

ARCHITECTURE SK



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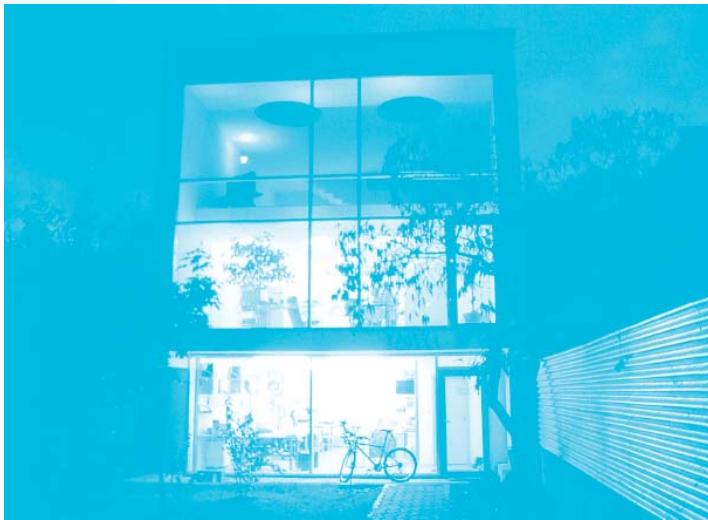
Slovak architects do not tend to experiment. They perceive architecture mainly through its functionality and aesthetics, which are considered to be eternal values. Clear layout, durable materials and more or less representative form touched by fashionable trends have always been the goal of the Slovak architects' struggles. This characteristic is the logical result of the architects' training in a country where the majority of architects have a traditional technical educational background. (About one hundred architects graduate each year from the School of Architecture at the Slovak Technical University. In contrast there are hardly ten graduates a year from the Department of Architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts and approximately the same number of graduates from the School of Arts at the Technical University in Košice.) The School of Architecture at the Slovak Technical University, the main educational institution, emphasizes the typological-dispositional and constructional aspects of building. Following the principles of its founders, the first generation of Slovak architects like Emil Belluš or Vladimír Karfík, the faculty educates skilled engineers prepared to solve practical problems of architectural design.

By the end of the 20th century, modern architecture had already become a part of the local architectural tradition. Classical modernism is perceived in Slovakia as a very important source of inspiration and as part of the "family gold" of the local architecture. The majority of Slovak architects argue that their work goes back to great work, or great architects, of modernism. In principle we can say that each of the examples of noteworthy architecture built during the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century in Slovakia in some way claims to be a mod-

ern project. Generally the architecture is characterized by the projection of rationality into orthogonal spatial relations, graphic abstraction, and reduction in materials. Among the latest works we can find direct connections with the formal vocabulary of classical modernism as in the case of KFA Studio, in reminiscences of artistically impressive figures of late modernism present especially in the work of L'ubomír Závodný, and in the monumental potential of classical modernism, which the architects Martin Kusý and Pavol Paňák use. New modernism has slowly become a symbol of good quality architecture in Slovakia. It dominates the pages of the architectural magazines and even scores commercial success.

In architectural discussion, doubts about such positions are being expressed. Opposing the exclusivity of new modernism is a "strategic architecture of a dialogue which does not want to be exclusive and everlasting, but rather ordinary, temporary, unfinished and permanently changing."¹ In the late nineties such disturbance of modern perfection could be found in some works in Slovakia. Real or only declared opposition towards the exclusivity of modernism is presented mainly by members of the youngest generation of Slovak architects. They are working on open spatial concepts, looking for new, perhaps ad hoc, technical and technological possibilities and intentionally refusing aestheticism.

The Office House Crater with its pub in Bratislava (Roman Hájek, collaboration Andrej Alexy, 1997) was the first work of so-called strategic architecture mentioned by critics at that time. Despite presenting minimalist forms, the Crater Building offered a spatial concept and even a strategy of use different from other neo-modernist pro-



- ↖ **Krater House,**
Bratislava, Roman Hajek, 1997
- ↗ **National Bank of Slovakia,**
Bratislava, Martin Kusy - Pavol Panak, 2002
- ← **KFA Villa, Bratislava,**
Norbert Smondrk, 1997
- ↙ **Atrium department store,**
Bratislava, Lubomir Zavodny, 2003

ductions. Contrasting with the abstract aesthetic tendencies and floating space of classic modernism, it brought an ad hoc solution and created an intentional disturbance. The architects created the building as a diagram of its inner events. The position in which the designers of the Crater Building found themselves might not be programmatic, but rather derived from the specificity of the task. Despite this fact, they legitimately created a certain tendency to think about architectural tasks in local conditions.

