

ONCE AGAIN ON MEMORISM...#

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In 1993, Gyula Hajnóczy added supplementary thoughts to Lajos Fülep's earlier interpretation of Memorism, according to which the mentioned concept would also apply to the history of architecture, similarly to other branches of art. He perceived a remembering-like continuity in architecture, starting from ancient times, through the Renaissance, to the present day. He formulated three topics that generate a theoretical problem, thus require further investigation. According to him, the form-based approach shows the otherness of the Middle Ages. And after the age of historicism, he perceived a kind of "agonization" with negative content. His third conjecture was the transcendence being inherent in architecture and unfolding in history.

The line of thought, originating from nearly thirty years ago, may come into new light if the history of architecture is approached not exclusively from the direction of the history of forms. If not the differences but continuity gets into the focus, and all this is extended to the problems of the present and the future. Of course, all the above issues can only be interpreted with further contemplation.

Keywords: Gyula Hajnóczy, Memorism, medioevo, transcendence

In the process of architectural changes on a historical scale, marked modifications can be detected that appear to be fractures or breaks. These are generally considered to be the turning points in the history of architecture, forming separately interpretable epochs. They can even be called styles. These events are attempted to be explained by the recognition and interpretation of differences. Thus, the different properties will be exemplary, and we will be happy to refer to them later.

This act of interpretation comes from the natural, explanatory need of the thinking man. After all, humans find the meaning and purpose of their thousand-year-long existence in positive changes. There is a need for a definite, but simply worded, forward-looking pointer or landmark (to articulate encouraging development) to maintain self-confidence.

As a result, new conceptual systems typical of each experienced historical era have been born and are still being born today. In architectural theory, the issue of the relationship between the old and the new arises several times. Old is mostly placed under the weight of emerging criticism, while New appears as a promising solution to the current problem. Then new demands, new critiques and theories arise again. What used to look good before becomes outdated soon, and this is how it goes along with optimistic development until the end of time.

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The processes discussed above are well indicated by the history of architecture described and recorded until these days, in other words by the history of style. Until the 18th century, historical experience – i.e. style – served as a kind of solution to the method of construction. Accelerated change found the former historical form, which was considered good, worth following. Then the 20th century, abandoning all this, fled into the modern illusion of the avant-garde. I use the term illusion because the classic Modern has since inspired countless ostensible solutions, still proclaiming its good intentions, although today its myriad problems can be seen too.

The history of the last hundred years' architecture has repeatedly raised the issue of comparing historical and contemporary architecture. At the beginning of the 20th century, the awakening Modern Movement broke away from historical forms, however, constantly formulated its principles in comparison with them. This situation created *Memorism*, a new concept of the 20th century architectural history. It is more than historicization also in terms of style history and different from Historicism. I could say it is a kind of conceptual attempt, but the name has become accepted since its birth and by now new ideas have also been inspired by it.

In 1993, TUB professor Gyula Hajnóczy wrote a thought-provoking article, in which he quoted Lajos Fülep, who discussed the significance of “memories” as a critique of an essay by Benedetto Croce.¹ Hajnóczy drew attention to the fact that “... Lajos Fülep mentions natural sciences and psychology in the line of remembrance »downwards«, but does not cite history and art history as a confirmatory argument...”.

According to him, the new wording “... a generally accepted interpretation of the formation of *Memorism* refers to the fact of the memory of the era. After an intermezzo – the medioevo – it is a continuation of what was present in language(s), literature, various branches of culture, but also in material and artistic memories – if not on the same scale, but – across all Europe ...”.

Hajnóczy's historical overview thus perceives some kind of continuity except for the Middle Ages. He sees the surviving values that have begun with ancient masters as a “*Memorism*” of a constant retrospect.

“Then initially, the image of the object of remembrance was like *tohuwabohu*: blurred and contourless. Yet the goal was precisely to achieve clairvoyance. One of the dominant triggers for the rebirth (renaissance) movement was the liberation of architecture from the metaphors of medieval art, that is, the desire to regain naturalistic solutions.”, as Hajnóczy wrote. He stated: “What happened was that at the dawn of the new age, an era called the Renaissance arrived. And it is permanently with us to this day.” However, he immediately asked the obvious question: “But how did this become a permanent form of behaviour? Is it because the key to development lay in

¹ Hajnóczy, J. Gy.: *Memorizmus*. In: Lővei, Pál (ed.): *Horler Miklós hetvenedik születésnapjára. Tanulmányok*. (Művészettörténet – Műemlékvédelem 4.) Országos Műemlékvédelmi Hivatal, Budapest 1993. 501–505. https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/SZAK_KOHI_Mm_04_Horler/?pg=507&layout=s (Accessed: 10 October 2020)

the past? But Europe began to »remember« in a wrong way. The continent inherited a significant part of the classical literature, philosophy etc. in its »original« form, but often she misunderstood, quoted and referred to this heritage quite rhapsodically.”

