

Zaha M. Hadid

Milestones in the history of architecture are often dwarfish buildings. Not great symphonies of cathedrals and palaces, but chamber musical forms of buildings have enlightened the history of ideas. That what once was the tomb of Theodoric of Ravenna for Italian Futurists, the Japanese Katsura-Pavilion for the premodern period or the Einstein Tower in Potsdam for expressionism, a minute new building in Weil am Rhein could now become for the stagnate building avant-garde towards the end of the 20th century .

Even though it is merely the fire brigade station :of a furniture factory in Baden, its creator Zaha M. Hadid at her first attempt realised her demartding, almost daring architectural concept. Since then the time of making fim of the "Paper Tiger", who thus far had only created furniture , interior decorations and fantasy pictures for gallerists, has been over.

Zaha Hadid is the most rigourous representative of a new spirit in architecture which turns against the late and postmodern period as well as against high-tech and high-touch. The motive of this architecture is not the rediscovery of history or the strive for new modesty, neither historical dead cult nor puristic transmigration of souls, moreover, it is the establishment of an own, imitation free and non-compromising contemporary language of forms.

Whether this development of the spirit is to be called "new spirit" or "deconstructivism" is not even clear among the representatives themselves. Thus the critic must also approach such phenomena with care.

Whoever visits Zaha Hadid at her London office and takes a look at her library will encounter a great amount of pioneer literature: Malewitsch, Leonidov, Wesnin, El Lissitzky, Melnikov - the entire suprematism and constructivism of the Russian revolutionary architecture of the 20ies. These explosive drafts of the world were all interrupted experiments, which finally have to be carried out today after half a century .

That what El Lissitzky had created with his studies of space and bodies, the so called "Prouns" or that what Malewitsch had created with his "Architecton" models, was nothing more than the last great "style" in the history of architecture - "style" in the sense of a mutual way of feeling, a mood of the radical hope towards a new start and belief in the future, which sought its unmistakable aesthetic expression in exciting new building ideas and spatial representations. The Russian constructivists created pictures and sculptures as preliminary architectural studies which tried to artistically grasp the technical revolution at the change of the century. Their drawings show imaginary landscapes of the moon and planet systems as visual contrasts to experiences, which are beyond perception: electric voltage, magnetic fields of force, radiation energy and motion.

Such rudiments of technical life were still interesting enough at the beginning of this century that artists wanted to study them. Thus in 1910 Kandinsky was enthusiastic about the "theory of the electrons, that is, moving electricity"; by means of which science could "shake the columns erected by man and question the matter on which everything was still based on yesterday and by which the universe was supported". The price of this curiosity was the total abstraction of these building and picture studies. The newly discovered phenomenon of kinetic energy could only be visualised in totally hypothetical drafts. Long before the first nuclear fission, the Russians, substitutively, let geometric bodies explode on drawing paper.

Zaha Hadid also possessed this longing for the imulated big bang. She said, you only had to grab the things at their core and they would then explode by themselves. Her early drafts look like collisions and explosions of aircraft in a pitch dark universe. The reason for this daring grasp for the stars had been given by the suprematist Kasimir Malewitsch when he wrote: "We can only feel space, if we get away from earth, if the basis disappears."

Architecture without basis was thus far only to be seen on paper. Zaha Hadid's houses cannot fly either, but they come very close to a spatial experience which is in maximum tension and motion.

Since the opening of the fire brigade station in Weil am Rhein numerous people have visited this small, radical manifestation of architecture. Whoever approaches the two storey wing building makes a similar experience as in Hitchcock's opening scene of "Vertigo" in which the main actor, James Stewart, seems to be frozen in free fall due to a backwards moving and at the same time forwards zooming camera. The building opens up with each step and withdraws at the same time. There are no optical points of fixation, which sort the dramatical penetration and three dimensional overlappings.

Pointed as a needle, a thirty meter high self-contained roof sticks out, under which the work rooms unfold in a radial way. These neither render a concluded interior volume nor a flush exterior, but look as if they were peeled out of the motionless space of the Euclidean geometry with a knife. Each of the surfaces in motion simultaneously reveals a rising and bent, convex and falling bundle of movements. The object centred central perspective no longer exists; the space has its own life.

The architecture of Zaha Hadid resembles a solidified building mobile. She operates with such stringent and precise displacements that the usual dispersal randomness and mikado aesthetics of other deconstructive architectures may be neglected. It no longer is a poetic disorder as in Schwitters' Merzbau or in Scharoun's grotto architecture, no longer an aggravating mixture of free nature form and strict art form. Hadid's architecture is neither an organic expressive coincidence nor a mathematic sophistry, but cold and at the same time crackling, loaded architecture from a furious intellectual incendiary.