In the 1990s, several individuals or groups of architects who were aware of the actual discussion of new paradigms in architecture appeared on the Slovak architectural scene. The most important of them is the Laboratory of Architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts. Since the beginning of the nineties, its leader Imro Vaško has been working on the research of landscape structures and a conceptual matrix and striving to apply the results of his experiments not only in his own creative work but in the pedagogical process as well. These outstanding activities permanently attract young, talented architects who first join the Laboratory of Architecture for a limited time. In particular, Benjamín Brádňanský, Peter Stec, Jr., and Ján Tupek are now collaborating with Imro Vaško on some projects.

The peripheral-residual relationship between architecture and the city and the topology of architecture and landscape are the main fields of interest of the architectural office fabrica. Their essay Landscape Model of Architecture could be considered the most compact presentation of such thought in Slovak architecture. The fabrica architects "conceptualise the architecture as a landscape, or landscape model of architecture, or landarch."²

Similarly to Vaško, they develop a kind of general matrix, a continual but locally maximal heterogeneous space, which is adaptive to permanent changes in inner and external context, where nothing is really fixed.

Architectural space which is thought of as a landscape, as a territory for events, programs and their mutual collisions, can be found in the works of Fečík Halmi Polakovič architects as well. As stated in the margin of their winning project in the European 5 competition by one of the office's members, "By designing of folds, adding, perforating and forming of building volumes the continual space with different local qualities is produced. The topology is preferred to figurativeness."³ And indeed their architecture tries to be only a frame for certain programs modularly preordained but not definitely limited.

The work of the Barak architects is also not limited by stylistic -isms and is open for dialogue. Working with simple, even banal and traditional solutions, using architectural archetypes and creating a kind of hybrid collage, they reflect the unique demands of each architectural task.

The Czechoslovak architectural office ksa. goes even further in the struggle for a user-opened architectural concept. As the office member Ján Studený says, their work is formed by "a trust that life's manifestations are richer and more actual than architecture itself."⁴ The ksa. vision of architecture without architects was quite complexly presented at the Venice Biennale of Architecture in 2002.

There are only a few female Slovak architects who, instead of enjoying the safer conditions of larger offices, are running the risk of individual work. In this sense Dana Cupková-Myers and

Mária Topolčanská represent the new generation of Slovak architects. Both entered the architectural practice abroad. After obtaining a master's degree at UCLA in Los Angeles and practicing in several famous North American offices, Dana Cupková now offers her individual ideas of architecture in New York. Mária Topolčanská started her career by obtaining a master's degree at the Catalanian University in Barcelona. Influenced by her tutor, the famous architect and architectural theoretician Ignasi de Solà-Morales, she joined several offices in Barcelona and tries to apply all these experiences in her Slovak practice today.

The work of all the architects mentioned here represents islands of independent thinking in architecture. Individual research programs, testing architecture in processes other than building, and looking for alternative practices make these architects extraordinary. Their efforts are not dominating the local scene. Nevertheless we can state that Slovak architects do tend to experiment – at least some of them.

¹ Steiner, D.: Faith or Life. An Architecture Prize. Several Experts and the New Game of Vying for a Position. In: 6th Mies van der Rohe Award for European Architecture. Barcelona, Fundació Mies van der Rohe and ACTAR, 1999, s. 18 – 19.
² Hrbáč, B.: Krajinný model architektúry. Arch 4, 1999, č. 5, s. 18.
³ Maroš Fečík in the discussion European 5. Hovorenie o slovenskej téme Košice – Tahanovce. Arch 4, 1999, N. 4, P. 12.
⁴ Rodinný dŕm ve Stupavě u Bratislavy. Architekt 46, 2000, č. 11, s. 34 – 46, tu s. 35.