Then Hajnóczi continued: *“So the stones of the past as well as its »spirit« were re-carved. Later theories were written posteriorly, after the end of an era, when they were permanently »manufactured« from the beginning, with a normative purpose... Mimesis itself is a kind of remembrance, and naturalism has permeated architecture, not only in the interpretation of the system of proportions, but often by quoting astonishing formal analogies... However, the inspiring forces continued to operate in Classicism, Romanticism, Historicism, and then, after an apparent break, in the style of present days...”*

Hajnóczi's line of thought thus reaches to this day, saying that Memorism is eternal and inevitable. But doubt arose in him again: *“The ultimate reason, however, remains a mystery, what motivated the Europeans to permanently relive their past. A farewell look to an agonizing culture when our whole life flashes before our eyes? But agonizing for half a millennium?”*

Hajnóczi had no clear answer, but he made a kind of interesting conjecture. *“In conclusion, we refer to transcendent forces that ensure and regulate the internal balance of culture. Religion, science and art are structuring our spiritual lives, the viability of culture depends on their harmony or disharmony.”*

Remembrance (Memorism) – according to Hajnóczi – is thus one of the continuous determinants and *transcendent* motives of architecture as a part of culture, being an important component of culture through its act of harmonization. This finding is, I think, an important, perhaps even one of the most important ideas in the modern interpretation of architectural history.

Therefore, this idea is worth further examination. Even when Hajnóczi analysed the issue, some important questions arose. One is the architecture of the Middle Ages *alien to* and different from the other styles, as evidenced by the endless Renaissance idea mentioned before. The other is the dark-minded *“farewell look of an agonizing culture”* line of thought, which is quite worrying. The third issue is the *transcendent nature* having influence on architecture as a determinant of culture.

The first contradiction can be easily resolved. The imaginative construction method of medieval buildings based on individual solutions really stands out from a world of well-interpreted rules and systems of proportions. But where does Memorism lie here as one of the continual determinants of architecture? In contrast to the Middle Ages, the ancient and modern formal approaches are easily related, which occurs several times during the 19th century and later. Although Romanticism, a reminiscent of the architecture of the Middle Ages is very memorable in its nature from the ideological point of view, the original medieval building technique is different and special. In the history of medieval architecture, the classic rebirth would be really hard to recognize. But what if the expected Memorism (being controversial in this matter) as a formal phenomenon is seen as a merely secondary aspect?

If we take into account the opinion of some philosophers, including John Ruskin, an outstanding connoisseur of the Italian Middle Ages, who compared the “pride of knowledge” of the Renaissance with the ingenuity of the Middle Ages, the question raised comes to a whole new light.² In architecture, Memorism as a kind of complex form and role of human behaviour can be considered continuous only if remembrance was displayed not only in formal historization, but in all elements of architectural activity. Then the architectural form, and thus the medieval form, is to be interpreted only as one of the logical consequences of the *remembering creation*. The special nature of the Middle Ages is therefore not an exception but a proof of the extension of the concept of Memorism.

The second interesting question revolves around the image of an “agonizing culture”. We should not forget, Hajnóczi wrote all this after finishing his manuscript *The History of Architectural Theory*, which contains similar thoughts, just at the end of the 20th century, when the uncertainties after the Modern period became apparent.³ By then, hidden behind the idea of Memorism, the common concept of historization had made the creators uncertain as an old-new shadow. And yet, the opinion-forming aspects of architectural history can vary from era to era. Since the question was asked, there have been numerous reassuring explanations and theories for the re-evaluation of historical eras, which refer to the unbroken “development” of architecture and are by no means agonizing in nature.

I think the essence of the problem is in our traditional conception of architectural history. Historical remembrance divided into stages of development does not explain the continuity of the phenomenon of Memorism. In other words, if the permanence of Memorism is true, it excludes the contradictions inherent in the intermittency of the change of form. We therefore need to find a common ground that is constantly present. This is also confirmed by the adaptable nature of the positive medieval attitude. It can only be reiterated that architecture, after all, means not only the form itself, but everything that determines the formal appearance as the end result of creative work. It always follows needs and always implemented along realistic possibilities.

And what about the *transcendent* nature affecting architecture? There is something final unresolved about this issue. Perhaps it is enough to mention that Memorism is marked as an essential human quality. Hajnóczi also refers to this in some form. “*In conclusion, we refer to transcendent forces that ensure and regulate the internal balance of culture. Religion, science and art are structuring our spiritual lives, and the viability of culture depends on their harmony and disharmony*” – he wrote.

It is far from me to explain Hajnóczi’s thoughts in retrospect, but in some cases, we should think about them. The question arises, what regulates the internal balance of culture? There may be constant aspects such as naturalness, symmetry, order, harmony, religion, science, but there may also be changing circumstances such as the

² John Ruskin: *Velence kövei*. MTA, Budapest 1898. Vol. 3. 210.

