

P5 Reflection

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A matter of scale Methods of Analysis and Imagination

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The story of Tallinn

Tallinn is the capital city of Estonia, located near the Baltic Sea. During the excursion, the first impression of the city is its hybrid urban fabric, where buildings and traces of different historical periods are adjacent to each other, creating chaotic but amazing scenery. This phenomenon can be traced back to the six turbulent periods in the 20th century, from tsarist Russia to a short period of independence, then to soviet occupation, to nazi german occupation, to USSR member, and finally as a sovereign country. We can see what these stages mean to the country through the perspective of monuments. The most commonly seen themes of the monuments are against Soviet union and celebration of independence. This brought my interest in monumentality.

According to some journals, the core identity of Estonia is established based on the opposition towards the outsider to union the insiders, which is directional, timely, and weak. It creates a sense of sundering when different groups of people feel differently facing the same monument; two monuments representing contradictory stances are arranged adjacent to each other; and radical attitudes towards what they used to believe.

But, at some moment when I looked back on the summaries. I started to doubt myself: when I looked at their history, I claimed that this was wrong and that was partial. It is because I have naturally my stance behind it. When I criticized about their monuments and ways of building identity, I was holding my political background and subjective views. Do I really have the right to say so?

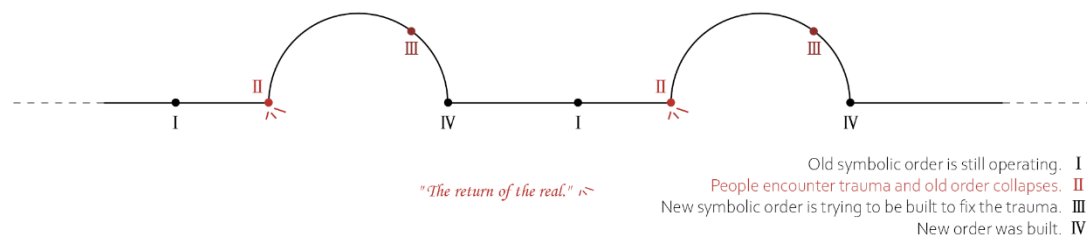
New monumentality

I think what I disagree with is the way that they bind the national identity, therefore monumentality, with politics too tightly, where hate is made, stigmatization is happening, and contradictories continue even Soviet Union no longer exists. Perhaps, if we want a non-political perspective, we cannot find answers through political means. So, I decided to step back and re-focus on the city itself again. And this time, based on all the research that I have done, I found a new perspective to read monumentality in the city.

The opposition towards the Soviet Union does not only written in monuments, but also in the concepts of the city. Different from soviet architecture, in Estonia, people are influenced by

the naturalism ideas from Northern Europe. They have a looser layout, more landscape design, and organic shapes of decoration on the pure concrete facades. Through these ways, history can be read. The political stance is translated into forms where the city is the archive, recording all these documents implicitly. Monumentality is rooted in everyday life.

Hal Foster defined a process of the old order collapsing and the new order being built. Through these kinds of iterations, civilization is written, history proceeds, and monumentality emerges in people's responses.



People's responses toward a finished iteration become monuments. And people's response during the specific iteration becomes the translation, as an implicit record in the city archive, which is a more modest, neutral, and mild way to memorize Tallinn. Therefore, I hope to make a renovation project trying to let people get closer to the heritage, to read the city and history through a new non-political perspective, and to create a communal place for all people to enjoy.

Research choice

The research topic above is firstly developed in (AR1A066) Delft Lectures on Architectural History and Theory. At that time, the study was more theoretical I dealt with the topic monumentality, checked some philosophy theories, and tried to use those theories to analyse the district Spaardammerbuurt in Amsterdam. In this project, the hybrid urban fabric of Tallinn reminded me of the research and I decided to continue.

It was an amazing experience to carried out a constant study through different projects. Trying to translate philosophy theories into a practical building was hard. I was thinking about the narrative of the whole logic until the last day before P5. Fortunately, the result is promising.

Project introduction

The project is located in the old radio complex (Raadiomaja) as an extension. The main functions comprise recording rooms, an archive, and a multifunctional hall. The main configuration translates the materiality of the existing site, using limestone for working functions, glass for leisure functions, and a cassette ceiling sheltering the threshold area. The key design focus is on the cassette ceiling, which is a device carrying multiple climate strategies and beautiful aesthetic effects. There are careful considerations about the beauty of space: order, proportion, and materiality, providing a new sight to enrich the architectural environment in the city. (More details in the presentation slides)

Personal reflection

As is mentioned in the research choice, I am glad to continue the interdisciplinary research that I am curious about. Apart from that, I also learned a lot in disciplinary study. I feel like I have just touched the edge of the discipline and there are still many things to be investigated. It is a huge progress by realizing it, because in the past, what I had taken for granted about “how to design architecture” were regulations of the faculty in architecture study (a highly effective, sustainable, practical building that should be present in a set of sequenced drawings). These dogmas are important, but also bold and rigid which in many cases result in similar projects. While detailing the space after P2, I tried different scales to interpret the same space, controlled the quantity of information on different scales of drawings, and focused on disciplinary study in proportion and self-imposed rules for spatial organization, which I claimed I am weak at and consequently neglected before. I learned to make things correct, but also to seek beauty, which opens the perspective to look at projects and look at the surrounding world.

I also have changed some of my habits at work. In the former projects, my workflow was always single-task and I would not start a new topic until one is fundamentally solved. In these months, simultaneous works on different scales, balanced consideration of structure and space, and the “collect and hunt” process – doing analysis and making decisions alternatingly trained me to deal with richer and more complex information, balancing details and the big picture.

My main tutor Jorge has a self-consistent pedagogical system that is new to me. Initially, I could not get what he meant or wondered if those methods of study able to be applied in my case. I did struggle for a long time before P2 to think about how to make sure my research about monumentality can be successfully transformed into a practical project. However, I am glad to look back on the past few months to say that after the training and all the struggles, I have a stronger capacity to adapt to the new workflow and new work methods: quick decisions and “collect and hunt” (P2), 5 form, 5 scale, 10 heuristics at the same time (P3), and the character that represents one's own intention through design. There are still some topics that I am still considering / not sure about the answer. But I believe that holding them in mind and reflecting on them from time to time would help me to finally establish my own principles of aesthetics in the discipline.

As a summary project for the two years, this extension project is successful in terms of my progress in skills and horizon, and new trials on different methods of study. I like it also because it records my trials in breaking the existing recognition/comfort zone and my bravery to touch the unknown. I would always benefit from it.