

Look at the Imperfection of Contemporary Architecture from Ruskin's "Imperfect" Aesthetic View

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Abstract:

As people's living place, architecture has not only solved the problem of "living" in "clothing, food, housing and transportation", but also it is closely related to people's joys and sorrows in daily life. However, with the development of the times, the shortcomings of architecture have become increasingly prominent. Ruskin once said: "we think the architect can do everything perfectly, but in fact, it is impossible to complete all the work just with his hands." Starting from the origin and development of architecture and various factors affecting architecture, this paper will explore the existence of perfect architecture in the current era, so as to guide people to look at architecture from the perspective of neutral development.

Keywords:

Architecture, Perfect, Imperfect

1. Introduction

As one of the core concepts of Ruskin's aesthetic thought, "imperfect" aesthetic view has had a far-reaching impact on our contemporary designers' aesthetic view and design view, because they think that imperfection is the essence of our understanding of life, and that imperfection itself is a kind of perfection. "No human work (whether architectural or other noble work) can achieve the desired satisfaction unless you admit that it is not perfect." [1] This "imperfect" aesthetic view leads us not to blindly pursue the perfection of everything in life, but only by recognizing the existence of imperfections can we achieve real perfection as much as possible.

From the development of rock caves in the Paleolithic age to now, the shape of architecture has changed completely, and the connotation has been filled constantly. Architecture, as a necessity of people's life, continues to evolve with the changes of the needs of the times, but no matter what kind of architecture it is, there are more or less criticisms. Even today, a time when the technology is developed, while enjoying the convenience brought by square box architecture, people still feel sorry for the single form and unkindness of architecture. Therefore, people cannot help thinking about how to pursue real perfect architecture.

2. Architecture

2.1. *What is Architecture*

Architecture, as a necessity of people's daily life, runs through ancient and modern times and its shape and volume also change with the trend of the times. However, what is architecture is much more complex than that described in textbooks. In addition, there is no absolute conclusion about its definition due to the fact that the architectural form evolves constantly and that different people have different definitions of architecture.

In the most universal sense, architecture is a tool piled up by human beings with the materials and technologies that are available at the time as much as possible to meet their own needs of living, learning, entertainment, operation, production and storage. Architecture is not only a record saying human's struggle with nature, but also an extraordinary artistic creation. At the same time, architecture also has the national characteristics of different periods and the characteristics of politics, economy and life in different regions. However, throughout the ancient and modern times, even in the modern era with advanced science and technology, architecture has more or less some inevitable defects.



Figure 1. Modern Architecture.



Figure 2. Modern Antique Architecture.

2.2. *Criticism of Contemporary Architecture*

Today, a time with dense population and shortage of land resources, reinforced concrete architecture makes people's living space change from horizontal development to vertical development to accommodate more people per square of land and the traditional cubic architecture improves people's utilization of the space in the architecture. However, there are still many unavoidable criticisms in such a functional living form: the monotonous and boring "square box", the excessive energy consumption of industrial materials, and the resolution of regional culture of architecture, which have become the topics that people must face and have made people think about whether "perfect" architecture exists or whether there is some possibility of existence.



Figure 3. Modern Architecture.

3. Defects of the Architecture with a Long History

3.1. Origin of Architecture

From the perspective of genesis, architecture is simply a residence processed and transformed by primitive humans with the most hands-down materials at that time to protect themselves and avoid various risks at first. No matter whether it is pit dwelling, semi-pit dwelling or other forms on the flat land, they can be classified as tent shack built of stones, leaves and branches. Although this kind of residence has provided a place for primitive humans to shelter from the wind and rain and rest to a certain extent, the tent shack is neither beautiful nor strong enough, which is of course caused by the lack of materials and backward construction technology. In addition, primitive humans do not pursue more perfect buildings. However, compared with nowhere to live, tent shacks are enough to meet their daily needs.