³ Hajnóczi, Gyula: Az építészettudomány története. *Építés-Építészettudomány* 26 (1996–1997) 3–4. 207–278.

continuous problem solving of the creative man. The latter, in its presence, is certainly constant.⁴

Thus, a steady circle of thought emerges, and change can only be interpreted in relation to it. Translated into the language of architecture, there can be a continuous, decisive, permanent socio-cultural environment in which the creator always looks back, so to speak, remembers. This is not historicization, as historicization is only an optional creative method. And remembrance, due to our human nature, influences us, qualifies, and creates harmony in its presence. This human thought appearing in the permanence of memory is exactly a historical-scale experience of the real environment and its projection into the world of the past and the future.

Thus, the history of architecture as one of the manifestations of Memorism in architecture is a constantly present characteristic feature of human thinking of all times. Ever since and as long as man creates and thinks on the basis of his own experience, he is performing memorism. This experience can be past, present, individual and community, etc. Either well documented or imagined on the basis of memories. It is clearly not just a formal phenomenon, as form is only a superficial consequence of experience. The role of the current client's needs, the technological environment corresponding to these needs, the laws of statics, material knowledge, the flow of information all influence remembrance and indirectly the architectural form too. Man is unable to abstract from his experiences and can live more or less effectively as long as he makes the best use of them.

The interpretation of the past and the future is based on a rough understanding of the present. We do not fully know the past or the future, and we can only deduce everything from the present. Therefore, all this is based on a human characteristic determined by geographical location, social status, and historical age. Both the relativity of getting to know our time and the constant change inherent in it originate from human memory and only from it. This may also be a kind of explanation for the aforementioned *transcendence* inherent in Memorism.

Based on the thought experiment described above, four interesting topics can be formulated, worth to be considered in more depth.

1. Memorism is an ever-present phenomenon, which may have formal consequences, but essentially it is a non-formal way of thinking. This follows from the creative interpretation of architectural history.

2. Remembrance is influenced by the problems of the present but can only be truly interpreted historically. This follows from the ever-changing conception of architectural history.

3. The tools of Memorism also make the phenomena of our time more understandable. The historical processes of the past have always had a significant influence on our time, and still affect it today.

⁴ "Culture is a process that is constantly developing, evolving, struggling with new and new problems and solving them: its internal balance, harmony, rebirth does not come from adapting to the »rules« of a certain definable nature, but from solving problems..." Bibó, István: A magyarság problémája [The Problems of the Hungarian Nation]. In: Bibó, István: *Válogatott tanulmányok*. Vol. II. <https://mek.oszk.hu/02000/02043/html/348.html> (Accessed: 10 October 2020)

4. The permanent values of remembrance do not only explain the values of the past and the present, but as a comparison they also describe the continuous historical-scale changes. Knowing the present enables us to make conjectures concerning the future. These dynamics of changes can only be understood through continuous, temporal extension.

In summary, the correct interpretation of Memorism is only possible with a creative conception, along the constant change, in relation to our age and extensible in time. In his above-mentioned article, Hajnóczy asked these questions with good insight, and he even answered them with the architectural-historical tools of his time. However, the changes of our time also give rise to further thoughts. If any open question remains, it should and can be answered according to the actual ever-changing present – precisely because of the essence of Memorism. All this, then and now, is possible only this way.⁵

MÉG EGYSZER A MEMORIZMUSRÓL...

Összefoglaló

Hajnóczy Gyula 1993-ban Fülep Lajos korábbi memorizmus értelmezéséhez kiegészítést fűzött, miszerint az említett fogalom az építészettörténetre is vonatkozik, hasonlóan a művészet egyéb ágaihoz. Emlékező jellegű folyamatosságot érzékelt az építészetben, az ókortól kezdve, a reneszánszon keresztül, egészen napjainkig. Megfogalmazott három témát, mely elméleti problémát gerjesztve, további vizsgálatot igényel. Szerinte, a formai alapú szemléletből kitűnik a középkor mássága. A historizmus kora után pedig egyfajta negatív tartalmú „agonizálást” érzékelt. A harmadik sejtése az építészetben rejlő, a történelemben kibontakozó transzcendencia volt.

A közel harminc évvel ezelőtti gondolatsor új megvilágításba kerülhet, ha az építészettörténet nem csak formatörténet szerinti megközelítésű. Ha nem a különbözőségeket, hanem a folyamatosságot vizsgálja és mindez kiterjed a jelen és jövő problémáira is. Természetesen mindez csak továbbgondolva értelmezhető.

Kulcsszavak: Hajnóczy, memorizmus, medioevo, transzcendencia

⁵ As Hajnóczy's article quoted Giordano Bruno's alleged sentence at the end, it is perhaps true of this line of thought too: "se non e vero, e ben trovato".

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