Book Reviews

Sekhniashvili Nino – Bostanashvili David: Shota Bostanashvili Poetics of Architecture. Tbilisi: Posta, 2019, 109 p. ISBN: 978-9941-8-1305-4.

The concise bilingual (in Georgian and English) monograph co-edited by artist Nino Sekhniashvili and architect, academic David Bostanashvili entitled *Shota Bostanashvili Poetics of Architecture,* was launched a year after the 2018 Tbilisi Architecture Biennial. This was the first Biennial held since Georgia regained its independence in 1991, but a previous Biennial had been organized by Soviet Georgia in 1988. The 2018 Biennial had the objective of analyzing and understanding the architectural process, characterized by rapid construction, which reshaped the urban landscape of the Georgian capital following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in the context of broader global changes. One can contend that the aftermath of the post-Soviet transformation was characterized by the first influx of capitalism, wherein the wellbeing of society was disregarded, and the city dwellers were induced to adapt their living patterns to cope with the new realities resulting from socio-economic urban chaos.

Incidentally, the years 1988 and 1991 witnessed the emergence of significant nodes in pioneering research regarding the theory and philosophy of architecture in Georgia. A significant development in architectural education at the former Faculty of Architecture in the Georgian Polytechnic Institute (renamed the Georgian Technical University in 1990) coincided with the occurrence of the 1988 biennial. The noteworthy new development was the inauguration of the studio-workshop 'Poetics of Architecture.' This studio, founded by Shota Bostanashvili (a practicing architect, culture theorist, and poet) created a "free listeners` auditorium" for students interested in acquiring an alternative, creative architectural design education distinct from that of traditional design studios. The studio's manifesto, a copy of which is available at the Shota Bostanashvili Archive housed at his former residence in Tbilisi, was drawn up in 1991 and published several years later by the Georgian Technical University, the pre-eminent technical university in the country. From 2007, the Faculty of Architecture, Urbanism, and Design (renamed in 2005) initiated the study of poetics of architecture as an optional course offered to candidates reading architecture and interested in learning how to re-read the history of architecture. Furthermore, in 2011, in collaboration with his only child, intellectual heir and co-editor of this monograph, Shota Bostanashvili drafted the manifesto for *Constructum*, a copy of which is also available at the said archive. This manifesto was based on research development in the poetics and metapoetics of architecture and was significantly influenced by the son's doctorate dissertation.

The first article is a reproduction of an essay written by the author of this review entitled *From Poetics to Metapoetics: Architecture towards architecture* published a year earlier (Bianco, L. 2018. *From Poetics to Metapoetics*: *Architecture towards architecture* in: *Balkan Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 10, Issue 2, pp. 103-114. DOI: 10.5840/bjp201810212). This essay outlines Bostanashvili's philosophy of architecture through his realized architectural designs. He termed his philosophy as critical discourse on architecture. Between the earlier and the later phase of his architectural practice one perceives a marked shift from existentialism to the philosophy of play manifestly reflecting the philosophy of Albert Camus and the cultural theory of Johan Huizinga, respectively. The paper concludes with a discussion on the return of the sacred as a reaction to technogenic architecture. This

article was followed by the *Manifesto for Poetics of Architecture*, penned by Shota Bostanashvili in 1992, and outlining nine propositions. For Bostanashvili, the 'gene' of architecture oriented towards the regulation of space through symbols is not rational. The inherent objective is the return of poetry and myth in architecture, the primacy of humanistic thinking, and a call for the return to nature and humanity. Architecture has the ability to express and evoke emotions, since "beauty lies beyond empirical reality, it is devoid of utility and causes selfless delight."