3.2. Development of Architecture

In the long production activities, human beings have gradually mastered more material production materials and more advanced material production technologies, so architecture is no longer limited to simple residential functions, but develops in the direction of multi-function. Dating back to the distant Roman period, in the earliest existing architectural theory book - *10 Books on Architecture*, Vitruvius proposed that architecture should include elements such as use, strength and beauty [2] which have become three standards for measuring architecture: firmness, practicality and beauty. In addition, the elements have achieved the following: establishing the system of European architectural science, putting forward the basic connotation and theory of architectural science and influencing the development of later European architecture.

The wooden architecture of China on the other side of the ocean has also developed more colorfully. For the sake of strengthening the feudal ritual system by the rulers, showing the rich family property by the businessmen, expressing the ambition by the refined scholars and preaching scriptures by the taoists and monks, they all use the design techniques of balance, harmony, symmetry and light and dark axis, decorate the architectural components of its structural system with various patterns, and integrate the color and decoration into it, thus forming a rich and gorgeous artistic achievement. The beautiful and colorful carved beams and painted rafters, and the couplets and tablets full of interesting and infinite reverie are the best proof.

Even though ancient and modern architecture have left brilliant priceless treasures in the long river of history, it is difficult for people to give examples of “perfect” architecture convincing the world.



Figure 4. Temple of Heaven.

4. No Perfect Architectural Design

As a grand design category in design, architectural design must have inherited some characteristics of design. However, design itself is imperfect, which is mainly caused by designers themselves, people who experience design and limitations of time and space.

4.1. Builder

The builder here has a broad meaning, including not only the designer of the architecture in a simple sense, but also the people or classes influencing the design and construction of the architecture.

4.1.1. Designer of the Architecture

The designer, an executor of design activities, will more or less reflect his own living environment, education level, personal preference and other factors in his design works while designing. Although most designers will consider the needs of Party A, the design works will inevitably contain the designer's personal factors. As the saying goes, no one is perfect, so the design works of great designers might not be perfect due to the fact that the shortcomings or tendencies of designers will be involved into the design works, thus becoming a stumbling block to perfect design. Even if the designer starts from reality as much as possible without any emotional color during the design, he cannot consider all aspects of design, and will always attend to one thing and lose another. Therefore, it is impossible to have a perfect design.

4.1.2. Other people who affect the architecture

As Mr. Chen Zhihua said in the *A History of World Architecture*, "as each class in history has different types, shapes and requirements for architecture, they may use different technologies and materials. This difference is not simply determined by the amount of wealth, but also reflects the economy, political interests, lifestyle and ideology of all classes." [3] Taking the current architecture construction process as an example, if a university has to expand due to the needs of significant development, it has to consider from multiple perspectives such as itself, the residents of the expropriated land, the government and the constructor. Such factors that will change with the changes of the times will limit the form and system of the architecture to varying degrees, which is one of the reasons why perfect architecture has not appeared since ancient times.

4.2. Construction Materials and Construction Techniques

As a place for human living, architecture is built with various building materials according to certain construction technology. Therefore, various building materials and construction technology will also play a decisive role in the final presentation effect of architecture. The building materials have developed from the initial earth, stone, grass, wood and bamboo to later tiles, bricks, concrete, cement and steel bars, and then to various polymer building materials, and the construction technology has also developed from pile dwelling wooden architecture to rammed earth technology, timber frame technology, concrete structure technology and then to green construction technology, 3D printing technology, etc. With their own advantages and disadvantages, these construction materials and construction technologies may meet

the basic needs of people in a specific period of time, but with the improvement of productivity, people's needs also increase, so their shortcomings are increasingly exposed. Therefore, the architecture cast by various "imperfect" construction materials and construction technologies are naturally "imperfect".

4.3. People Who Experience Architectural Design

As users of architecture, different people hold different views on the same architecture, which is mainly reflected in two aspects.

