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DLA thesis of dissertation

ARCHITECTURE OF THE HUNGARIAN VILLAGE MORTUARY

Moments to educate the instincts of the architect, introduction of a seemingly impossible task

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2009

Introduction

By the mid 20th century in Hungary just as in many other places in Europe a special situation had evolved in burial habits. The irresistible processes of secularization and their “maiden” the science coordinated changes in all segments of life and created new priorities such as efficiency, subservience, ability to standardization and hygiene. These efforts elevated into administrative heights eliminated in no time the burial rituals which beared secular traditions in Hungarian villages. From this time on, following the desire of the law of modernity, the bier takes place in the mortuaries which appeared though without any tradition in cemeteries and morgues. In the centers of modern culture, in the cities the architects and artists who had been working on the new function made greater effort to solve the problem experimenting with new solutions, while in the periferies in major part of the cases the community faced an impossible architectural challenge. Beginning with the 1920s the architectural quality of these edifices built in the cemeteries of Hungarian townships and villages depended only on the motivation, knowledge and possibilities of the immanent “creative forces”. These edifices built with dashed off work, resemble summer wash-houses or storage-houses, had got rid of their remaining ritual functions. Their function later became identical with their architectural character: they became storeges, service buildings, while the open-air or covered places in the vicinity of the houses became the only centres of the burial ceremonies. The unfortunate duality like that of a non-matching couple, the building's profane charcter engaged to a temporary sacral investment of the open space can be often seen in Hugarian townships' cemeteries.

Purpose of Ph.D. research

Recognizing the insupportable situation in the recent decade more and more villages create for themselves the possibility to provide a worthy mourning place by building or altering their mortuary. Although many are those unfortunate villages for which can be useful a repertory of examples for village mortuaries. I propose different but in the same time correlating and coopeartive aspects, which can mean the initiatives for those, thinking about the innovation of the Hungarian mortuary architecture in villages.

Structure of academic research

The chapters of my academic Ph.D. research contain an elaboration of a thesis each. The statements dry theoretic knowledge I tend to complete with case studies implicit experiences. I tried to arrange the thesis in a non hierarchic order as well. My main intention was not to present a gradual, hierarchically organized, exclusive system. Because I consider the presentation of the architecture of the village mortuary impossible in a general concept with relevant statements of all places and in all times. Though I believe that the edifications and reflections extracted from the main ideas of each thesis can be considered as identical and may be improved further on. From this in my expectations can be seen the outlines of a will to create an open structure, which can be continued and completed any time. However I thought it to be important to wove among the loose lines of my basic statements some crossing strings to fasten and avoid the confusion of the waves of ideas. The referential media of this thesis-matrix is formed of the examination of the possibilities of forming and sacral impregnation of the unity of the constructed and immanent natural environment, and the transitive space evolved on their frontiers.

Structure of Artwork

It is strictly linked to the academic research, the edifications extracted from it are built in the four identical mortuary and cemetery plans from which my artwork is put together. These are planned to exact places and were done for preceding commissions. Among these three plans – the cemetery for Tát, the mortuaries for Kisbajom and Ötvöskony – are to be constructed. The fourth, the documentation of the mortuary of Nagyatád, is a study plan made for request. The planning of the cemetery and the wall of urns was carried out together with Tamás Karácsony architect and Dániel Barcza landscape architect. During the academic research in joint action with my tutor we contacted by mail more than 100 villages chosen by the previously mentioned selection. We offered these townships various ways and levels of cooperation in the cases of their mortuaries in bad condition. Only a few responded among them from which material not more than a study plan could be made. Some of these are represented among the case studies of the academic research, but they can be considered as complementeries of the artwork as well. All elements of the artwork are frameworks of the effort, which claims to organize a differential unity from the peripheral situation of the space structures of burial architecture: near with distant, closed with open, internal with external, constructed and organic. Beyond the architectural methods I call for the help of the space and form creating endowment of the living vegetation.