The article on Bostanashvili's award-winning *Bread Factory* (1983-87) designed with Vakhtang Davitaia was written by David Bostanashvili. Other than his memorials, the bread factory is the only building that is still standing today. Despite being a factory, from Bostanashvili's perspective the structure was conceived as a cultural object within a particular cultural context and constructed to convey a mythical meaning. Contemporary architectural thinking in the former USSR was outstandingly rational. A commission to create a memorial implied an assignment to conceive a symbol whereby the architectural proposal is the embodiment of the symbol. In the case of the bread factory, the commission was for 'a factory,' and Bostanashvili's proposal projected 'a house.' The commission for the factory required a utilitarian, clinical space grounded in rational thinking and thus anticipated an accommodating response rather than an unforeseen narrative encompassing a functional space laden with irrationality, in other words not 'a utilitarian shed' but 'a house for creating bread.' The notion of 'house' and 'bread' generated several signifiers, and as a consequence, the building portrays semantic shifts from a 'machine/tool for bread manufacture' to 'the language of culture.' The concept of 'a queue' is frequently associated with the demand for 'bread' and can often spawn the incidence of a spectacle or a performance which, in the architectural vocabulary of the building, was intentionally translated as the bridge. The semantic reading of the bridge, implying the act of waiting to get in and the dynamic welcoming at the entrance, constitutes a conscious leap from the profane to the sacred place inside the building. Upon crossing the bridge, a visitor is constrained by Bostanashvili to confront several pavilions whose form is evocative of traditional Georgian 'oda houses' which in turn surround a cloistered small yard that grants access to the main production hall of the factory. Bostanashvili brought together the concept of 'oda houses' as traditional producers of baked Georgian bread ('tonis puri') strengthened by the cultural memories evoked by queuing for the 'tonis puri' as experienced by most citizens of Tbilisi. The bridge was renowned for conjuring such cultural undertones, but since the building is no longer a factory, the bridge and the 'oda houses' are now unequivocally empty symbols with no one waiting in queue on the bridge. The building still retains its original form, currently hosting various small scale businesses that produce clay statuettes, but the metal silos, formerly utilized for storing flour or grain, were sold as scrap metal. The current phase in the life of this unique building calls for critical rethinking regarding its architecture. Culturally conceived as a revolutionary building, the Bread Factory was not designed from a production perspective focusing on the bread, but from a humanistic angle focusing on the users, the workers and the consumers. At the time when it was inaugurated, this factory was recognized as the best architectural product of the year in the Soviet Union and was subsequently awarded the Grand Prix for the 'Humanisation of the Working Environment.'

Another article by David Bostanashvili, entitled *Poetics of Architecture: Six names*, incorporates an extract of his father's writings, text within a text, meta-writing on writing. The article includes and critically reviews the six paradigms which Shota Bostanashvili addressed in his 2003 seminal publication: mass, wall, column, stair, frame, and veil. These paradigms of the poetics of architecture are components, constituting distinct signs of text throughout the history of Western architecture. They

are grounded in culture, and therefore, in this context, one can talk of the culturologic value of architecture. Poetics of architecture interprets the whole history of architecture as an ever-present text while the six paradigms of architecture are the signs belonging to that text. From this perspective, history is not a mere memory but a generative mechanism. The article contends that the veil is the most distinct paradigm as it is a common sign of twenty-first-century architecture that has its roots in the 1980s. Veiling is about masking or using building design language, cladding. It marks the transition leap in architecture from tectonics to wrapping. The aforementioned article was followed by the *Manifesto for Constructum*, written in 2011 by Shota Bostanashvili, together with his son. Constructum is to architecture what text is to literature as Barthes construed in his essay *From Work to Text* (Barthes, R. 1977) in Heath, Stephen (trans.). *Image Music Text*, London: Fontana, pp. 155–164. Similar to the *Manifesto for Poetics of Architecture*, the *Manifesto for Constructum* outlines nine propositions. It attempts to understand architecture in terms of text semiotics. Its sources lie in critical essays by Barthes, Kristeva, and Derrida. As for the veils, Shota Bostanashvili started experimenting with the idea of shifting, soft tectonics of architecture in the 1970s as illustrated in his own project and also in student projects he later mentored. Constructum is "a rhetorical figure … alternative to architecture. … a free play of signifiers". Analogous to architecture, constructum is presented through language, but the altered episteme has text as an alternative to oeuvre. This process marked the drive towards a critical discourse on architecture.

The monograph concludes by a bionote listing Bostanashvili's professional and pedagogical milestones, his major architectural projects (both realized and unexecuted), and a selected bibliography of his publications, exhibitions and video footages. Colleagues involved in the projects are duly acknowledged and the awards won by various designs are also described in detail. The bionote also includes a list of scientific publications scrutinising and appreciating his works.

The book was launched by Nectar Gallery during the Tbilisi Art Fair held in May 2019. Bostanashvili was one of the four artists selected by the gallery to be included in the exhibition, with the others being Elene Chantladze, Thea Gvetadze and Elene Lukhutashvili. The exhibition, entitled *Four Discourses,* not only recalls the title of a poetry book by Bostanashvili but also embraces the essentially radical art of the four artists.

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