4.3.1. Difference of Experiencer Subject

Different people will get different experimental evaluations for the same architecture that they are in. This is because people's judgment of things is always based on their own world outlook, values, outlook on life and aesthetic tendency. Therefore, everyone has their own evaluation criteria for the quality of architecture and 1,000 people might have 1,000 perfect designs.

4.3.2. Variability of Experiencer Subject

It is mainly reflected that people will change their views of the world as they age, experience, and accumulate in life experience. Their previous interests, hobbies, viewpoints, and views may change greatly in the later period, so even the same person in different periods will hold different attitudes towards the same architecture, and even will regard the "perfect" architecture previously considered as a worthless "junk" that hinders their own development while standing on the opposite side of the architecture.

4.4. Shackles of Time and Space

It is difficult for people living in the moment to break through the shackles of time and space:

4.4.1. Time Limit

That is, it is impossible for people to break through the limitations of science and technology at that time and the current design needs. For example, people in the primitive era could not build houses with reinforced concrete instead of stones and branches or pursue more functional and decorative living tools in the face of natural disasters, snakes, insects, beasts, diseases and famine. Even the most solid tent shacks at that time would eventually be eliminated due to the fact that they did not conform to the trend of the times. At the same time, as a man-made tool, architecture itself has a service life. Even though people have constantly optimized the building structure and explored more solid building materials, architecture always has a service life. At present, it is also difficult for the most common reinforced concrete architecture to ensure that it will not be dilapidated and die out due to wind and sun in decades or hundreds of years.

4.4.2. Space Limit

There will be no "perfect" architecture that is universally applicable in the world. Taking China as an example, China has a vast territory and abundant resources. Due to a large longitude and latitude span, China's natural conditions such as climate, altitude, soil and resources in different regions will also affect the evaluation

standards of architecture. As it is cold and dry in the north, it is necessary to pay more attention to sufficient light during the architectural design, while as it is warm and humid in the south, it is necessary to pay more attention to moisture-proof and ventilation during the architectural design. Therefore, the cave dwelling warm in winter and cool in summer in Northern Shaanxi will become a muggy, humid and uninhabitable architectural form in the context of the south. At the same time, the differences of macro backgrounds such as economic level, customs and culture in different regions will also have a great impact on architecture. In ancient times, the scope of imperial power was mostly in the north, while the south, as a “barbarian” place, often ignored the feudal ritual system and used too gorgeous colors and complicated and luxurious decorations in architecture. If the north used the typical architectural form of the south, fatal disaster was bound to happen. The embodiment of this regional difference in architecture has never been interrupted since ancient times.



Figure 5. Northern Architecture Focusing on Lighting.



Figure 6. Southern Architecture Focusing on Ventilation.

5. Imperfection Is Another Kind of Perfection

Nowadays, the increasingly prominent disadvantages of architecture make some people lose confidence in architecture. Throughout the history of architectural design, although those architectures that can be called classics cannot escape the curse of imperfection, their imperfection is another form of perfection. As Ruskin once said when commenting on Gothic architecture, “imperfection” is the source of architectural beauty. [1] Because of its own defects, the architecture of various times has aroused people’s exploration of “better architecture”. We all look forward to perfection and strive to achieve perfection, but we will neither achieve vulgar things before more difficult and noble things because vulgar things are easy to complete nor choose obscene victories and give up glorious failures or we will not lower our goals just because we may enjoy the satisfaction of the results. [1]

These various imperfections, large and small, have not only stimulated people’s desire, but also given people valuable failure experience. This “imperfection” has become the driving force of architectural development, making architecture further on the road to “perfect architecture”. Therefore, the designers will not stop exploring “perfect” architecture, but on the contrary, designers, as architectural participants, should bear in mind the social responsibilities, deeply believe in the social values, and actively seek better architectural forms to meet people’s growing needs and expectations for architecture. In addition, the designers should also believe that with the help of digital media technology and more advanced science and technology in the future, the designers will dig out new architecture closer to “perfection”.

Conflicts of Interest

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