1_Urn-cemetery and the elaboration of urn-wall in the Cemetery of Tát, Komárom-Esztergom County

The cemetery of the village neighboring Esztergom can be found where the Danube and the 10th Highway meet. As in other countries in Hungary as well the undertaking is done in urns – this is the reason why the local municipal decided to extend the western part of the cemetery by building urn-walls parcels and roads. The presented study, admission- and execution-plans were carried out for this purpose. The “v” shaped graveyard with the existing mortuary surrounded by the fence made of artificial stone was a kind of forgotten territory. Its well-protected character obviously marked the place of the future urn-garden. From the noise of the traffic and from the voyeurism we tended to hide the new, park-like urn-yard, which is enclosed by a massive concrete wall. However from the side of the Danube along the cart-road runs a hedgerow to guard the sake of the tranquility of the mourners and visitors, closing out the view in, but letting through the nestles and sounds coming from the riverbank. The main concept of the project is the harmonizing articulation of the border situation of spiritual and geographical aspects of the urn cemetery. The powerful architectural material and form gives a tranquilizing frame and environment to the just slightly limited proliferation.

My family is bonded with strong relation to Somogy County. Through this acquaintance I gained opportunity to plan two mortuaries for the cemeteries of a nearby village and a town in the place of their former badly designed predecessors which didn't meet the standards of nowadays.

2_Mortuary in Ötvöskőnyi, Somogy County

The old shaky hut, which used to stand by itself as a lonely stranger in the middle of the cemetery, by these days found a benevolent support from the trees strengthened during decades on the border of the old parcels and empty lawn. So the installation of the new house was determined by these landscape conditions. The inner center which bears closing functions is built from the former hut's bricks and has a simple form. It is surrounded by branch-braid-texture originated from traditional rural architecture, it reaches the periphery of the covered open space, the wall made out of it finally contacts the decade-old trees. The last layer of the composition is the web of vegetation which by the time overlays and enwraps the house. The main concept of the plan is an experimenting with homogenous and location-specific structure of material. The aim is to create a linkage between the closed venue of the building, the temporary covered-open space, and the proximate nature and landscape.

3_Mortuary in Kisbajom, Somogy County

This plan means a new chapter of the previously introduced experiment. At the same time we kept the walls of the original building at the space tightly enclosed by the graves, our duty was to provide the biggest intimate mourning space possible. In this case the homogenous terminal shell was made with a porous structure constructed from the boards which were available in greater quantity at place. We expect that this structure later merges with the creeper vegetation later on.

4_Mortuary in Nagyatád, Somogy County

In the center, in urban environment, in the ring of railways, multi-laned roads and residences is situated the brilliant graveyard of Nagyatád surrounding the chapel. No wonder that the recently built mortuary which became obsolete by now, didn't dare to approach closer than the fence of the cemetery. The need provides possibility. The wall of the cemetery absorbs all the enclosed inner functions, it doesn't try to compete with the glorious church. It is only a small space under the roof which reveals itself as mortuary.

Thesis of the DLA

1. Thesis Research

To avoid confusion one of the most efficient method is finding the ends of the strings (fibers) and identifying them one by one. Though this is a time consuming, tiring and rather mechanical procedure, there is no other way to really become aware of things. My tutor, István Janáky has been making excursions to hidden places of Hungary where he seeks architectural beauties lying low. He was the one to come upon the fact that by the well-looked-after greenery of the townships' and villages' cemeteries surround the austere designed bier places presented as some hut or garage, built with scrambled work, or as some ice-cream selling kiosk lolling about in the peaceful ambient of the burial-ground. The DLA research was initiated by his inspiration. During several both joint and individual trips, even for me was revealed a world which is slumbering, intact and neglected. The fieldwork wasn't limited to the documentation of objects. Often I made contact with the users of these architectural spaces, the inhabitants of these villages. I gained knowledge of their desires and intentions, I peered into their everyday life. I made some photos, sketches and getting home, even plans were elaborated by the inspiration of these experiences.



Arranging the elements by age, region and type, of this continuously extending material gathered during the research, helps to empirically create a detailed “map of problems” and to determine its structural layers.

Historical overview

(Reasons of loss of the tradition. Some weak fibers stretching between past and present.)

