4.

18 Nikolaj Hartman, *Estetika* (Beolgrad: Dereta, 2004), 258-260.

19 Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre, *Classical Architecture: The Poetics of Order* (London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1986), 2.

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