

## RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ARCHITECT<sup>1</sup>

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This title is a plagiarism of that of a lecture by Jacques Maritain in Princeton, 1951. It occurred not now but in 1990 when I wanted to take the floor at the general meeting of the Federation of Hungarian Architects. It would have begun somehow like that: 'The Federation of Hungarian Artists and Applied Artists entitled me to speak at this general meeting, as representative of a trade humiliated and self-humiliating, or, more rudely, dishonoured, and self-dishonouring. But it seems to me I am speaking to a trade that can make these attributes to refer to itself.' I did not take the floor, since – just as at the general meeting of artists not long ago, concerned only with agreeing the new statutes, problems of election of officials – here the problem of 'Chamber' was focused on. Questions like the situation of our architecture and fine arts, existence or not of viable tendencies, what is the architectural and artistic culture in this country at all, and if it is execrable – it is so – who is responsible for it, how much creative artists are responsible for it; may some aspects of value be spoken of? Whether the architect is responsible or not for having served wrong decisions, having taken part in demolishing historical town cores, being ready to design pseudo-symbol buildings or trashy villas and holiday homes for the newly rich? By analogy: do hydraulic engineering experts offering all their professional skill the Bős-Nagymaros plans, and architect teams ready to its aesthetic-architectural plastic surgery merit condemnation?

These rhetorical questions may be also asked in the field of fine arts, but here the real facts of hurling down statues swept away merely theoretical interrogatories. Let us refer to the oeuvre of Imre Varga, the sculptor

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among the most skilled ones in this country, and the most successful one in the last a quarter of the century.

If invited, he modelled Our Lady, divine and mother, the devout St. Elizabeth, St. Stephen shaken by the task inflicted on him by his vocation, Radnóti meditating even on the pathway to death, Derkovits defying merciless reality, the stately Mihály Károlyi, Wallenberg shouldering anything for humanism, a tired Lenin like any other, Béla Kun swaggering, Liszt, the mad genius, Bartók fluttering, the quiet Kodály, the Holocaust monument: he did model anything ordered either by György Aczél, or by Cardinal Lékai, and said with the coolness of a professional: 'give me the lion', monument of Imre Nagy too. When asked, how to feel like Virgin Mary and Lenin at the same time, how to serve several gods at the same time, he did not understand the question, since he is a professional who is expected only to solve the given problem to his best. Neither Zsigmond Kisfaludy-Stróbl did bother whether modelling the monument of István Horthy or the Statue of Liberation. Can a sculptor help it if he has to model Caesar rather than Pericles? Can an architect help it if he has to design a Forum for Mussolini rather than a cathedral?

In these rhetorical questions – which I did not dare to raise at the general meeting – doubtless, several problems are interlaced that have to be attempted to be disentangled to get back to the origin, the question without a question mark: responsibility of the architect.

According to Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, responsibility is moral, legal or mental accountability. Thereby it may be also a legal term, but also a moral quality – obviously, for us, this latter is of interest. What is the responsibility of the creative artist – architect, fine artist – to whom or to what is he responsible?

Maritain, in his quoted lecture, discussed primarily the writer's responsibility, polemically starting from Gide's statement: 'What was written by somebody has no significance or consequence.' His reasoning affects, however, other branches of arts, too, being concerned with the relation between arts and morals. In his opinion, there is no direct relation between these two scopes arising from inner subordination, since both are autonomous regions of the human cultural sphere, hence 'controlled from inside', with individual value criteria. Art is a virtue in Aristotle's and St. Thomas Aquinas' meanings, that is, an ability to create value, a creative force – like the ability of 'Practical Reason' – referring to the act of producing an object, serving the oeuvre's 'good', 'benefit' – in Maritain's wording, 'bien de l'oeuvre' – rather than human purposes (bien de l'homme). The value displayed in the work is not the human will but it arises from the thing itself, as its display. Thus, the creative artist is primarily responsible to the work producing a value by its disclosure, its

coming to being, hence to art itself. His duty is to develop this value wishing to be born. He has to concentrate on it, and sacrifice anything for that. His individual morals are subordinate. Oscar Wilde was right to tell: 'That somebody is a poisoner is no argument against his prose.', or as Cocteau stated: 'Painting does not care a hoot if the painter is damned, if hell's fire anneals the stained glass window to sparkling.' But, in Maritain's opinion, this is by no means the same for the painter, since he is not the creature of Painting, and not a mere painter, but primarily a human being, and as such, subject to moral principles. From the aspect of Art, the artist is, in fact, responsible only to his work, but from the aspect of Morals, Gide's statement is a self-deceit, since the writer, the artist does respond to his, and his neighbour moral requirements. As a matter of fact, Arts and Morals are two autonomous independent worlds, but remember that both are worlds of man, that is, man as an intellectual creative and moral being is performer of facts determinant for his fate, sharing both worlds. Since, however, man is primarily a man rather than a writer or a painter, from human aspects, the autonomous world of Morals, the issuing system of requirements is superior to the autonomous world of Arts. There can be such a law that contradicts the categorical imperative of Moral, concerned with the gist of human existence: human salvation. In other words: in final account, Art is indirectly, extrinsically subordinate to Moral. Thus, Maritain, in conformity with his Catholic ethos, unambiguously voted for 'bien de l'homme' although stressing the relative value of the 'bien de l'oeuvre'.