This chapter presents the implicit and explicit historical reasons of the conditions found in Hungarian cemeteries. I sketch up, with the help of available accurate ethnological research, the most important motives of the burial traditions broken for almost half a century ago. On the basis of these I make an effort to prove that some barely glowing and faintly contured burial traditions' inheritance and survival can give some aid to the ambitions toward the revival of the rural burial architecture.



Among these one of the most important paralellism is between the space-texture of the former residence-veranda-yard and the mortuary-open foreground, in other words the paralell between the ex- and present determinative spaces of rural burial.

The temporary space as sacral location

Examples and prefigurations from history

The desengagement of the series of habits of the ceremony of bier and burial from the environment of everyday life created a new public building type which is without predecessors if we consider its functions, but in the same time it is inherent and relative of the sacral architecture of historical times. The patterns extracted to introduce this can be put in thematic order by the quality of the *temporary space*.



_1. The traditional, or using the common expression, in the order of the historical churches of Hungary and Europe as well, the religious articulations primal centers were the closed type churches, congregation houses, tabernacles.

Though neither in these times had dispersed the tradition of the usage of temporary, open air places for rituals.

So the calvaries, the sacral spaces of monasteries composed into landscapes and natural environment, architectural forms, but also the house in the house arrangement of places of pilgrimage had a great impact upon the formation of the sacral architecture of 20th century (Ronchamp, La Tourette).



_2. Well known is the fact, that the architectural and landscape architectural articulation of the temporary or transitional space harmonizing with the natural environment has a privileged status in the eastern philosophies (like buddhist and shintoist sanctuaries, zen gardens, mohamedan pavilions for meditation, etc.). Studiing them can support us with important knowledge to understand the relation between the building and its natural environment – the vegetation, the garden and the landscape.

Profane and sacral resonance

(The weak fiber gains strength, helps to grasp)

The bier at the rural mortuary and the ritual performed on its yard with temporary ritual requisites (house investment, sweeping of the yard, veiling of the mirrors, etc.) took place in profane ambience. These spaces had sacral architectural aspects. This was the reason why the burial ritual, when forced out to the cemetery, first didn't require any sacral environment. It was created by the mourners by artifacts and well known songs originating in oral traditions. It is problematic to require from the small edifications to present any elevated and elaborated transcendental architectural content. The effort to alter the village mortuaries ordinary architectural character to a majestic sacral architecture, is followed lately and probably to urbanized inspiration. But the earlier cannot be ceased by the later.



However naive and clumsy may be the result, the most interesting motive in the case of village mortuaries, although it is hard to catch, but it is the resonance that is generated by the dual immanence of the ordinary and the sacral. We believe that in this aspect it is fundamentally different from the towns' and most of all from the cities' buildings bearing the same functions. The conservation and the support of articulation of this characteristic can be an intention to follow.

Dissolves

(A Swiss mortuary and the cooperating traditions)

Gion A. Caminada swiss architect took the traditional house of graubünden as example planning the bier place of his birthplace. With a traditional structure of the space, and with the innovative redesigning of the traditional

building structure the venue was placed *outside the cemetery tightly by the fence*. Following the belief about the nature of these elements, this region belongs to this world, but on the other hand serving the living it leads them to the other world. For the mourners, is given a differential, familiar - "home-like" - space and tranquil and slow time to live their mourning. In other terms the strictly defined profane and sacral contents gain unity, their discrepant substance cease, on their boundaries evolves a new.



One of the cultural tradition (the bier at home) is fading away, in the community it is well known, experienced by all its members. The change doesn't mean a drastic break-away from the tradition but an organic alteration. In the critical moment one strong fiber of the traditional cultural texture coils around other weakening filament giving aid to that. The function which never have stood autonomously by itself now becomes the natural extension of the village-texture climbing the steep mountain side.

6. Thesis

Symbioses

(Givens and population – local traditions)

The success of the proper creation of a village mortuary not only depends on the mental and professional preparation of the architect.

The active participation of the community during the construction, architectural and natural resources, local materials, forms, architectural techniques can provide the possibility that the relation between the inhabitants of the village and the small house is pervaded by the proportional equilibrium of the natural immediacy and keeping the distance respectfully.