The architect does not reveal that what she saw when studying her object, moreover, that what she knows about it. She receives her ideas from the same abstraction energies as the Chinese painters of the Middle Ages did, who made landscapes seen from the bird 's-eye view with two alignment points to endless lands, or as the constructivists and cubic-futurist'i, who bring their volu mes without any perspective limitations into relationship by means of multiple dimensions .

Whoever takes a look at Zaha Hadid's draft drawings, will not see any construction drawings, but moreover scripts which do not show completed buildings, but dramatic scenes in space. In contrast to the dispersing and mikado aesthetics of many contemporary young architects Zaha Hadid does not want to develop excitement at a,ny price. The grotesquely deformed building is not of major importance, but emptiness and openness between the fragments. Space, which can in no way be seen and grasped, is the true luxury in which Zaha Hadid is indulged. Where other architects fight expensive battles with various materials and surpass each other with lavish ornaments, she seeks the spatial luxury of pure emptiness.

In this basic motive of the Modern, lifting boundaries and bringing dynamics into the space, Zaha Hadid is very closely related to her great idol Mies van der Rohe, who at the beginning strongly oriented himself on the transparent space compositions of the Russian suprematists and their longing for infinity. However, the form of Zaha Hadid's drafts is more basic and at the same time more aesthetic than that of the Modern . Disintegration, liberation, transparence and finally sanitary aesthetics - her architecture no longer wants to have anything to do with any of these fundamentals of the heroic Modern. For this modern prophecy could so easily be used to the advantage of the wear industry and administrative suitability and has become as affirmative today as governmental propaganda art. Therefore it is amazing in which way Zaha Hadid has found the same abstraction energies before her industrial Fall. She goes back into the utilization of former great architectural fantasies and distils never visualised astral bodies out of them . In their filigreeing and at the same time monumental silentness they convey a large degree of sensual excitement.

Her architecture releases novel architectural energies for statements. She shows why the art of building can neither be content with the provision of decorated boxes nor with the vulgar modern incantation of the purity of "space" and "light". She creates something like an inspiring built-up emptiness as a spiritual projection surface, a shiny whetstone to sharpen the senses. .Her architecture possesses a striking beauty and conveys an invincible optimism which is necessary in order to be able to cope with the trist but at the same time great perspectives of today 's risk society. Zaha Hadid is far from glorifying technology and progress of the early modernists. Her architecture is the symbol of a urban society which has become unstable, but which is self confident and which no longer wants to be stuck into building cells.

Zaha Hadid also needs optimism in an everyday sense. Her first large city building project, the "Neue Zollhof" in Düsseldorf has been taken away from her after four and a half years of

preparation . The investor, the "Kultur- und Medienzentrum Rheinhafen GmbH" , gave up the project, for which the plans had been worked out to the point of approval, shortly before the beginning of construction work - for economic reason as is said, although they had already invested ten million marks in preliminary planning. Instead of to Zaha Hadid they awarded the Californian Frank Gehry with the contract who as a specialist for wishes of the building sponsor and for cheap buildings is to build the "Neue Zollhof" for eighty million marks instead of the esteemed one hundred million marks.

The project was to be part of necessary city repair work in Düsseldorf in order to again connect the old town with the Rhine. Beside the Lan9tag (governmental building) of North Rhine Westphalia and the new WDR broadcasting studios the so called "Meile der Kreativen" (mile of those who are creative) is being developed: numerous new television, radio, fashion, design and artist studios which are to render cultural glimmer to the employee scene of Düsseldorf . The project of Zaha Hadid was planned to be the heart and would have created a basic new definition of an office building and a transformation of the usual desk workplace. It had planned a bundle of rays of "finger formed buildings" with dramatic open space alignments and a mixed building programme from Kindergartens to cinemas, which wanted to place a novel concept of the living and working world against the monoculture of today 's business buildings.

The Erich Schelling prize for architecture for Zaha Hadid would like to appreciate this failed draft and notionally render it a place as a strong "argument" , as an unrealized "hypothesis" in the discourse of contemporary architecture. The history of architecture in this century only lives to a minor degree from carried out drafts. More decisive for the history of ideas are all of the failed master drafts starting with Mies van der Rohe's glass high rise in the Friedrich Street in Berlin via Le Corbusier's and Pierre Jeanneret's Völkerbundpalast in Geneva to Axel Schulte's German historical museum in Berlin.

But fortunately the awarding of this prize is not a symbolic memorial address, not a mere posthumous honouring of a building idea. For as a sign of equalising justice , Zaha Hadid was able to celebrate her thus far greatest success shortly after the failure of her project in Düsseldorf. She won the building tender for the opera in Cardiff, the capitol of Wales. Therefore we may still hope that the milestones of modern architecture will not only be reflected in the imaginary sky of theories or in the chamber music of the small building form of a fire brigade station, but that they will finally be realised on a large scale of the building symphony of an opera house.

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