How can all these be interpreted from the aspect of architecture and fine arts? In architecture and in fine arts of community function, what is the customer determinant, either a some social community or an individual. Namely, function, ideological, iconological message, symbolism of the object are not inventions of the creator alone but also of the customer, and even the style is selected else than by the creator's pure decision. Let us quote again the statement of the outstanding philosopher Nicolai Hartmann. '... a house, even an unimportant one, a failure of a house is related to the restricted family as the clothing is to the personality: expression of self-concept and conscious self-modelling. Hence even a living house points to essential features of man. While an enormous building demonstrates what is set by his ideas as a goal for him, thus, what man wants to become, what he dreams of.' Accordingly, also the community, the customer are responsible – but in fact, does it exonerate the architect or artist working on commission of the community, or are they only responsible as professionals, hence, does the responsibility for the 'bien de l'oeuvre' in their field actually have the priority?

All these point to the complexity of the problem of responsibility in architecture and in fine arts. The simplest may be the domain of au-

onomous morals, the 'bien de l'homme', namely that general moral norms, civic and professional uprightness, honour hold also for those active in these fields. That in this respect, the artistic and architectural institutionalism and customary law are 'poachy' needn't be confirmed.

It is well known that there is an infinity of rotten interlacings: professional lobbying; corruption possibilities arising from antagonism between design and construction: from being at the mercy of the building industry: group interests controlling acceptance or refusal of designs: or often, manifest mafia – as an 'excuse' it may be mentioned that neither the western countries more correct, morally higher, much superior to us. This, however, belongs to general ethical norms such as if a shopkeeper cheats or not his customers.

I am of the view that the kind of work undertaken by somebody belongs to individual moral standards. Quoting the former example: it has to do with someone's conscience not to have anything against modelling both János Kádár and Imre Nagy.

In the matter of architecture: for the designer it is indifferent what is the ideology and function of the building undertaken to be designed, and he does his best to meet a maybe deeply antihuman task, assuming absolute break, alienation between 'bien de l'oeuvre' and 'bien de l'homme'. As a matter of fact, the endeavour to aesthetic perfection may be even confessed by a whore, also killer tools may be subject to design: a well-designed rocket may be as beautiful as Brancusi's bird.

There is an infinity of examples for problems concerned with individual or communal moral shifting under the competence of professional ethic norms.

It would be difficult to concisely define the purport of professional ethics, intermingling responsibilities for, and obligations to 'bien de l'homme' and 'bien de l'oeuvre'. For instance, the boundary between general moral and professional ethic responsibility was faded out in a case like that of the scandal of the pavilion of Sevilla where decision of the legal jury was kicked over by the administration, and an outstanding architect earlier denying to take part at the competition became accomplice to the antidemocratic decision. There is an infinity of examples for similar cases in other fields of culture – let us simply refer to that after the politically motivated dismissal of the chief editors of literary and sociographic reviews *Mozgó Világ* and *Tiszatáj*, some were immediately ready to replace them. In these examples, however, general moral problems are determinant.

The situation is more difficult in problems of professional ethics decided by commitment to 'bien de l'oeuvre' rather than to 'bien de l'homme'. Namely, in such cases it is difficult to decide if someone fails in an architectural problem, – hence in the 'bien de l'oeuvre' – since the problem

is beyond him, being simply talentless, or the customer was dilettantish but insistent by forcing the designer to accept poor compromises. A number of cases may be quoted where it is difficult to decide whether it is a professional shortcoming or an offence against professional ethics. There are several public buildings where difference between the function of the entrance hall and distributional function of the vestibule of an office building has been omitted caring little for such blunders like that of having designed on one of the most representative squares of Budapest, near the Gresham palace, the 'Hungarian Sing-Sing' as tourists from abroad name it; spoiling the sight of the Basilica dome by the 'mini-dome' of a building of obscure style: accommodating the bar of the fitness hall in the architecturally accented hotel division floor facing the most beautiful panorama in this country (Chain Bridge, Buda Castle) – to quote some examples of architectural mistakes. All these may be, of course, due to a common mistake of customer and architect, or may point to professional deficiencies of several of our architects. For instance, there are many unaware of that a flight of stairs is a space forming factor with iconological meaning. Indulgently speaking, it may be an other than professional ethic offence, or only in that meaning that the architect shouldered a problem beyond his abilities. But looking at the Buda hills, the Balaton region, and several Transdanubian towns, with their trashy villas of a peculiar style mixing the 'Baumeister' style of the '60s with forms of the Makovecz school and of post-modern Eclecticism, – outrage against the principle of organic architecture, – then it is righteous to say that designers of this 'tinder architecture' may be sentenced because of offence of professional ethics.

Adolf Loss qualifying ornament a crime did not express only the sectarian purism and aggressive denial of the past of the developing rationalist architecture but – in spite of his exaggeration-borne mistake – he guessed architectural creation to be a kind of ethic act. In fact, the cynism 'all is the same for me' is a professional ethic offence. Namely, for the case of architecture, in conformity just to those in the quotation from Hartman, – in addition to Maritain's requirements of 'bien de l' oeuvre' and 'bien de l'homme', a third requirement has to be established: 'bien de la communauté', that is, responsibility to the community, – and in this respect, 'community' means more than the actual society, namely, it is at the same time responsibility for past and future, for the safeguarding harmonic symbiosis of human society and Nature. Conservation of the architectural culture of mankind, making it a public property and developing it, modesty with creations of the past – an obligation even if just the tradition has to be transcended – is a professional ethic norm just as it is indecency for an architect to transform the Sándor Palace to a gambling casino, to design a hotel on the slope of the Buda Castle Hill, to face-lift Bős-Nagymaros, to

deface the Buda hills with trashy villas of the newly rich, to irresponsibly reconstruct historical monuments, to help barbarous destruction of historical town districts, or to disregard them because also natural environment is an inalienable part of national culture, forming identity, habits of a people, so it must not be outraged by the architect.

These were about to be told in my speech at the general meeting, but I understood that the matter of the 'Chamber' was of utmost importance, just as the situation of our architects under 'unfolding market conditions'.